Summary

Amarantha Freesia is the typical Amity girl. Only, she isn't quite so typical. Behind her facade of friendly smiles and chipper laughter she is everything that Amity isn't. With a bad attitude and a sharp tongue to match, Amarantha knows that she doesn't belong in Amity. The question is, where does she belong? Not in Candor, she lies every day. Not in Abnegation, she could never be selfless. Not in Erudite, she isn't nearly smart enough. So that only leaves Dauntless. But is she brave enough? Only one thing is for sure, he's positive she isn't. And he's determined to show her that he can break her.
Chapter 1

The morning light was streaming in through the windows and I sighed. It was way too early. But that was the way that it always was here in Amity. We woke up early, like we always did. Long before the rest of the Factions woke up. Before any of the rest Chicago was awake. The farmers had to be up early in the morning to tend to the crops and ensure that the rest of the Factions had their food. The only other people that were up at this hour were the Abnegation. There might have also been a few dedicated Erudite up as well. But I knew that Candor and Dauntless were still fast asleep. They couldn't have cared less about waking up early.

Closing the blinds before the sun could burn out my eyes, I walked over to the wooden dresser that was sitting by my door and opened the top drawer. My eyes were immediately assaulted by the bright yellow and red clothing, neatly folded over themselves. If I had a choice, the clothes would be much darker and thrown in a mess all over my room. But that would only result in a punishment of the upmost Amity form. And that was something that I didn't want to deal with.

There were only so many times that I could be given the Calming Serum, and I was sick of it. It was probably the reason that I hadn't eaten bread - which was infused with the serum - in months. All it did was make me sluggishly do my chores for the rest of the day. That, and make me irritable when it finally wore off. I was always angry these days, but I would never let anyone see that. It wasn't the way that an Amity acted.

We were supposed to be happy all of the time. We were peaceful, we were chipper, and we loved everyone. Here in Amity it was like no one understood that people couldn't be happy all of the time. Sometimes we were sad and sometimes we were angry. People had a right to be heartbroken and they had a right to hate others. They had every right to lie sometimes and be truthful at other times. It was a foolish thing to think that we could always be happy.

But somehow there were thousands of people that didn't share my sentiment. And so made the Amity Faction. But there were also the people like me. The outliers. The ones that don't belong. I wasn't always happy; in fact, most of the time I was forcing myself to keep calm and act like I wasn't losing my mind pretending to be happy all the time. It wasn't like I was never happy, but I was nowhere near as happy as others.

Of course on the outside, I was the perfect Amity girl. I smiled at everyone that I passed, I laughed quietly and had plenty of friends. When I went to school, I spoke up during the arts classes, choosing to stay silent and take notes with loopy handwriting when we were in the math, science, and history classes. Like every other Amity I rode the trucks in and out of the city, always making room for people, even when there was no room left. I talked to people that I didn't know and had no qualms about people kissing in front of me.

My first kiss had been in front of an audience and he had broken up with me shortly after, but of course I had smiled and told him that it was alright afterwards. Most of my days were spent in the field where I gathered flowers to give to my parents, telling them happily about my day and never keeping secrets from them. I also never complained when the food ran out. And that was frequently. I was never confrontational and I never said anything that revealed any true feelings. I told my parents everything and my friends were always with me to joke and laugh.

But that was only what people on the outside saw. The perfect Amity daughter. It was a far cry from the truth. Even when I smiled at people, I was always rolling my eyes inwardly. My laugh was always a higher-pitched false giggle when I was in public. Those friends that I had were only people that I brought around the house to please my parents. Even though I spoke up in arts classes I never
had any idea what I was talking about, and most of the time I actually knew what I was talking about
in the more educational classes.

Despite the fact that I made room for people on the trucks I always wanted to shove them out of the
trucks, rolling them into the beds of dirt. When I talked to people that I didn't know, I almost always
wanted to walk away from them. Meeting new people had never been my forte. That wasn't
anything in comparison to when people kissed in front of me. I wanted to smack them or simply
shout at them to find a better place.

When I had my first kiss I had wanted to scream at everyone to get the hell away from us and when
he had broken up with me I had found him afterwards. Two black eyes later and he had been forced
to tell everyone that a rogue Dauntless guard had gotten him. That was one of the proudest moments
of my life. It was also the worst summer of my life, as I'd had to wear long sleeves to cover up the
bruises and cuts on my knuckles.

While I was out gathering flowers in the field I wanted nothing more than to shove them down the
throats of the laughing kids that would dart by me. Why couldn't I just be that happy? It only got
worse when food ran out. I would have wanted nothing more than to take something from the person
sitting next to me. Though I wasn't confrontational to people that bothered me, I always made sure to
speak to them in a sickly sweet voice and make silent threats, mostly to keep myself from saying
anything out loud. Despite the fact that I loved my parents, I lied to them and my friends - my true
friends - every day.

It was exhausting to have to pretend like every day I was the perfect Amity girl, when every day I
just wanted to go to sleep and pretend like none of this was real. Every day I wanted to go to sleep
and wake up in another Faction. And soon that would be a reality, not just a dream. Today was the
Test. It was the test that would tell me which Faction I belonged in. It was the test that would
hopefully tell me that I was never one to belong in Amity. Anywhere else, it didn't matter, just not
here.

Sighing deeply, I rummaged through my clothes until I found a red shirt that hung loosely on me and
a yellow skirt that went down to my feet. It wasn't the nicest outfit that I could think of, but it was
better than the tight and short clothes that Amity normally to attract attention from the other Factions
out in School. Save Abnegation, that is. From time to time I would even catch a Dauntless staring at
me.

Walking into the bathroom, I turned the faucet on in the shower and stepped in. Of course, as soon as
I had, the one Amity thing about me revealed itself. I began to sing a sweet tune that I had heard a
Dauntless guard whistling one day a few years ago. He had been taller and more intimidating that
anyone that I had ever seen before. I hadn't seen his face, only the back of him. But even that was
more intimidating than anything that I had ever seen before. But it was also in that moment that I
realized why some people idolized the Dauntless. They thought of them like gods. It was the way
that I thought of them most times. I wasn't sure if I would ever fit in with them, but I knew that I
wanted to be like them.

Stepping out of the shower, I dried the water off of my body but let my wet hair trail down my back.
The light blonde locks flowed over my shoulders, bleached from long hours in the sun, and trailed
down to my mid-back. It was the way that most female Amity members wore their hair. It wasn't like
I was fond of Amity, but I did like my hair.

Glancing up into the mirror, I wiped it clean and smiled when I saw myself. Another Amity trait
coming to play. We tended to be very arrogant about ourselves. Our appearances were something
that we had always taken pride in. It was one of the few ways that we differed from the Abnegation.
My freckles were spattered sparingly across my face and my nose was as small as it had always been. My defining trait - my piercing green eyes - stood out vividly on my face, making me look happy and excited. Down my body I was thin, but not so much that it was startling. I had a good amount of curves too. A gift from my mother. They were more than most of my friends had. Embarrassingly enough, I couldn't see much past my waist as I was too short. I only stood at a little over five feet, a mocking point from the other kids. It ran in the family though; my mother was just a little taller than me.

Covering myself up with my clothes and brushing my hair out quickly, I headed back into my bedroom and slipped on a pair of red sandals at the foot of my bed. My messenger bag was on the bed and I grabbed it, nearly forgetting to put my books back in. Not that I would need them for that much longer.

Yawning once, I jumped slightly when I heard my mother call me. "Amarantha!" she barked.

It wasn't very often that you heard an Amity yell, especially from a full-fledged particularly not from one as proper as my mother. I grimaced at the sound of my name. I loved my parents more than anything, but I wished that they had thought a little longer about a name for me. The first thing that I was going to do when I got to my new Faction was change my name. Amarantha was sweet for an Amity, but that wasn't who I was. The only question remained was who was I, if not Amarantha?

"Come downstairs, please, dear. We have something that we would like to talk to you about," Mom continued.

Her second comment broke my trail of thoughts and I gulped. That couldn't be good. I knew what she wanted to talk about and it was not something that I was ready to have a conversation about. Not ever. At least, not while I still had another night in this house. That could get awkward.

Today was the day that I would be told whether or not I was an Amity at heart and I knew what it would say. It would say that I didn't belong here, but I had no idea where it would put me. As far as I was concerned, it seemed like no matter where it put me, it would be better than here. But I knew that while I was praying that I wouldn't have to stay in Amity, my parents were holding out the same hope that I would stay.

Although to be fair, I had never shown them any interest in leaving. I had never shown anyone outside of my two best friends that I had any interest in leaving. My parents were die-hard Amity lovers and they thought that their daughter was, too. I knew that telling my parents that I was leaving Amity would break their hearts and that wasn't something that I could do. I wanted to leave, but I didn't want to break my parent's hearts in the process. I'd come to the conclusion long ago that not telling them was much better than telling them.

Deciding that I could put the conversation off no longer, I turned and walked down the stairs. As I hit the landing I yawned once more, hearing the trucks starting in the yard. My heart jumped into my throat and I nearly laughed. What a perfect day for me to be a little late for school. It meant that I could leave right now and not have to worry about the talk. If I could do that, it was all that mattered. The more that I could avoid my parents before I had to see them tomorrow on the ride to the Choosing Ceremony, the better.

As I walked out into the living room, I saw that my parents were sitting at the table. They were both blonde haired and green eyed; I was the spitting image of both of them. My mother came up to me and wrapped her arms around my torso, much to my displeasure. As much as I loved them, I wanted them to keep their distance for now. It only hurt that I knew that today was the last full day that I would spend with them. Their faces tomorrow would break my heart.
So I gently pulled away from her. "Mom, I'm going to be late to school. I have to go, really. Can we talk when I get back tonight?" I asked.

My father walked over to me and I smiled at him, hoping that he would convince my mother that it was time for me to leave and go to school. That was what he had done for me on my first day of school years ago. After all, today was the last official day of school. One more day and I would never have to listen to the pointless lectures that my teachers gave us every day.

Okay, so maybe I wasn't an Erudite either.

"No sweetheart, we would like to talk with you now," Dad told me. I glanced over at the buses. They looked like they were about to pull out any second. "Not to worry, you won't be late. Most kids today want to talk with their parents before they have to leave."

Yes. They want to. That was the difference between us. I had nothing to say to my parents right now. Nothing that wouldn't make our last twenty-four hours together very tense. I just want to leave and pretend like I would be back in Amity tomorrow, if nothing else, just for their sake. And mine, partially, since I was still very concerned about where I would end up.

"We know that today after school you are going to take the Aptitude Test and we know that you're going to get Amity," my mother said.

I sighed softly, wishing she had never said that. On the outside I smiled at her and nodded, hoping that she wouldn't see through my facade. Of course, she was no Candor, so she didn't. "Here's hoping," I said, my voice wavering slightly.

"I've never seen someone more suited for the Faction," she told me. The feeling in my gut twisted painfully. Maybe I should tell them... If nothing else, to not give them any more false hope. "We're so happy for you to follow in our footsteps dear."

She gave me a soft kiss on the forehead as she moved away. My father moved over to stand in front of me and I smiled at him, fighting back the urge to tell them the truth. "There hasn't been a transfer out of Amity in our family," he said.

Once more I gave a soft sigh. He was right. My parents, grandparents, and great grandparents had all come from Amity and had stayed. There had never been anyone that wasn't in Amity in our family. Not since the Faction system had started over a hundred years ago. I supposed that I would be the black sheep for generations to come.

"It's thrilling that our daughter will be staying with us. You have no idea how much it means to us that you have stuck with Amity through all of this," Dad continued. He was only digging the hole even deeper. "We know that you have had some problems with the way that things are done here but you've done so well at becoming the perfect Amity. We're so proud of you."

He pushed the hair back off of my face as he pressed a small kiss against my cheek. I thought about something that I could say, anything other than the truth, but nothing came out. Just a weak smile. So instead of forcing something out, I looked over to the window and found myself completely relieved when I saw that the first of the trucks was pulling out of the fields and heading to the school.

"Oh, the trucks are leaving!" I yelled, pulling back from my parents.

My mother turned to me with a little smile, but I knew that the look on her face was reprimanding. It was a wonder how anyone in Amity could ever be afraid of their parents. They never yelled and they never did anything even the slightest bit intimidating. I couldn't imagine what it would be like to piss
off a Dauntless parent.

"Keep your voice down," Mom chided.

Turning back to my mother as I made a rush to the door, I gave her a bashful smile, stuffing a piece of toast in my mouth. "Sorry," I muttered, small pieces of bread flying across the room.

The first thing that I was going to do when I left this place was scream. A piercing, louder than life, scream. One that would get me the Calming Serum here. Dad looked like he wanted to say something to me, but before he could I went dashing out of the house. Just before I hit the edge of the yard I realized that I shouldn't just leave so abruptly. Not when I would be doing it for the final time tomorrow. I turned back to my parents and smiled.

"I have to go. I love you guys but I can't be late. Not today. We can talk more when I get home," I told them, finishing off the last bit of bread.

Dad looked over and started to walk after me, clearly with the intent to say something to me. I was sure that they were going to count my attitude today as rude, but it didn't matter. There was nothing that they could do to me. There was nothing that they would have done to me anyways. In less than twenty four hours, I would be out of here and on my way to my new Faction. Whatever that may be.

"Amarantha before you go-" Dad started, before he was cut off.

The trucks that were waiting on me honked their horns and I jumped a little, knowing that it was time for me to say goodbye. I'd almost forgotten about school, being so focused on the Choosing Ceremony. It wasn't like this was the last time that I would see my parents. No, that was tomorrow. But that was the saying that we all went by. Faction before blood.

"Bye!" I yelled to my parents before turning and dashing at a full sprint to the bus.

As I ran at a full dash towards the bus, I smiled to myself. It was rare that I got to run like this. Usually I was told that we shouldn't run, that it disrupted the peace. "Don't run, dear," Mom called after me.

As much as I would have loved to turn back and flip her the bird before sprinting off once more, I forced myself to slow down. At least, until the truck driver honked the horn once more. So I went back into a sprint. Just a few hours left, A. At least there were good things that would come from leaving Amity. Come to think of it, there were mostly good things that would come from leaving. Pulling myself up the stairs, I apologized quickly to the bus driver for taking my sweet time. He merely smiled at me and nodded as I filed into the back of the bus and dropped next to a familiar face.

The figure next to me turned slightly so that they could look at me with a shit eating grin. I groaned loudly, knowing that there was no way that I would be able to enjoy the ride to school in peace. Nope, I would have to talk today. But I wasn't really sure that I would have wanted to be in silence either. That just meant that I would be thinking about which Faction I would be told was a fit for me.

"So I see that the talk with your parents went well this morning. Just like you were so sure that it would," she told me with a little smile, knowing that I was not in the mood for her this morning.

"Shut up."

"You know, you really do look like shit."

"Thanks."
"How long did you sleep last night?" she asked me.

Turning towards her, I sneered, debating on throwing her off of the bus. As much as I loved my best friend, there were times that I wished that she was anywhere but near me. This was one of those times, which naturally meant that she was sitting as close to me as possible.

Iris looked absolutely nothing like an Amity, which made sense as she was leaving with me tomorrow. Well maybe not with me, but we would be leaving at the same time. I had no idea if I would want to follow her to Candor. Iris's deep brown eyes were analyzing me, giving me a look that told me that I better not be hiding anything from her. Her long black hair was swinging over her shoulder and I watched as she tied it up. Most Amity members left their hair down, like I did, but Candor's would normally keep their hair tied up in a tight ponytail. Just the way that Iris liked it.

They would welcome her with open arms. Rolling my eyes at her childishness, I shoved her slightly, laughing as she messed up the ponytail that she always tried to keep up so perfectly and so tightly. It was always funny making her look a little less than perfect. She naturally flicked me off and I laughed. It was the way that we always were. Messing with each other all of the time and doing the things that no respectable Amity would ever do. It was probably why we got along so well.

"I don't know why you try to deny it. We all know that you're going to be going to Candor," I said. The moment that I'd said it, I noticed that her eyes brightened slightly. I couldn't help but to smile at her. She was so passionate about Candor. I hoped that I would be that way with my new Faction. "I hope so," she said softly.

"I know so. I've never seen someone more honest than you are. You're more honest than some actual Candor members," I told her.

She smiled again. It wasn't a lie, it was the truth. She was one of the most honest people that I knew. She always told the truth, even if it hurt. It was a trait that every Candor had. "You know that we aren't supposed to talk about where we are destined to go," Iris hissed at me.

She was right about that. We weren't ever supposed to talk about where we wanted to go or what we got on our tests. But that didn't matter, people were always talking about where they wanted to go or what they got on their tests, especially when they were proud of their result.

"Plus, who knows if I'm even going to get Candor? I might get Erudite," she said, making me shake my head. She was destined to get Candor. But Erudite might not be that bad. "Or... Amity!" she yelled.

The two of us doubled over with shrieks of horror and loud laughter. I knew that everyone was starting to stare at us, but I couldn't have cared less. It was hysterical, to think that we would rather go anywhere but to stay in Amity. At least, not Factionless. Even Amity was better. But it didn't change the fact that this place was just too horrid to even think to stay in.

"Quiet down," an older member, Derrick, called to us.

He had short blonde hair that was sticking up at all angles. He turned back towards us and smiled. I knew that he hadn't meant anything mean by it, he was just asking us nicely. At least, as nicely as he could. I should have just looked away with a respectful nod, but instead I made a little snorting noise before turning away. I heard everyone whisper about my retaliation around us, but I tuned them out.

Figuring that I should be nice for my last day in this faction, I turned back and looked over to Derrick. "Sorry," I muttered to him.
Derrick had always been one of the nicer people here so I didn't want to make him angry with me. I watched as he brightened and gave me a little smile. I rolled my eyes, disgusted by the way that he could just turn on his happiness, and turned away from him. Iris was looking at me with a little smile and I scoffed at her. At least she was better at pretending to be Amity than I was, despite the fact that I looked more like one.

"I can't even imagine how horrified I would be if I got Amity on my test," I muttered. "Where's Florian?" I asked when I realized that the third part of our trio was nowhere to be found.

Iris turned to me and shrugged. She had never been overly fond of Florian but she would never say that. It was the one thing that went against her Candor ways. "He caught an earlier truck. He's one of the first people to have to go," she said.

Of course he was already there. I nodded at her, picking at the dirt under my fingernails. I should have figured that he had left well before us. Florian was always on time for everything. Not like Iris and myself, who were never on time for anything. It meant that we were usually exactly on time between the three of us, balancing each other out.

"Girl, if I'm not going to go back to Amity, you sure as hell aren't," Iris said, referring to my earlier comment, and I smiled. If only I knew like her, exactly where I wanted to go. It must have been nice. "We all know that you're destined for greatness somewhere else. Anywhere else. But the question is, where?" I shrugged at her. I had no idea where it was that I would be going. "You know where I'm going. Why don't I know where you are going to go?"

Shrugging my shoulders once more, I leaned onto her slightly. My hair was wet on her shoulders and she shrieked slightly, pulling away from me. As much as she was down and dirty like me, she hated being wet. I got up off of her and laughed as she wiped the droplets of water off of her shoulder. I'd been hoping to make her drop the conversation, but she was still glaring at me, letting me know that I wasn't getting out of it.

"Because Iris, I don't know where I'm going to go," I told her, making the air serious once more. "I mean, I could go anywhere and be ten times as happy as I was in Amity. Except for maybe Abnegation." Abnegation was slightly too similar to Amity for me. "But of course, that's the most common transfer from Amity. God, my parents are going to be horrified when I leave. They'll think that I'm the biggest traitor in history," I said sadly.

My parents could be a little much for me but I knew that I would miss them a ton once I was no longer around them every day. Of course I would be around plenty of kids around that were in the same boat that I was. There were always transfers that didn't admit to their parents that they were leaving.

"Come on, you know that it won't be that bad," Iris told me.

I looked over at her and scoffed. That wasn't the truth. They would hate me forever. They had made that obvious this morning. "Yes it will," I muttered.

"Your parents love you more than anything and you know that they want you to be happy. If that means that you have to leave, then they'll respect that," she said.

For a while the two of us merely sat there in silence. I was pretty sure that she knew that what she said wasn't the truth, but she was being kind enough to tell me what I wanted to hear. It was nice; for once she was turning off her Candor ways. It was one of the last times that she would be able to tell a blatant lie. Wanting to get us out of the serious air that we weren't very used to, I shook my head and turned to her with a brilliant smirk.
"Thank God you aren't going to go to Erudite. You're a damn moron," I told her, and she laughed loudly, shoving me roughly to the side.

Derrick turned back to us and I braced myself for the lecture that was to come. Instead he gave us a little smile and I cocked my head. Where was the berating? "Ladies, watch your language," he told us. There it is. I knew that he wouldn't be able to keep his mouth shut. "At least for the next day, you're still Amity," he told us, his eyes sparkling as they landed on me.

My face flushed and I looked to the ground, trying to forget about the fact that after tomorrow, I would never ride Derrick's bus again. Turning back towards Iris, I saw that she was watching him with a slightly sad look on her face. I felt for Iris. I knew that she didn't want to leave Amity for one reason. Derrick. She had always had a crush on him and last year he had asked her on a date. But of course she had said no, knowing that she was going to leave Amity in under a year. Her eyes were near dead as she looked at him, probably wishing that she wanted to stay in Amity, if only to get to stay with him.

Finally, she tore her eyes away from him and looked over to me. "I haven't been Amity since the day that I was born," I muttered, standing and walking out of the bus, heading into the School building that was towering over us. One last day.

As we walked into the building, I glanced around at the rest of the City and looked at all of the ruined buildings. The ones that weren't home to the Factions. The ones that had been abandoned for nearly two centuries. Probably long before that, too. During the war. I thought back to the old history classes that I had attended, the ones where we learned about where we were from.

The city that we lived in that had once been called Chicago. They had always told us that we are lucky to be in the City. They said that the war was terrible. That the rest of the world was destroyed. Our founders built the wall to keep us safe and they divided us into five groups, Factions, to keep the peace. That was where our system came in. The system that I was having such a hard time trying to beat.

The smart ones, the ones who value knowledge and logic are in Erudite. They knew everything. Or, at least, it seemed like they did. Their leader was Jeanine Matthews. She may as well be the leader of the City. Everyone was afraid of her. Candor value honesty and order. They tell the truth, even when you wish they wouldn't. That's where I knew that Iris would go. Then there's Abnegation. The rest of us liked to call them 'Stiffs'. They lead a simple life, selfless, dedicated to helping others. They even feed the Factionless, the ones who don't fit in anywhere. Their leader, Marcus Eaton, was one of the leaders of our City. He had apparently abused his son, but most people didn't believe it. Abnegation run most of the government.

And then there was Dauntless. They were our protectors, our soldiers, and our police. I'd always thought they were amazing. Brave, fearless, and free. Some people thought that the Dauntless were crazy, which they kind of are. But they had the freedom that no one else did. Not in any of the Factions. It always seemed like they didn't have to listen to anyone.

Then there is Amity. The Faction that I belong to. Or that I should be. They were the peace keepers. The ones who farm the land and are always so damn happy. The ones that could never think for a moment that something is wrong. The people that weren't from Amity called us 'Softies'. It's a rather appropriate name for anyone that fits the bill. It all works. Everyone knows where they belong. Except for me.

As I walked into my first class, English, I sat down in my chair towards the back and immediately tuned out whatever we were talking about. No one usually listened on the last day. Most of us just daydreamed about what was to come. And the teachers knew that. I thought about the choice that I

There was Candor. I had always thought that I would be reasonably happy in Candor. I would be able to say anything that I wanted to and I would be with my best friend. Iris was a shoe in for Candor and if I went there, it meant that I would be with her. It meant that I would get to go away from my family but it meant that I wouldn't be far. We were the closest to the Candor building. Maybe I'd get to visit. Plus sometimes, I felt like maybe I should be in Candor. I loved to tell people the brutal truth. I liked the reaction. But on the downside, I knew that I wasn't passionate about Candor. I would be happier than here in Amity, but not happy enough. Plus I was a liar, I always had been and I knew that it was not a habit that I would break easily.

Passing on Candor for now, I went on to my next choice. Erudite. The intelligent. Would I be happy in Erudite? I liked the color blue. Plenty of extremely successful people were from Erudite. They never reprimanded any of their members, which meant that I would be able to get away with cursing and acting out. They weren't very fond of public displays of affection, which meant that I would never have another humiliating public breakup. But there were also plenty of negatives. I didn't really think that I was smart enough to be in Erudite. I wasn't a moron, but I wasn't smart enough. Plus, there was nothing fun about Erudite. They always were studying and doing projects. That wasn't exactly very if I didn't make it there, I would be Factionless.

That meant that Erudite was out. There was no way in hell that I was being Factionless. So I moved to Abnegation. It was probably the most similar faction to Amity and I was sure that my parents wouldn't be that disappointed if I moved over to Abnegation. They would be sad, that was for sure. But they wouldn't hate me. A lot of people changed from Amity to Abnegation and the other way around. They weren't very vain, but that wouldn't be a problem. I liked myself just fine, but looks were nothing that were ever that vital to me. They weren't very touchy either, but that was nothing that bad. It just meant that I couldn't be caught making out with anyone in a back alley. Of course, I knew for a fact that I wouldn't be happy in Abnegation. I didn't want to spend my entire day helping people, as heartless as that sounded.

At that realization, I knew that Abnegation was probably out too. I sighed and shook my head at myself. I hated even thinking that I had now come down to two options. Pushing the second to the back of my mind for a moment I thought about the only other faction I had never directly been involved in. Dauntless.

God, they looked like so much fun. I knew that if I were in Dauntless I would always have a blast with everything. People were always smiling and laughing and yelling and running. That was everything that I had ever wanted. They punched each other and fought, but they were still like one big family. It was the friendliest that people could ever be towards each other, even more than Amity. I loved watching them. They always looked so incredible and they always looked like they could never die. They were the types of people that I wanted to be like when I was younger. No filter and a filthy attitude.

As hard as I tried, there were no negatives that I could see to joining Dauntless. They were the types of people that I wanted to be. I loved watching them and I wanted to be them. The only thing that I was afraid of was hurting my parents. And I knew that joining Dauntless would destroy them. They thought that they were just a bunch a barbaric animals, most people in Amity felt that way about the Dauntless.

Shaking my head and trying to think of anything except for the black-clad Faction, I thought to my own. The one that I was trying so desperately to escape. There were so many awful things that I couldn't stand about Amity. I hated the fact that I always had to smile at everyone or that I always
had to talk to everyone like I was so happy to see them. I hated having to lie every day and never
getting to yell or run. I hated that I always felt like an outsider looking in. Even in my own family I
felt like an outsider. I hated the fact that I would feel like I was letting my parents down, no matter
what I did.

But there were things that I loved. My family lived in the Faction and one of my best friends lived
there too. Everyone was always happy and it was sometimes nice out there. It made things feel like
we were a giant family. And being out in the woods was nice too. The trees and gardens were so
pretty. But that made no difference. I knew that staying in Amity was not something that I wanted to
do. I'd rather anything else.

Startling me from my thoughts, the bell rang and I jumped slightly. I looked up to the clock and
knitted my eyebrows. It was already the end of our day, and that meant that the Aptitude Test was
about to begin. Everyone stood from their chairs and headed out of the front of the building, moving
into the waiting area until we were called back.

It was easy to find the rest of the people that I was supposed to be waiting for. I found the large
group of Amity's, all sitting next to a group of Dauntless. They were rowdy, shoving each other
around and I smiled. It looked like fun. Everyone in the Amity section was laughing and joking, but
no one dared make any offensive jokes or shove each other. It made things so much more innocent.
So much more boring. I sought out the black hair that I had become so accustomed to finding and
took a spot next to my oldest friend.

In front of us, Jeanine Matthews from Erudite took her spot and began the monologue that she
apparently gave every year. Something that we didn't want to hear and she didn't want to say, but
something that we were forced to sit through. Everyone quieted down to listen to the blonde-haired
woman.

"One hundred years ago, after the war, our founders created a system they believed would prevent
future conflict and create lasting peace. Today, aptitude testing based on your personality will assign
you to one of the Factions. While it is our belief that choosing the Faction indicated by your test is
the best way to ensure success within the Faction system, it is your right tomorrow at the Choosing
Ceremony to choose any of the five Factions, regardless of your test results. However, once the
choice has been made, there will be no change permitted," she said.

I let out a soft sigh. It would make things so much easier if we were allowed to change Factions if we
didn't like the one we chose. Of course that would make the Choosing Ceremony much less
significant. That was the whole point. The Aptitude Test gave us one answer and we had to go with
it. There was no turning back.

Iris turned to me, and for the first time in years, I could tell that she was nervous. But the moment that
she noticed that I was looking at her she turned her face into a smile and nudged me lightly. "Are
you ready?" she asked me.

I scoffed lightly. I was anything but ready. I wanted to crawl in a hole and die, but that wasn't an
option. "No," I muttered.

The two of us both smiled as there was a shout from the Dauntless section. I turned and noticed an
older Dauntless member was looking at me. And it seemed that he had been watching me for a long
time. He looked to be making sure that the younger kids were in line, judging by the air of authority
he held. He had large, block-shaped tattoos going up his neck, hair that was shaved on both sides,
and piercings all over his face. His gaze narrowed on me and I turned back around quickly. Best not
to already pick enemies.
"Do you know him?" Iris asked, sounding surprised.

"No."

I turned back again to see that the Dauntless guard was still watching me. His hard eyes shone for a moment as I blushed and looked away once more. "Aaron!" his voice boomed. He seemed to be shouting at one of the kids he was watching over. I turned back, ignoring the very loud conversation that was happening between them. "Are you?" I asked Iris, trying to shake the feel of his lingering gaze.

Iris smiled brightly at me and I laughed. Leave it to her to be one that was never nervous for anything. Then again, she knew where she was going. She had the luxury that I didn't.

"Of course I'm ready. I've been ready for this since the day that I was born. I'm so ready for the test to be over. I just want it to tell me that I will never be an Amity again!" she shouted and I laughed, ignoring the looks and laughter that we were getting from the Dauntless kids behind us. "I mean God, I'd take Abnegation over this."

Glancing over towards the gray-clad kids, I narrowed my eyes. They all looked so calm and collected. I was sure that none of them would want to transfer. They usually didn't. It seemed like they always knew where they belonged. Like they knew that for the rest of their lives, they just wanted to make a difference. It was a nice sentiment, but it just wasn't something that I wanted. I wished that it was though. It would make things so much easier.

"Must be nice to know exactly where it is that you want to go," I muttered to her, slightly bitter. She could tell that I was angry that I had no idea where I should go, so she draped her arm over me and gave me a reassuring pat on the shoulder. Not that it really helped at all. Still though, I appreciated the effort that she was putting in. I knew that I hadn't been the nicest person over the last few weeks.

"Don't worry A, you'll figure out where it is that you want to go. It doesn't have to be what the test tells you. It's only a guideline. You're free to pick whatever it is that you want to do," she told me and I nodded.

She was right, we were free to go wherever we wanted or wherever we thought matched us. The Test just told us what it thought that we would be best with. "Iris Gelsey!" a woman called out, startling us from our conversation.

I glanced up to see that it was a woman in a clean white shirt and long black pants. I smiled at the sight of her. Candor. That was a good sign. I watched as Iris's face brightened at the sight of the woman before standing. Her hands were shaking just ever so slightly and I saw the thin veil of sweat on her forehead. No one would call her out for it though. Most of us looked that way once we stood up. Before Iris could get out of my reach, I grabbed her hand and gave her a happy smile. For once, it was a real one.

"Good luck, Iris. Don't worry about it, you'll get Candor," I told her, making sure that my voice was low. The last thing that I wanted was for either of us to get in trouble because Iris had told me where she wanted to go. "I know it."

She smiled at me and I saw the lump slide down her throat. She was so much more nervous than she was letting on. "Thanks, A. Do you want me to wait for you after the Aptitude Test?" she asked me. I shook my head at her. Probably not. Whatever the test was going to tell me, I would need time to
think about if. If Iris wanted to talk after it, she would need another person to talk to. I would probably be next to useless. "Don't worry about it," I said.

She acted like she hadn't even heard me. "I know that we're supposed to head straight home once we're done but I can miss the trucks," she said, clearly hoping that I would want to her to wait for me.

Instead I shook my head and gave her a bright smile. "Don't worry about it, just head home," I told her and she nodded.

"You're sure?" she asked.

I could tell that she looked a little dejected, but I would need tonight to sleep and think about what it was that I wanted to do in the morning. "Maybe I'll see you later. Or maybe I'll see you at the Choosing Ceremony tomorrow," I said and she nodded, clearly slightly worried about me.

"Iris Gelsey!" the woman repeated.

I shrugged her off though, pushing her in the direction of the Candor woman. "Don't worry about me. They're getting sick of waiting for you. Just go," I told her, noticing that her test administrator looked irritated that we were taking so long.

Giving her one last smile, I watched as Iris disappeared. I waved to her and gave her one last wink before she vanished from sight, wishing more than anything that she would get Candor. She would, she just had to think about what to do to get that result. She deserved to be somewhere that she really wanted to be. I leaned back against the table drifted off into my own world. A few minutes passed before I jumped as a woman called my name.

"Amarantha Freesia!" another woman's voice called.

It wasn't the same woman that had administered Iris's test. I glanced over at her and immediately noticed that she was from Dauntless. She had tattoos all over the place and her hair was pulled back into a strange twist of braids and curled sections. There were plenty of differently colored sections. She was probably only a little older than me. She led me back to the testing rooms and walked me into one. It was completely bare other than a freaky medical looking chair and a large computer monitor next to it. A lump formed in my throat as I awkwardly stood in the back of the room.

The woman glanced at me and motioned to the chair. "Sit down," she told me and I did, sitting uncomfortably in the chair. "I'm Tori. I'll be administering your test. You'll be offered a series of choices to test your aptitude for each Faction until you get one result. I wouldn't sweat it. Ninety five percent get the faction of their origin, and from the looks of you..."

Well that was uncalled for. I narrowed my eyes at her and watched as she walked around the room, picking things up and moving them around. She looked extremely bored as she grabbed everything that she needed. I supposed that it wasn't a pen and paper test like I had originally thought. As she was fiddling with the computer monitor I knew that I could no longer stay silent. I had to say something to her, it was eating me alive inside. I had the perfect chance.

"What's it like?" I asked her before I could stop myself.

The woman named Tori laughed at me and shook her head. Her braids whipped around her head as I stared at her. I couldn't understand what was so funny. Apparently I had said something weird. Maybe Dauntless were a little less normal than I had been giving them credit for. I wondered what was funny as she continued to walk around the room, hooking wires to the large cart that was to the
"Maybe another Erudite. Seems like they have a lot of people coming to them this year," Tori said. I nodded at her. I supposed Erudite wouldn't be anything too bad. "It's nothing too bad. I can't tell you what exactly you're going to see in there but nothing in there can really hurt you. Just keep calm and do what you would normally do," she told me.

Letting a small smile fall over my face, I shook my head. That wasn't what I had meant. I didn't care about how the simulation went. I'd know that in a few minutes. That was something that I would find out without a doubt. But there was one thing that I was dying to know. I had always been dying to know. Shaking my head at her I looked back over my shoulder to see her messing with some wires that were attached to the chair that I was sitting in.

"That's not what I meant. I wanted to know what Dauntless was like," I said. Her head shot up and she leaned around the chair, looking at me with a curious glance.

She shook her head at me and smiled, for a moment ignoring my question. "You're an interesting one, kid," she told me.

She wasn't that much older than me. At least, I didn't think that she was that much older than me. I rolled my eyes at her. I was no kid. I was an adult now; I had been for a while. Knowing that I wasn't going to drop it, Tori shook her head at me and came to stand in front of me, crossing her arms over her chest.

"It's fun but it isn't easy. Don't just come because you want to have fun without being happy all of the time. You won't make it. Dauntless tears you apart and then makes you want to die," she told me, and the hair on the back of my arms stood on end. "But if you can make it, if you're one of the few, it's worth it. Now drink up."

I glanced into her hand and saw that she was holding a shot glass that was filled with a blue liquid. I held it up to my nose and took a sniff at it but it had no smell. I couldn't help but to wonder if this was part of the test. Maybe it was to see if we were too trusting. What if Tori was trying to poison me? I certainly wouldn't be happy about that.

"What is it?" I finally asked her.

Tori shook her head at me and grinned, like she knew a secret that I wasn't involved in. Giving me a little wink, she let me slowly take the drink before grabbing the glass from me. It didn't taste like anything. The sensation was strange. "Don't keep asking about Dauntless. I sense an Erudite in you," she told me.

It seemed that everyone knew what Faction I would be going to, rather than myself. I scoffed at her. The more that I thought about it, the less that I thought that it was a good idea. I watched as Tori walked over to the computer and began hitting a few buttons. The screen was mostly gray with a few lines jetting back and forth. I was about to ask her why nothing was happening when the world went black.

Before I could panic I woke up in another room, but this time Tori was nowhere to be found. In fact, nothing was. The chair that I had been sitting in was gone and I was left standing in the middle on the room. Tori was gone as was the big station with the computer monitor. The only thing that was in the room were two buckets. In one bucket was a piece of dripping meat that I recoiled from. That's repulsive. Amity were naturally vegetarians.

In the other bucket was a knife that glittered in the light. My eyes were immediately drawn to it as I
took a few steps forward. With my luck, something was going to jump out at me and kill me. I thought about grabbing it when a loud voice came over the intercom, breaking the silence.

"Choose," a thundering man's voice yelled to me. "Now. Before it's too late," he said once more when he realized that I didn't know which one I should grab.

If I grabbed the knife I would be able to defend myself from any predators, but if I got the meat I would be able to eat if they were leaving me in here for a long period of time. Curious as to what they wanted me to do at the moment, I cocked my hip out to the side and looked at where I imagined the man was.

"Why? What will I do with them?" I asked.

Without hesitation, the man came back over the intercom. "Choose," he thundered one more time, a little more forceful this time.

Sighing, I stepped to the side, a little closer to the objects. "Just tell me. What do I have to do with them?" I asked, waiting for an answer. But when I got none, I sighed. Maybe I can grab them both before they get a chance to tell me to grab one again? "Can I have both?" I asked, still receiving no answer.

Leaning back slightly, I sighed. This was officially stupid. I thought that this would be a few questions and answers, maybe a few situational things, but now I was just having an argument with a man with no face. I reached out to grab both of them when a small shock went through my hand. I recoiled and gasped, pulling my hand back to me. Jesus that hurt. I could almost hear the imaginary man laughing at me.

"Why can't I have both?" I repeated.

"Choose."

"No. Asshole," I growled, rubbing at the black marks on my hand.

"Fine," it said.

I cocked my head. What the hell did 'fine' mean? I was about to ask Tori what the hell this was all about when I heard the loud bark of a dog. Whipping around I saw that it was no dog, it was a rabid wolf. The dog was barking and snarling at me and I felt fear creep up in my throat. This thing was anything but friendly. His haunches were on end and my stomach was curdling. I turned back to grab the knife, but when I did both it and the meat were that was why I had been forced to choose. Now I was going to die with nothing to help. Idiot.

Turning back to the dog, I saw that it was snarling at me and charging. Out of fear, I remembered something that I had heard in school once. If an animal sensed that you weren't a threat, it wouldn't attack you. Praying that it was the truth, I dropped to the ground and held my hand out. The dog continued to growl, eventually stopping in front of me. It sniffed my hand and gave it a lick. The dog sniffed my hands a few times and gave me a few more licks as I laughed. Maybe I wasn't as foolish as I'd thought that I was. I didn't have to choose after all.

As I pet the dog that now seemed like it had known me for life, I smiled to myself. So maybe this wasn't as bad I had thought that this would be. As the dog rolled over onto its stomach, I noticed that a little girl had suddenly appeared behind me. Where the hell had she come from? She was rather cute. She had bright blonde hair that was pulled back into pigtails with a white frilly dress floating behind her.
"Puppy!" she yelled, beginning to advance on me.

Oh good, children. The one thing that I might have hated more than Amity. I rolled my eyes and groaned until I realized that the once calm dog was now once more rabid. It left my side and began advancing on the younger girl. I jumped up, knowing that the girl didn't sense the imminent danger. The dog barked once loudly and began to run after the girl, startling me into moving. I might not like kids but I knew that something had to be done. I couldn't let that girl die. I ran after the dog and just before it reached the girl, I pounced on it.

I had been expecting to either land roughly on the dog or to have woken back up in the testing room, but as I looked around I realized that I was in neither of those places. Instead of being in the dark room, I was on a train, the ones that the Dauntless rode whenever they needed to leave their compound. No one was on the train with me except for one man that looked worn and tired. Were they expecting me to help him or ask if he needed something? No way. I didn't know that man, or care about him. I just wanted to be done with this so I could get back to Tori and she could tell me what the hell my results were.

Before I could find a way off of the train, the man walked up to me and I stepped back. Something about the man seriously set me off. I just didn't like the way that he was looking at me. He looked like he was ready to explode. The man showed me a picture and I grimaced at the man. Some part of him, in the far off corners of my mind thought that the man might have looked familiar to me. In fact, the longer that I looked at the man, the more that I knew that I knew the man. I had no idea what his name was or anything like that, but I knew him.

"Do you know this man?" the guy asked me.

For a moment I thought about being honest with the man and telling him that I did know the guy in the picture but the more that I looked at the man, the less that I wanted to tell him. He looked like bad news and I wasn't sure if telling him was really the right thing to do. So I followed my gut.

"No, never seen him."

Well, there goes Candor. Sorry Iris.

The man grabbed me by the arm, startling me and I pulled back from him. My arm stung slightly where he grabbed me and for a moment it freaked me out at how real the whole simulation was. If this man hurt me in here, would he hurt me in the real world? Could they do that to everyone that went through the Aptitude Test? Could we die in here?

"Liar!" he yelled at me, grabbing me once more. He calmed down for a moment though, pleading with me. "Just tell me, have you seen him? This man is going to kill me!"

Maybe I should have told him the truth. If someone was going to kill me, I would have wanted help. Still though, I was sure that I couldn't trust that the man wouldn't hurt me once I told him the truth. So hoping that I was making the right choice, I gave him the same answer.

"I've never seen him," I repeated myself.

The man seemingly finally lost all of his patience with me as he grabbed my arm and threw me up against the side of the train. I screamed at the sudden pain that rushed through my head as it came in contact with the steel siding of the train. Did Mom and Dad really have to go through this all of those years ago? What the hell did they do when it came to this?

"Liar!" he yelled at me.
I tried to free my arm from the man, but he had too strong of a grip on me. "Let go of me!" I shouted.

"Help me!" the man howled at me.

Finally I was able to wiggle myself free of the man and throw him off of me. But he advanced on me and grabbed me again. Before he could grab my arm I pulled away from him and threw my fist into his nose. He stumbled backwards, nearly hitting the floor from the impact.

"Get away from me!" I screamed at him, watching as he fell back from me.

He grabbed his nose and I noticed that it was bleeding rather profusely. Looking down at my own hands I noticed that they were covered in blood as well and my face paled. Damn, this thing was so real. Before I could check that the man was alive, he jumped back towards me and knocked me to the ground. I gasped and brought my leg back up, kicking him in the chest. I'd only meant to shove him back from me, but I realized too late that I'd shoved him towards the open door of the train. The man tumbled back out of the train and plummeted towards the ground a hundred feet below.

Before my mouth could open in a scream, I realized that I was back in the room with Tori dashing from one corner of the room to the other. I'd just killed that man. But it was only a sim... Only a sim. There were more important things for me to worry about. Tori looked panicked and it made me nervous. What was wrong? Was it bad that I had killed someone in the sim? Could they arrest me for it? Looking down at my hands I was relieved to see that there was no blood on them. Nothing that had happened to me was real.

I couldn't take the silence anymore. "So the test is over? What were my results? What am I destined to go to?" I asked her, hoping that she would answer me. "Please tell me that it isn't Amity. Anything but Amity."

Tori moved to stand in front of me and grabbed my hands, pulling me up from my chair. "Get up," she said.

My feet stumbled over each other and I howled softly as I banged my hip into the cart with the monitor on it. My pain did nothing for her. She acted like she hadn't even heard me. I groaned as she pulled me to the door of the room. I growled low in my throat at her sudden actions. I understood that they were probably behind schedule but I deserved to know where it was that I belonged.

"We're going out the back door before a supervisor comes," she told me and I cocked my eyebrow at her.

Back door? Was there a back door in these places? Why were we doing this? I was pretty sure that this wasn't protocol. I pulled back from Tori slightly and pressed myself into the back of the chair that I had been in only minutes before. Everything was happening so fast. What the hell had happened while I was in the simulation?

"But what was my result? You didn't tell me it," I told her, fighting back against her grip as she led me to the back door.

"Come on!" Tori sneered at me, pulling me to the door.

Shaking my head, I yanked back against her and stopped, making sure that there was no way that she could move me any further. Not until she told me what the hell was going on.

"What happened?" I asked her, making sure that she knew that I meant business.

Her eyes were darting back and forth. Clearly she wanted me to go with her. Tori sighed at me and
shook her head. I could tell that she just wanted to get me out of here, but she had something to tell me first. I wanted to know where I belonged and I wanted to know why she was shuffling me out of the room so fast. I damn well deserved to know what this was all about.

"You're going to tell your family that the serum made you sick and that I sent you home," she told me. I scoffed at her. What utter bullshit. "All right?"

There was no way that I was telling them that. Not unless she gave me a good reason for having to do something like that. I shook my head at her and stomped my foot into the ground. It might have been a little childish but I wanted her to know that I meant business. That I wanted to know where it was that I belonged. I hadn't done anything to justify her rushing me out of here like I had some disease.

"No, but what was my result?" I asked once more.

That was the only thing that mattered. I just had to know where it was that I belonged. Everyone knew where they belonged. I deserved to know, too. Finally Tori gave up on shoving me out of the room and sighed. She looked up into my eyes and I braced myself. Here it comes. This is my future. I'm ready for it. No matter what it is.

"Amity," she told me.

My heart sank into my stomach. Maybe that was why she wanted me to get out of here. She didn't want to be the one to tell me that I was destined to go back to my Faction that I hated more than anything. Well, at least my parents would be pleased with me. But I could still leave, right? There was no one forcing me to stay in Amity.

"And Erudite," Tori continued. My head snapped up as I glanced up at her. I had gotten two Factions? How was that possible? "And Dauntless. And Abnegation," she finished slowly.

Alright. I wasn't expecting that. At least I knew that Candor was definitely out of the running. But Four factions? How the hell was I going to figure out how to do this? How could I manage pick one out of four Factions that I apparently fit into? No one was suited for four Factions. At least, no one that I'd ever heard of. But Dauntless... God, I couldn't believe that I actually fit into Dauntless. Some part of me felt completely elated. Those were the people that I had always thought were absolutely incredible. They were the people that I wanted to be.

"Dauntless... How did that happen?" I asked Tori, not really expecting an answer.

This must have been something that I didn't understand. She looked extraordinarily panicked about it. Tori shook her head at me, clearly not happy with the way that my results had played out. Hey lady, you should feel the way that I feel right now. My choice had gotten no easier since this morning.

"You should have grabbed one of the items in the beginning. The knife would have ruled out Amity and the meat would have ruled out Dauntless, but you did neither," she told me. I nodded. That made total sense. "When you pet the dog instead of attacking it I ruled out Dauntless and you were Amity. But then you jumped on the dog to save the girl and that added Dauntless back in and Abnegation. So I put you in a backup simulation. When you lied to the man it ruled out Candor. And then you hit him, which kept in Dauntless. It pushed Amity down, but didn't rule it out." I had done nothing to rule out Erudite, that was why they were in there too. "Your results were inconclusive."

My heart nearly stopped as soon as she said it. My results were inconclusive? How could that even happen? Was that even possible? I was pretty sure that it wasn't. Everyone that took this test got one
result and that was it. There was nothing that justified getting no result. It never happened, I would have heard something about it in school or in whispers throughout Amity.

"That's impossible. It doesn't make any sense," I mumbled to Tori, hoping she could make sense of this.

This was a dream. I was going to wake up and Mom was going to be yelling at me to not be late for school on my last day. Tori shook her head at me and I noticed that her olive skin had gone nearly white. Clearly this was not good, whatever was happening to me.

My eyes were watering slightly. "No. Not impossible. It's just extremely rare." So at least if nothing else, I wasn't the only person that this had ever happened to. "They call it Divergent. You can't tell anyone about this," she told me.

The panic in her voice sent a horrible pit forming in my stomach. Was there a chance that this could end up being deadly for me? My face paled. She was right, I could not tell anyone about this. I had never heard of the term Divergent, not anywhere. Maybe one day, no matter where I was placed, I would have to visit the Erudite compound to get to their library. They had to know something about this.

"Not even your parents. As far as the world is concerned, you received an Amity result because that is what I manually entered," she told me.

That meant that anyone who looked saw that I should be an Amity. A perfect Amity, just the way that everyone thought that I was. But it meant nothing, I could still pick whatever I wanted. In fact, my test suggested that there were other Factions that I would fit into as well.

"So what am I supposed to do at the Choosing Ceremony?" I asked desperately. She had to give me something to do. I had to know. "I was supposed to learn what to do. This was supposed to tell me what faction to choose, the test. We're supposed to trust the test," I babbled stupidly, hoping she could give me something.

There was no point in me asking her. She wasn't going to be able to tell me anything. Tori shook her head at me and my heart dropped into my stomach. That meant that there was really nothing that I could do. I had no choice but to make this one on my own. The last thing that I had wanted.

This day had just taken a strange turn. "The test didn't work on you. You have to trust yourself," Tori said and I nodded at her.

Without saying anything more, she opened the back door to the room and sent me on my way. My stomach was roiling painfully and I was pretty sure that I was going to vomit up anything that was in my stomach. This whole thing had to be a mistake. There was no way that this was real. Maybe this was all still part of the simulation, seeing how we handled it? Maybe we were supposed to decide on our own, where to go. But somewhere in the back of my mind I knew that I was really out of the simulation and this was a real live nightmare.

As I climbed onto the trucks and headed back to the Amity compound - the sun well past setting - I took a deep breath in. This would be the last time that I ever rode back to the Amity compound. I was sure about that. I couldn't deal with this place anymore. But that did leave me some other choices. Would I go to Erudite? No, I knew that I would be just as miserable there as I was here. How about Abnegation? No, I knew that I wasn't selfless enough. There was also Candor but I apparently had no aptitude for that Faction.

So that meant that the only choice that I had left was Dauntless. But was I brave enough to make it
there? I thought so, but that didn't mean anything. Only the skills that I showed once I got myself there would be able to tell them if I belonged there. But I knew that I could do it. I am Dauntless. Tomorrow at the Choosing Ceremony I would do the only thing that made any sense, I would become Dauntless.

The trucks came to a quick stop and I nearly trampled all of the other Amity members on my way off of the truck. They were all tired and probably grumpy, but they still smiled as they headed back to their homes. Me, on the other hand, I no longer cared. I just wanted to get out of here. As of today, I was Dauntless. There was no more point in lying to anyone other than my parents. Just one last day to act like an Amity.

Bursting through the door of my home I walked in and saw that my parents were sitting at the table. My mother was in my father's lap, laughing softly. She stood though, looking a little surprised that I was back. "Darling, you're home earlier than we would have thought. How did everything go?" she asked me.

I forced myself to keep a smile on my face. "It was fine," I said weakly.

"Did you really get out of the test that early?" she asked me.

I shook my head at her and saw the worry flash through my eyes. I knew that I would miss my parents more than anything but I had to leave. I just couldn't stay here, surrounded by things that I hated. I'd probably explode from anger. And as of right now I was sure that the longer that I lingered downstairs, the closer that I was to throwing up.

"Uh, no, Mom. The serum actually made me sick," I said.

Almost immediately, she grabbed me around the waist. "Are you okay?" she asked worriedly.

Smiling softly, I nodded at her. "I'm fine. The woman who was administering my test told me to go home. So I never got to do the simulation. I guess I just have to choose tomorrow," I said softly, hoping that my parents would just let it go and leave me alone to my thoughts.

There was nothing that I wanted to think about right now. I knew my choice, I just wanted to go to bed. My father came up to me and I smiled at him. The wrinkles around his lips straightened out slightly as he smiled back at me. It was like he was born to smile. Maybe that was how he knew that he was Amity.

"Would you like us to make you some tea?" Dad asked me.

I shook my head at him. "No thanks," I said.

"You're sure?" he asked.

"The last thing that I want is to be sick again," I joked.

Both of my parents laughed at me. It wasn't really a lie. I was pretty sure that I really would just throw it up and I wasn't sure that I wanted to see that blue liquid again. I wasn't sure that I wanted another reminder of everything that had just happened not even half an hour ago. I just wanted to leave and never have to think about the word Divergent ever again. I just wanted to adapt to my life in Dauntless.

Dad's voice brought me out of my thoughts. "Well on the bright side that shouldn't be too hard for you. We all know that you belong right here with the rest of your family. It will be so lovely to get to keep you with us. You'll love the process to become a member here in Amity. It's all about happiness
and love," he said.

The sharp pain of the lie shot through me once more. I nodded slowly at my parents and prayed that they couldn't see through my facade. The last thing that I wanted was an awkward final night. I smiled at my parents and made sure that it was over exaggerated. They had to believe that I wasn't awake enough to want to be down here and talk with them. I was afraid that if I talked with them much longer I might let the truth slip.

"You know, I'd love to keep talking tonight but I really think that I should get to bed. It's late and I'm not feeling too good. Not to mention that I have a long day coming up tomorrow," I told them.

"It'll be the biggest day of your life," Mom said.

"I know," I whispered back. They both nodded happily at me. Sighing deeply, I headed to the staircase and smiled back at them. "I love you guys. So much. I just want you both to know that. No matter what happens, I will always love the two of you."

My mother smiled at me, smoothing back her blonde hair but I could see the worry in her eyes. I didn't blame her, I knew that I was probably acting a little funny today. But I have every reason to be. It seems like I had a longer day today than anyone else did.

"Sweetheart, are you alright?" Mom asked me.

It was one of the rare times that she actually saw through my mask. I nodded at her. "Fine, just nervous," I told her with an awkward laugh.

She merely nodded at me and turned back to my father. The pair stood together and it pained me to know that they thought that they were looking at their perfect Amity daughter. Maybe it would be good for me to leave. At least that way I wouldn't always feel guilty for leaving them. Dad shook his head at me and I smiled down at him, hoping that he was just going to tell me something about having a nice night. But of course that would be too early.

"Don't be. Your life is planned out for you, and unlike the transfers tomorrow, you'll just be back home after the Choosing Ceremony," he said. I nodded, a voice in my head calling me a liar. "Get a good night's sleep. Goodnight dear."

They both pressed kisses on my cheeks that I returned. I said another quick and quiet goodnight before running up the stairs and closing the door to my bedroom softly behind me. For a moment I leaned against the door. The last thing that I wanted to do was think. I just wanted to sleep. But I was wide awake. There would be no sleep coming to me soon. I kicked off my shoes and sighed, walking over to my bed.

"Nice to finally see you," a voice called.

Gasping softly, I jumped, whipping towards the voice. Standing behind my door, leaning back on the wall, was my other best friend. One of the most amazing people that I had ever known. He was also one of the most attractive people that I knew. His long blonde hair fell into his eyes slightly and his eyes were a bright blue. He was also deeply tanned with clothes that normally hung off of his lean frame. He was every Amity girl's dream. I didn't blame them, he was extremely attractive. Even to me, someone as far from Amity as you could get.

He pushed himself off the door and sauntered towards me. "You know, if I had known any better I would have thought that you were avoiding me all day. Kind of hurts from my best friend," he teased.
Well that was surprising. Florian had plenty of friends that he liked well enough, other than Iris and me. He usually went to hang out with them when the three of us weren't together. I felt a pang of hurt as I plopped down on my bed and watched as he followed me. His smile was bright as he pulled me into him.

"Hey Florian," I said softly.

His hand was behind my neck as he pulled me into a long kiss. I could feel him smile and I knew that he was happy to be back around me. Whenever it was the two of us with Iris we all seemed to fight, but when it was just him and I, we got on swimmingly. In fact, sometimes we got along a little more than friends. But I was never one to complain about that. We weren't dating, just happy to be friends. Lots of kids in Amity were like us.

We broke apart from each other after a few seconds. "Sorry, I really haven't been avoiding you, I've just had a long day. You know with the test and everything. It didn't exactly go the way that I had thought that it would," I said sadly.

For a moment I debated on telling Florian what had happened but then I remembered what Tori had told me. Tell no one, not even my family. I would have to follow that. Florian's face paled slightly and for a moment I wondered if something had happened to him during his simulation too. Maybe he was Divergent, too. Maybe he would come with me to Dauntless. God, I hoped so. I didn't want to go alone since I knew that Iris was going to go to Candor.

"Oh God, did you get Amity?" he asked me. I shook my head, but he wasn't looking at me. "I know how crushed you would be if you had to stay here for the rest of your life. But you know, it's only a suggestion. You can go wherever you want to."

I did know that much. "No Florian, actually I didn't get Amity. Not really anyways," I said. I saw his eyebrows knit in confusion.

But the look on his face didn't last for that long. He suddenly looked so much more relieved now that he knew that I wasn't going to stay here. He knew how much I hated Amity. And I knew how much he hated Amity, too, despite the fact that he put on a good face for his family. Although, he might actually work out as an Amity.

"But I have no idea what's going on. I'm not sure what I want to do. I have no idea what I should do. I need you to help me. I need you to tell me what to do," I pleaded with him desperately.

Florian shook his head at me and I sighed. I had known that he wouldn't tell me what to do, but I wished nothing more than him to help me out. I had no idea what I should do. I wanted to go to Dauntless more than anything, but what if I wasn't good enough? I couldn't be Factionless.

"I can't tell you what to do, Amarantha," he told me. I cringed at the sound. I hated when he used my feel name. He only used it when things were serious. "But I can tell you that you have to calm down. I love you, Iris loves you, and your parents love you. No matter what you do tomorrow or what you choose, we will always love you," he told me.

That might not be true after tomorrow. Not after what I was planning on doing. "What if I choose Dauntless?" I asked him.

In the back of my mind, I had been hoping that he would make me feel a little more confident about my choice tomorrow. Of course, that wasn't what was going to happen. He cocked his head at me and shook it slightly. I knew that he thought that the Dauntless were a little too rowdy and annoying but I wanted to know if there would be any chance that he could forgive me if I went through with
my plan to go there.

His face was almost amused. "Dauntless? Why would you want to go there?" he asked disbelievingly. There went any chance of him thinking that my going to Dauntless was a good idea. "To a bunch of mindless soldiers that spend all day sweating over each other?" I shook my head at him. They weren't that bad. They defended us. "Come on, Amarantha. I know that you think you want the adventure that a life in Dauntless would give you, but you'd be so much happier here. Or in Erudite. Somewhere that you can be happy. Or be with me," he added softly.

Of course I should have been expecting something like that. I looked over into his eyes and felt my heart soften slightly. I had always had a soft spot for Florian, but I hadn't realized that he had thought of me as anything more than a friend that he could fool around with every now and again. That was the way that we had always been. But judging by the look that he was giving me, maybe he did think of me as something more.

"Florian..." I said softly, knowing that this was not the time to reveal feelings. Not right before we were getting ready to leave each other forever.

There was nothing that I could think to say. Not when it came to this. Florian shook his head at me and grabbed my arm, pulling me into him so that I would be quiet. I fell into his body and sighed deeply. I fit so well with him. I couldn't imagine that this was really the last night that he would ever sneak into my room. I couldn't imagine that this was the last time that we would ever really get a chance to talk. I opened my mouth to say something but he put his hand up to my mouth and shook his head.

"Don't. Come on, don't talk right now. I don't want to hear any more of this. Tonight might be the last night that I can sneak into your room so I want us to enjoy it, not spend it worrying over a new day. Come here," he told me.

He pulled my mouth to his without another word and I knew that there was nothing more that I could do. His mouth slid across mine and I smiled as he ran his tongue over my lip. For nearly an hour we laid together, our tongues mixing together and our hands running over each other's bodies. It felt just like every night beforehand. For the time that we laid together, I even forgot about my choice tomorrow and being a Divergent. But like all good things, it had to end. Before I could tell him not to, Florian had rolled us onto the bed, forcing me underneath him.

It was no shock that he wanted it, but it was the wrong time. It felt like this was our goodbye. I felt his hand hiking up my skirt and I reached down, pulling his hand away. He looked at me like I had stolen a prize from him. I smiled and shook my head. It definitely wouldn't be the first time that we had ever done it, but this wasn't the night that we should have been doing anything like that. Florian groaned as I pushed him off of me with a little smile.

He shook his head at me and sighed, standing up from the bed. He grabbed his shirt that had been misplaced and pulled it over his head. "You should go. It's getting late," I told him.

"It's been later," he shot back.

A small smile fell over my face. I noticed he wore a little hurt on his face, which I was quick to rectify. "Not that I don't want to spend the night talking with you about everything stupid we've ever done and reminiscing but we have a long day ahead of us. I hope that you have a plan in mind for yourself tomorrow. Don't go in there blind like I am," I said softly, making him smile.

Florian gave me a little grin and nodded at me. I was glad that he wasn't angry with me, but that wasn't in his nature. He wasn't an angry person, he was relatively peaceful. He just wasn't suited for
Amity. Although I wasn't sure where else he would go. Maybe he would end up in Amity. He had always been good at pretending that he was.

"You aren't going in there blind. You know where you belong. Deep down in there, you know where you belong..." he trailed off and I nodded, not liking where this was going. "I love you, Amarantha."

It was the last thing that he told me before turning and disappearing out of my window; not without a wink though. He jumped from the window into the tree and scurried down it. It was rather nice for the last time that we would be together. We did argue from time to time, just the way that he did with Iris, so I was glad that we could leave on a sweet note. I smiled as he left my line of sight and dropped back into my mattress.

"Goodnight Florian," I mumbled.

The words lingered on my tongue for a long while. It was the last time that I would ever get to say that. I didn't bother getting changed or getting ready for bed. My motivation to stay awake and plan for tomorrow had suddenly died. So I settled for laying down and replaying the events of the day. It had been a terribly long and stressful day, but I knew that I was ready for tomorrow. Screw being Divergent and screw what my parents wanted. For the first time in my life, I was going to make the choice that was right for me. I was Dauntless. I had to be. I was brave. I could do this.
Chapter Two

The morning came so much faster than I wanted it to. Not that I was surprised. Florian had been over here well into the night. Outside I could hear kids playing in the fields. Many of them were younger siblings playing with their older siblings, the ones that were Choosing today. Just in case it was the last time that they could play together. I wished that I was one of them out there, but I was an only child.

All over Amity, and the rest of the Chicago, other sixteen year olds were saying goodbye to their families. It wasn't all going to be people saying goodbye though. Plenty of kids were rejoicing in the fact that they would not be leaving their families. I wished that I was one of them. I wished more than anything else that I would be staying in Amity, riding the buses back with my family after the Choosing Ceremony. It would have made things so much easier. But I knew that it wasn't going to be the case. In just under an hour I would headed to the Dauntless compound.

The thought unnerved me slightly. One of the things that made me so curious about the Dauntless was the fact that I had no idea where their compound actually was. No one outside of Dauntless, and some government officials, knew where the compound was. I was convinced that it was underground, seeing as it was nowhere between the fences that surrounded the City. I had been on plenty of walks around Chicago and had never once seen the Dauntless compound. The entrance had to be hidden.

Of course, if all went according to plan, I would know where the Dauntless compound was soon enough. In fact, in under an hour I would be a Dauntless initiate. I couldn't help but to wonder how they would welcome me. There hadn't been a transfer from Amity to Dauntless in years. I didn't know how long, but it hadn't been during my lifetime. The transfer was just too strange for most people. At least I would be making waves this year as the sole transfer from Amity to Dauntless.

It was a little premature, but I knew for a fact that while others were thinking about transferring, none of them were thinking about heading to Dauntless. They probably had the least amount of transfers of any of the Factions. Amity and Candor normally had the most. It was all because people were afraid of the Dauntless. Of them or their training process, I wasn't sure. But I knew that I was ready. No matter what, I was ready.

Part of me knew that this would not be an easy transfer. I would be betraying my family, who had thought for my entire life that I would stay in Amity forever. I had never told them otherwise and never made any indication that I wanted to leave. I would be going without anyone that I knew, too. Most other people went to new Factions with people that they knew. Maybe not by name, but they would recognize their faces. They knew that they were from their original home.

I, on the other hand, would have no one I knew. Chances were that there would be plenty of Erudite and Candor transfers. Maybe even a few Abnegation. They weren't very common, but there was the rare one or two that transferred into Dauntless. They usually had a hard time, but a few had made it. At least, that was the rumor. As far as I knew, no Amity members had ever made it into Dauntless.

Sighing at myself, I couldn't help but to think about what my life in Dauntless would be like. I would be stronger, that much was for sure. People that went to Dauntless were strong in every way. They always seemed to be the strongest people in the city. Hopefully I would be able to yell, curse, and fight whenever I wanted to. Of course, I couldn't imagine anyone fighting an Amity. Maybe they would have me fight someone. That would be interesting. I didn't think that I had the hardest hits, but I had plenty of years' worth of anger to let out on these people.
Of course, if they put me up with a man twice my size I would get knocked down pretty quickly. Trying to blink away the images of myself beaten and bloody, I instead wondered if I would end up having tattoos and crazy hairstyles like they had. I figured that I would probably get a few piercings and tattoos but I might end up going easy on my hair. I had always liked it the way that it was. I liked my naturally blonde hair but I would probably have to cut it. I had seen Dauntless members with long hair, but never as long as mine.

Standing up from my bed, I glanced over at my clock and snorted at the sight. I was running extremely late. I only had a few more minutes. I should have been ready over an hour ago. My parents would probably be calling me downstairs any minute now. Not that it was something that I wanted to deal with. I would have liked to ignore them for the next hour. The good thing was that once I picked where I wanted to go, I wouldn't have to go back and sit with my parents. I could go sit with my new Faction. It would make things easier on me. I would just have to avoid looking at them.

I walked over to my dresser and opened up every drawer, digging through my clothes to try and find something that worked for changing Factions. I wanted to try and find something that didn't scream that I was a Softie, but it didn't look like I was going to find anything. Figures. My parents had never let me get anything that wasn't red or yellow. There was nothing that I could get that wasn't red or yellow - the Amity colors.

Maybe I could try dressing in all red. But that wouldn't look very good. I would just look like a lobster. And all yellow would stand out like a sore thumb in the all-black Faction. So I merely settled on something reasonably simple and relatively easy to move in. Every time that I saw the Dauntless going somewhere, they were running or jumping from something. That meant no heels, no dresses, and no skirts. It also meant that I should probably put my hair up.

Stripping off my clothes from the day before, I grabbed a yellow shirt and threw it on over me. It was a little loose fitting and the design cut off just below my belly button. Stretching myself out in the mirror, I tried - and failed - to look more intimidating. There was no way that anyone in Dauntless would ever be afraid of me. Maybe the day would come that they were, but I wasn't exactly a two-hundred pound muscle man.

Turning to the side, I let my eyes settle on my body. I was pretty thin with just a few layers of baby fat. Nothing that noticeable that the Dauntless might pick it out. At least, I hoped not. That would be the most mortifying thing on my first day. It was already bad enough that everyone else would be coming in wearing dark blue, gray, black, and white. I would look like the flower child that I always had been in my bright yellow and red outfit. Grabbing the pair of red shorts that I had laid out on the counter, I pulled them on and looked myself over. Good enough.

Hopefully I wouldn't have to stay in them long. As I walked back out of the bathroom, I grabbed my red and yellow sneakers and pulled them onto my feet, groaning at the bright colors. The more that I thought about it, the more I wondered what idiot had thought that red and yellow were peaceful colors. They made me want to rip someone's head off. Or at least bury mine in the sand. Grabbing my yellow hair tie off of my dresser - that blended in with my hair thankfully - I pulled my hair up into a high ponytail and looked myself over.

It would definitely end up making someone laugh at me. Here's hoping that I would be able to make myself look a little bit more Dauntless once I got there. Most of the people that were going to the Choosing Ceremony would be dressed up like it was a formal event, which it sort of was. It was essentially all of us coming out as real adults and taking our places in the world. We were supposed to be dressed up but I didn't really care. I needed something that I could move in.
The Dauntless were constantly running around. They never took a moment to rest. And I was sure that the Dauntless wouldn't be dressed up at all. The only issue was that I didn't want to look like a fool in front of the leaders of any of the Factions. But there was probably nothing that I could do to help that. It was just the type of person that I was. I would make a fool of myself at the Choosing Ceremony and then again, plenty of times, in front of my new Faction leader. Hopefully there weren't that many assholes in Dauntless.

Who was I kidding? Dauntless was full of people that wanted to watch someone make a fool of themselves. But that was half of the reason that I wanted to go there. I wanted to prove that I was more than a pretty face and that I was more than just some kid that was full of smiles and laughter. I wanted to show that I was something to contend with. I was a good fighter, I had a strong mind, and, in time, I would have a strong body to match.

All that I had to do was make sure my blood fell into the right bowl at the Choosing Ceremony. I couldn't imagine the horror on my face if, by some cruel accident, I ended up back in Amity. If nothing else, at least my parents would be happy for me. But that wasn't good enough. As much as I loved my family, that wasn't what I wanted. And right now, I had to come first. I wanted to be brave, not peaceful.

Knowing perfectly well that it was time to stop dawdling and go downstairs before my parents came up to get me, I took a deep breath and opened the door to my room. It was time to say goodbye. Well, my version of goodbye. Which would consist of dancing around any questions they had about the Choosing Ceremony, leading them on to think that I was going to pick Amity, picking Dauntless instead, and hoping that they didn't hate me for it.

Oh yeah, that was a fantastic plan. I couldn't only imagine that they were going to completely despise me. But that was life, wasn't it? No matter what I did today, someone wasn't going to be happy with me. Florian would be upset if I didn't follow him wherever he went. Iris would be upset that I didn't follow her to Candor. My parents would be upset that I didn't stay in Amity. Then there was the issue that I would be upset if I didn't get to go to Dauntless. No one won in this game.

Gathering my jumbled thoughts together, I looked around my room for the last time. I knew that no matter what, this was the last time that I would see this room. Even if I ever got to come back here for a day, I was sure that my parents would change it before long. They wouldn't want any reminders of their disappointment of a daughter. And I wouldn't be able to blame them for whatever they did with it.

Glancing around at the pictures that were all over my wall, I couldn't help but to smile. There were ones of me running through the flowers, laughing with Iris, and even one of Florian and me kissing. I couldn't even remember that one being taken. Smiling at the four poster bed that was made of a deep mahogany and topped with light blue sheets, and multicolored pillows thrown all over it, I made it back up for the final time. I would miss that bed. There was a white, wooden dresser that I kept all of my clothes in and I smiled. Carved into the side were Iris's and Florian's names, both in childlike writing.

There were so many good memories that it almost hurt to leave here. But it had to be done. I knew that I would never be happy if I stayed here. Taking one last deep breath, I smiled at my room and placed a small kiss on the picture of my parents before leaving. I shut the door behind me and fought back tears. This was going to be worth it. I was doing what I had to do. Marching down the stairs, I saw my parents bustling around the dining room and smelled the fresh fruit that they must have gone out to pick while I was still asleep.

"Good morning. Smells good down here," I chirped.
Both of my parents glanced up at me and smiled. "Thank you, dear," Dad called.

He was across the room, chopping up pieces of an orange. Mom followed my voice and I glanced over at her. Her eyes were bright with a smile but as she looked down at my body I could tell that she didn't approve of what I was wearing. Not that she ever did really. She always felt like I didn't dress 'Amity enough'. Whatever that meant. I would love to see what she would think of me once she saw me in my Dauntless getup. Whatever that would look like.

She walked over to me and handed me a small muffin. "Oh, Amarantha dear, you look very nice but don't you think that you want to be in something a little more breathable?" she asked me. I narrowed my eyes at her.

Normally she would have said that it looked like I was unhappy, but today she let it slide. "This is perfectly breathable," I argued.

"Well the outfit is nice but it looks like you're about to take a run or something," she said sweetly. That's kind of the point. "Please dress up for today. This is a special day.

I shook my head at her and feigned ignorance. The last thing that I wanted was to get on Mom's bad side the day that I was going to break her heart. "Sorry, Mom, I wasn't thinking. I don't have time to get changed or else I would," I said, laughing lightly.

"We'll have to buy you a new alarm clock," she teased me.

Tell her the truth. Mom brushed a stray strand of hair out of my eyes. "Besides, this will be easier to climb the stairs in rather than heels. You understand that, right?" I asked her, hoping that she understood the lies that I was telling. I thought they sounded real enough.

Pulling away from Mom, I took a few steps back, only to run straight into Dad. I jumped at the feeling of him, having not really been expecting him to have been standing that close behind me. He merely smiled at me and laid a hand down on my shoulder. My heart was thumping in my chest.

"Of course we do. That makes perfect sense," he said.

Once more I nodded at them. Dad had always been the more reasonable of the two. He was always the one that let me get away with the few times that I had accidentally let my non-Amity behavior get the better of me. Although he usually made a note about it to Mom, who would get on me about it later.

"We made you your favorite breakfast but it doesn't seem like you were down in time for anything," he joked.

"That's okay," I said softly.

That was probably for the best. There was fresh fruit and toast spread out over the table. Not that it was anything that I really loved. I was excited for meat, which I knew I was going to be able to get in Dauntless. They had to have higher amounts of protein then we had here in Amity.

"You can have it when we get back, I suppose," Dad said.

No I can't. My throat began to close and I felt like I might vomit up everything that I had eaten in the past few days. Not that it was much. I had been so nervous about the stupid Choosing Ceremony that I had barely eaten. I probably should have woken up early today. I was absolutely positive that I would need my strength for whatever Dauntless would throw at us for our first day of training. Probably nothing good. Or at least nothing easy. I tried to force myself to grab something from the
table, but even the sight of it made me sick.

"Sorry, Dad, I was just tired," I told him.

It wasn't really a lie. It was the truth. I had been up thinking about whether or not I would be able to make it into Dauntless all night. "It's not a problem, sweetheart," Mom said.

"I wanted to get up a little earlier but I was so tired. It was a stressful day yesterday and I'm just so nervous for the Choosing Ceremony," I said honestly. But I would never tell him why.

Both of my parents looked a little pained and I couldn't help but to wonder why. As far as they were concerned, this was the easiest thing that I would ever have to do. They thought that I wanted Amity more than anything. Mom wrapped her arm around my shoulders and I cringed slightly. I wanted nothing more than to peel her off of me. She had no idea what I was getting ready to do to her.

She gently pushed my head up. "Amarantha, you shouldn't be nervous. Unlike most kids you've always known where it was that you wanted to go," she told me, nearly making me hurl. She was half-right, I had always known that I didn't want to go to Amity. "It's so easy, isn't it? Knowing that tonight you're coming right back to where you belong."

She gave me a small peck on the cheek and I nodded at her blankly, hoping that she couldn't see through the nerves that were wracking me to my core. I had to be careful with the knife that they were going to give me in the Choosing Ceremony. At this rate I was going to take my hand off with it. I guess it would at least look extremely Dauntless.

"Yeah, Mom. It's easy all right. You're right. I shouldn't be worried about anything." She gave me a bright smile. If only she knew what I was talking about. "I know where I'm going to go today." My parents laughed lightly. They thought that I was talking about Amity. "I think I've known for a long time."

In fact, I knew that I'd known for a long time. I knew that I didn't belong in Amity. I belonged in Dauntless. Of course, I had kept that last part to myself. I wanted my parents to be as happy as long as possible. I could only imagine how awful their ride home would be. The first time that they would go home without their daughter. I hoped that it wasn't anything too painful for them. I didn't want to be responsible for breaking their hearts.

But I already was. "We're so happy to hear that, dear," Dad said.

I thought that he might have been about to say something else when the roar of the buses alerted us that it was time to leave for the Choosing Ceremony. It was time. There was no turning back now. I had made my choice and I would force myself to stick with it. No matter what my family said to me.

"Come on now, I think that I hear the buses getting ready to leave," Dad said.

Once more, I nodded blankly. We packed up our things and I sighed, turning back to my house to say goodbye. I wouldn't even get to take anything with me. Everything that I had would be left in my home for my parents to do with as they pleased. We made our way out to the buses and I climbed on. It was extremely crowded today as it wasn't just kids leaving. Their parents were all with them.

Apparently I was shaking more than I thought that I was as I heard Derrick chuckling at me. My parents were already seated so I turned my burning glare onto him. I wasn't in the mood today. Sensing that I didn't want to joke today, he put his hands up like he was surrendering to me. It was such an Amity thing to do.

He smiled at me and gave a little wink, almost like he knew what it was that I was planning to do.
Maybe he did. Derrick was smart; after all, he was from Erudite originally. I hadn't known that until Iris had told me a few weeks ago. She'd been batting the idea of staying for Derrick back and forth.

"Don't be nervous, Amarantha. Just know that whatever you decide to do, your parents will always love you," he told me.

I scoffed loudly. I wasn't so sure about that. From what I saw, they would hate me if I chose Dauntless. "You're so sure about that?" I asked him.

He nodded at me. "It might come as a little bit of a shock to them at first but the day will come that they can get over it. And who knows? Maybe you'll get to see them sooner than you think. After all, there is Visiting Day," he told me. So he did know that I was leaving.

Nodding to my old friend, I smiled and wished more than anything that there would be people like him in Dauntless. I wasn't much of a people person, but that didn't mean that I wanted to be a total loner. "Thanks, Derrick. You know, I'm really gonna miss you," I told him.

He smiled at me. "I'll miss you, too," he said.

Derrick was so sweet. Iris was really missing out on not being with him. For her at least, he might have been worth staying in Amity. But she would never stay, not for some stupid boy. "I'll miss all of you guys, but you're one of the only ones who ever really understood that my wanting to leave was not such as bad thing." I told him softly, making sure that no one else could hear me.

That would certainly make for an awkward car ride. Derrick gave me a big smile and held his hand out to me. I grabbed it, thinking that he wanted to shake my hand. But right as soon as he got my hand in his own, he let something slip into it, closing my fist tightly, before releasing my hand. I turned it over and smiled when I saw that it was a little pendant of a tree. The Amity symbol. Even though I wasn't the biggest fan of Amity, it would always be home. I grinned at him and tucked the pin into my pocket. I would make sure to keep it with me as a reminder of where I can from.

"Take your seat, it's time to go. Good luck today. You'll do great today. I wish that I could watch you," he told me, his eyes glittering slightly. It was something that I had become accustomed to him doing whenever he was trying to teased me. "I think it will be a show to see, something that people will remember forever."

He gave me a little wink and I laughed softly. I smiled at him once more before taking my seat in between my parents. They both had their hands on my legs and I wanted nothing more than to shove them off of me. As much as I loved them, it felt like every time that they did something nice to me I would make the heartbreak only that much worse. The ride to The Hub - where the Choosing Ceremony would be held - was only about ten minutes, but at this rate it would feel like forever. So instead I focused my nervous energy into something else.

I began to think about the people besides me that would be defecting from Amity today. I knew that I wasn't alone in my desire to leave. Iris would be going to Candor. I knew that for a fact. But we weren't going to be the only two that were leaving Amity.

There was Carla Hay. She would be an Erudite. There was no doubt in my mind that she was intelligent enough to make it. Every day that we went to class she would sit in the front row - instead of the back like the rest of Amity - and she would scribble down her notes. She may as well have been an Erudite. I had been in her room before. Everything was blue. Her defecting would come as no surprise.

One of her friends would also be defecting. But not to the same Faction, unfortunately for them. It
was the same problem that I was facing with Iris. Meghan Reagan was a sweet girl and it was easy to
tell where she was going to go. She would be an Abnegation. The Faction would suit her well. She
was sweet enough to be an Amity but she was never loud enough. While everyone else yelled and
laughed through the meals that we all shared, she would always sit in silence. Not to mention that she
would light up whenever a couple would show their love for each other in front of her. It wasn't like
I was a fan of it either, but there was nothing to be done about it. I knew that Meghan would do well
in Abnegation.

It wasn't just females that would be defecting this year. I knew that there would be a number of males
that would leave. Plenty of guys couldn't stand the peace and love atmosphere that Amity had. One
of my old friends, Trey Morrison, would be one of the guys to leave. For a long while I had thought
that he would end up as a Candor, but I had been wrong. He was destined to help people. He would
be another Abnegation. Every time that he saw someone in any form of need, he was there to rescue
them. It got a little sickening to watch after a while. Most Amity were rather selfish, being one of the
things that made us so different from Abnegation. But Trey would make the perfect mix of Amity
and Abnegation.

The last of the transfers that I knew well was a girl that had always been in my classes. Someone was
a damn moron if they didn't think that she was going to transfer. And she would probably tell you the
same thing. If it weren't for the incessant truth-telling I would actually think that Dari Justine would
be heading to Dauntless. That would kill our parents. Two Amity transfers to Dauntless within one
year. It was practically blasphemy. We all knew that she would end up as a Candor. It suited her
personality well. I knew that she wasn't a fan of the Amity way of life. I hoped that Iris would have
Dari as a friend. I didn't want anyone else to be the only person that was going into their new Faction
with no one.

Okay, so maybe I did a little bit.

Mark Jansen, Erudite. Heather Williams, Erudite. Jessica Sanders, Candor. Damien Richards,
Abnegation. Hayley Sharp, Abnegation. All around me I saw people that were going to transfer.
Their parents all looked nervous but they also looked like they were proud of their children. Of
course they were. Their children had all been honest with them. Plus they were all moving to
respectable Factions.

Erudite were all about knowledge. Any child could easily make their parents proud of them.
Abnegation were all about helping others. They were as close to Amity as one person could possibly
get. The only thing that would suck for those parents was the fact that their kids wouldn't be living
with them. Then there was Candor. At least they never lied. They had that going for them. Their
parents would be proud to have an honest child.

Then there were the transfers to Dauntless. They were always the kids that were looked down upon.
People thought that kids like me were fools. Children that wanted to have a little adventure. Of
course that was a little bit true. But that wasn't all that it was about. I wanted more than just the
freedom that Dauntless would give me. I wanted to be given a chance to protect the city that I called
home. I wanted to defend my friends and I wanted to know how to defend myself. Most of all, I
wanted to show my parents that they had a child that they could be proud of. And she didn't need to
be in Amity to make them proud.

The trucks pulled to a stop on the outside of The Hub and I took in a deep breath. Like always, the
Amity were the last ones to get there. With our frivolous attitudes, we were horrible at making it to
places on time. We were even worse than the Dauntless. Taking a deep breath, I jumped off of the
back of Derrick's truck for the last time and made my way inside of the Hub. As the Abnegation
flooded the stairways, leaving the elevators for everyone else, I pushed through the crowd.
I could hear my parents telling me to slow down, but I ignored them. They were right behind me as I stopped to take in the scene in front of me. All around me were people. On the far left side of the theater were the Dauntless. Rowdy as ever, they were all yelling at each other and laughing loudly. It looked like so much fun. Next to them were the Candor’s, all engaged in quiet discussions, small smiles on their faces. Many looked to be in the middle of a debate. Next to them were the Erudite. They were all talking quietly, but no one seemed to be enjoying themselves. Next to them were the Amity that had already arrived, talking loudly and laughing. They all looked so happy. On the end of the auditorium were the Abnegation. They were sitting quietly, not speaking and not smiling. What a dull life.

Glancing up to the seats that were sectioned off for Amity, I took a deep breath. This was the last time that I would ever be identified as one of them. Dad put his hand on my back and I blindly followed him. We were passing the Dauntless members but I didn’t dare look up. I feared that if I did I might spill the beans. Or my guts. I wasn’t sure which one was worse.

"Factions, please gather in your assigned areas," a man on the speakers announced.

I looked up and was about to pull my parents to the Amity section of the amphitheater, but Dad was a little bit faster than me. He appeared back in my line of sight and I nearly crashed into the woman that he was walking with. For a moment I thought that it was Mom, but the blue outfit immediately gave her away as an Erudite.

"Amarantha, this is Jeanine Matthews," Dad told me.

For a moment I just stared blankly at her. Finally I forced myself to nod. I didn't have to be told who she was. Jeanine was someone who wanted everyone to think that she was with us, but really she just wanted to control us. It was obvious enough. Her hair was up in a tight bun and it looked like she thought that she ruled the world. Which she probably thought that she did. My jaws ground together as I stared at her. Your beloved test doesn't work as well as you'd like to think.

"She is the leader of Erudite," Dad said. Once more I nodded. I knew that. "We met a few weeks ago at a meeting and I've wanted you her to meet you since then."

My head snapped over to him. Why the hell had my Dad wanted me to meet her? He didn't want me going to Erudite so it made no sense that he would want to introduce the two of us. Maybe he wanted me to get into politics. Jeanine Matthews would be the person to talk to if you wanted anything to do with politics. She practically ran the City Counsel, even though it was supposed to be in Abnegation territory.

"It's so nice to finally meet you, Amarantha," Jeanine told me, shaking my hand tightly. I grimaced at her words but forced myself to keep a smile. Twenty more minutes of being Amity. It wasn't that hard. "Your father speaks extremely highly of you. He's very proud that there will be another Amity in the family. It's so nice when children keep to their origins."

"I suppose," I muttered dumbly, swallowing a lump in my throat.

Had Dad told everyone that I was going to stay in Amity? How embarrassing. "Defecting is such a cruel thing to do to your family, wouldn't you agree?" she asked me, a cruel glint in her eyes.

Somehow she must have known that I was going to transfer. Maybe it was really written that plainly across my face. Good thing my parents were rather clueless. I narrowed my eyes at her and scoffed. Screw being Amity, this bitch had to be put in her place.

"Well there's the Aptitude Test," I began as she raised her eyebrows at me. "That's supposed to tell
us where we go. And there are plenty of times where the Aptitude Test tells kids that they don't belong in their birth Faction."

She nodded with a little smile. Yeah, I wasn't Erudite smart but I knew that I wasn't at total idiot. As she pondered my response, I wondered if she knew anything about being Divergent. I assumed that she did. Tori had told me that it was something that was extremely dangerous and something that I had to keep to myself. I assumed that it meant that someone knew about it, and Jeanine was exactly the kind of person that I assumed would. Part of me couldn't help but think that she knew about my Divergence just by looking at me.

The thought made my skin crawl. I had no idea what she would do to me if she knew what I was. "Smart girl. Perhaps we can make an Erudite out of you after all," she said. My parents laughed at the joke. "Besides, you should know that you are always free to choose where you want to go. Despite what the Aptitude Test says."

That time I couldn't help but to scoff out loud. I knew that she was making a very persuading argument but anyone with half a brain knew that there really wasn't a choice. You went where the Aptitude Test told you to go. Or, in my case, you went in one of the Factions that it told you to go. That whole 'pick where you think you fit' thing was bullshit. We all knew that part of the system involved going exactly where the test told you to go. Except for Divergent's. Maybe that was why people hated them so much.

"You say that but you don't really want that," I snapped.

My parents both looked horrified that I had dared to say something like that. "Amarantha. That's rude and not very Amity." Good, because I am not Amity. "Please apologize to Jeanine," Mom told me, making me blanched. No thank you.

I assumed that if we were in Dauntless or maybe even Candor, my parents would have slapped me. But, of course, we were in Amity. So instead they smiled and laughed at me, thinking that my words were more from nerves than actual malice. Jeanine actually saved me the pain of apologizing to her as she shook her head and smiled at me. A smile that told me that she was watching me. A smile that unnerved me to my core.

"Oh, please, no. Children just say silly things sometimes," Jeanine said.

As my parents turned towards her, I shook my head. "We're deeply sorry, as is Jeanine," Dad said.

I still didn't like her in the slightest, but at least she had saved me the pain of apologizing to her. "I want you to choose who you truly are and where you truly belong. Not on a whim. Not because you wish you were someone you're not. But because you honestly know yourself. I want you to choose wisely. And I know you will," Jeanine said with a bright smile.

Was there some way that she knew that I would be transferring out of my Faction? It seemed like she knew that it was exactly what I was planning on doing. Right before either of us could get a chance to say anything to other during our little pissing contest, Mom put her hand on my back and pushed me away from Jeanine. I turned from her without another word and followed Mom without complaint.

"Come darling, it's time for us to take our seats," she told me and I nodded.

Blindly, I followed my parents up to our seats near the middle of the stands. On each side of me was yellow and red. I wondered what it would be like to be surrounded by all black in a few minutes. Mom and Dad were sitting to my left and I took a deep breath. It was the last time that I would sit
near them. Making me jump slightly, Iris came running up to my side and plopped into the chair on
my other side.

It was the happiest that I had seen her in a long time. She wore a bright smile and I knew that she
was thrilled to be getting out of Amity today. I was, too. But I was nowhere near as excited as she
was. "Hey!" she chirped brightly.

"Hey," I responded, my voice sounding a little devoid of emotion.

"I waited for you outside of the school yesterday, even though you told me not to, and I never saw
you. Did your test really take that long?" she asked me. I gulped. It was almost impossible to lie to a
Candor. But she wasn't one just yet. "I was in and out of there in no time."

A sudden flash of anger shot through me but I pushed it back down. I didn't want to be angry with
Iris just because my test hadn't gone the way that I had wanted it to. She was just lucky. I was happy
that she knew what she was doing. It wasn't her fault that I was Divergent. It wasn't anyone's fault.
Not even mine.

Turning towards her, I smiled. "You know, I actually got sick from the serum that they gave me.
Apparently it happens every now and again. I never got to take the simulation," I told her.

Her eyes widened drastically. I guess she had never heard of it happening. "Really?" she asked.

I nodded at her. "I guess today I just have to go with whatever my gut tells me to do," I said softly,
making sure that my parents couldn't hear me.

Iris narrowed her eyes at me and I rolled my own. I hated when she tried to analyze me like I was
some mysterious creature. "You got sick?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You seriously got sick?" she repeated, giving me a guffawing laugh.

"That's what I said," I snapped.

My eyes narrowed at her and I balled my fists at my side. "I've never heard of that happening. A,
what the hell is going on with you? You've been so weird for the past few days. Is it all really
because of this?" she asked, motioning around us.

I shook my head at her and narrowed my eyes. Candor's had a natural knack for annoying the other
Factions but I had never seen it. Not until now, that is. "Yeah, Iris. Is that really so hard to believe
that I'm stressed out over this?" I asked her.

"Kind of. No one is like this," she said.

She was looking at me like she genuinely believed that I was being overly dramatic. "Not all of us
have that luxury to know where we want to go. We haven't all had that luxury since the day that we
were born," I snapped. She scoffed at me. She just didn't want to admit that I was telling the truth.
"Lay off me, alright?"

Angrier than I had seen her in a while, Iris leaned forward, making sure that the only thing that I was
looking at was her. My parents glanced over to us for a moment and we both gave them wide smiles,
hoping that they would look away from us. Once they had looked away, we both turned back
towards each other and glared.
"No, A. I don't believe you for a second," she told me.

"Why's that?"

"I know that you're stressed out over all of this but come on, it's one choice of five. It isn't that hard. Just pick one and deal with it." Shocked by her words, I stared at her, forcing myself to not tell her about the Divergence. She had no idea how hard this was for me. "This isn't life or death," she muttered.

Iris dropped back into her seat and my jaw dropped. For her, this wasn't life or death at all. It was just an important decision that would plan out her life. For me, though, this really was life or death. As far as I knew, Divergent's were executed the moment that Jeanine found out about them.

"Maybe for you it isn't," I muttered to her.

Faster than I had ever seen her move, she whipped her head around to face me. I wondered if the sudden movement had given her whiplash. Her eyes were as wide as they had ever been and she was looking at me like I had grown three heads. If she was going to keep looking at me like that, then I couldn't wait to get out of here. The air was stifling.

"What did you just say?" she asked me.

I shrugged at her. I didn't need this now. "You heard me," I muttered childishly.

"How is this life or death? I know that this could mean being happy in life or just living but come on A. I think you're be a little over dramatic here. It's easy. You just cut your hand with the knife and let it fall into one of the bowls," she told me, shaking her head gently.

That was all that we had to do, but there was so much that came after it. This was so dangerous for someone like me. Tori had made that much clear. Iris's hair was pulled up in a tight ponytail and I wanted nothing more than to rip it out of its perfect hold. This wasn't the Iris that I knew. This was some other bitch. Iris would have genuinely been concerned for me. She wouldn't have brushed off my concerns like they were nothing.

"Yeah, right, Iris. Must be easy to know that your blood is going to fall into the bowl with the broken glass," I told her, just loud enough that a few people turned to look at her.

She turned an angry glare onto me, probably pissed that I had spilled her little secret. "What the hell was that for?" she hissed irritably as chatter rose around us.

It looked like she was going to continue to chew me out, but before she could I cut her off. "Enjoy Candor. I know that it's where you belong," I told her, effectively ending the conversation.

We both dropped into our chairs, each of us pissed beyond belief. Not that I'd meant to say anything like that to her. She was my best friend, but I just couldn't help it. My parents turned to talk with me, but one look from me told them that I was not in the chatting mood. For once respecting it, they turned away from me and back towards each other, continuing their previous conversation. A figure fell roughly into the seat in front of me and both Iris and I jumped.

One cheesy grin from the newcomer and I knew that it was Florian. He grinned at me, opening his mouth to say something, but stopped almost immediately. The venomous looks that both Iris and I were giving each other told him that we were in no joking mood. Not today.

"Well, well. The two of you look absolutely furious. What happened in the last, what, five minutes since the two of you have been sitting here?" he asked us.
"Drop it," I mumbled.

Florian waited a few more moments to see if we would say anything else. "Nothing? All right then, tough crowd," he muttered when he realized that neither one of us were going to say anything. "Come on girls, all three of us have this. You know that we do. No matter where we all end up, even if it isn't together, we will always support each other."

And that was the truth. We would always be there to support each other, even from a distance. They were my best friends. I would always be there for them, no matter what they did. Risking a glance over to Iris to see how she felt about Florian's little speech, I noticed that she was looking at me too. Her face was probably mirroring my own. She looked heartbroken and I knew that even though she knew where she was going, this decision was hard for her too. It was hard for all of us.

"Always," I said softly.

The worried look on Iris's face turned into a smile. "Always," she repeated back to me.

"He's right, this is the wrong day for us to be bickering. I love you. I love you both," I said, turning to give Florian a smile.

Iris gave Florian one of her rare smiles and I laughed. The two of them fought together all of the time, but on those rare occasions, they really were the best of friends. "I love you too," Iris told me, grabbing me into a quick hug.

"Somehow I love you both, too," Florian added, hugging us from behind.

The three of us laughed, wrapped around each other. I noticed Mom and Dad watching us with a little smile. They probably thought that we were acting like normal Amity's. "And Florian is right. No matter where we all end up, we'll always love each other and always be there for each other," I said softly.

"And no matter where you decide to go, I'll be cheering for you," Iris told me. I smiled at her. I was glad to have their support.

Before I got a chance to thank her, I heard the speakers in the front of the auditorium squeak. Everyone glanced up to see what was happening. Marcus Eaton had taken his place at the front of the stage to speak. So it seemed that this year he would be doing the Choosing Ceremony. It changed every year to another member of the City Counsel. I wanted to believe that he had never laid a hand on his son but it was so hard. All of the evidence was there. His son had defected, clearly changed his name, and Marcus never spoke of him. I didn't even know his birth name. I only knew that he was a few years older than me.

He cleared his throat, effectively silencing the last bit of chatter. "The Faction system is a living being composed of cells, all of you. And the only way it can survive and thrive is for each of you to claim your rightful place. The future belongs to those who know where they belong," he told me. I swallowed the lump in my throat. I knew. I knew. I knew. "When we leave this room, you will no longer be dependents but full-fledged members of our society. Faction before blood."

Gathering in a breath I spoke along with every other member of every other Faction. "Faction before blood," everyone said.

The sudden increase in volume was a little creepy. It was the one time in my life that I could remember everyone acting the exact same way. It was almost unnerving. My heart was beating rapidly and I felt like any moment it would burst out of my chest. I was much more nervous than I
had originally thought. I jumped as a hand hit my thigh as the first name was called. It was a kid from Candor. He stayed, earning a large round of applause.

The names went on and on for well over fifteen minutes. Nervously, as we drew nearer to my name, I glanced up to Florian and gave him a little smile. He was the best friend that I could ever ask for. Both him and Iris. I couldn't imagine what it was going to be like without them every day.

"I love you... No matter what," he told me.

He was leaning over the back of the chair to speak in my ear. I nodded at him. I wanted to say it back but I was too afraid of what would come out if I opened my mouth. Knowing that I wasn't ready to speak with him, he leaned into his chair and turned back to the stage.

Barely able to focus myself, I watched kid after kid stay in their home Faction. There was only one person so far that had defected. From Candor to Erudite. It wasn't that strange of a change. I took in a breath as I looked over each of the bowls that were set up on the stage. There were five metal bowls for each of the five Factions. The choosing child had to take a knife and glide it over their hand, letting blood pool into their palm. Once they had made their choice, they turned the hand over and let it fall into the bowl of their choice.

Each bowl made perfect sense for the Faction that it represented. For Amity, it was a bowl full of soil. Our bowl had always felt like something that fit so well with the Faction. It was so literal. Amity was full of farmers. They were all people that would dig in the soil to plant whatever they needed. I always felt like the bowl was like you dropping your blood in and hoping that a tree would grow. It was like planting your roots as Amity. It was something that I couldn't do.

Next to Amity was the second bowl. For Abnegation it was a bowl full of gray stones. It fit well with the Abnegation way of life. It was a simple bowl, even simpler than the soil from Amity. It matched the way that the Abnegation dressed and it matched their lifestyles too. Nothing spectacular, they were relatively plain people. It was a nice place to go for someone that could handle that life. That someone wasn't me.

Passing my eyes over the Abnegation bowl, I looked into the next one just as a defector poured their blood in. For Erudite it was a bowl full of water. Water that started as a clear blue and would always end up tainted red by the end of the day. It was always the creepiest of the bowls. It just felt so terrifying. It felt like it was shark infested water, and by going into it you were risking your life. I was making a big deal out of nothing, but it still creeped me out. I knew that it matched Erudite well though. Water was calm and collected, the same was that Erudite was.

Turning my eyes from the red swirl that was going through the Erudite bowl I looked over to the next one. For Candor it was a bowl filled with broken glass. I knew that in a few moments it would be the bowl that Iris would let the blood from her hand go into. The glass suited those people who were going into Candor well. They were completely transparent. Just the way that the Candor's were. I always thought that if you were in Candor there was no point in even grabbing a knife. You should have just cut your hand with the pieces of broken glass in the bowl.

I finally glanced over to the last bowl. The only one that was making noise. It was the only thing that was making noise in the room other than Marcus calling names. For Dauntless it was a bowl full of burning coals. Out of the five bowls, it made the most sense. The burning coal were hot and they were intimidating. Just the way that the Dauntless were. The effect it made was cool too. Whenever someone let their blood fall into the bowl it would hit the coals and make a loud crackling noise. It was like Dauntless was asserting its dominance.

"Iris Gelsey," I heard Marcus call.
My head shot up, as did Iris's. Grabbing her hand, I wished her a silent good luck and watched as she moved out of our row to head to the bowls. She glanced back at me before grabbing her knife and I nodded to her. She knew what to do. She just had to do it. I watched as she grabbed the knife and slid it across her palm. She watched her blood pool in her hand for a moment before moving her hand to linger over the broken glass. A moment later it fell into it.

"Candor," Marcus said.

I watched as she walked over to the Candor section, all of whom were quietly applauding for her. She took her seat in the front row, briefly shaking hands with a girl sitting next to her, and glanced up at me. She was wearing a large smile and I winked at her. She had made her choice, and she had made the right one. Marcus Eaton cleared his throat once and the noise immediately died down. I turned my head back towards the stage.

"Florian Rose."

Turning back briefly, I smiled at Florian. He looked extremely confident as he turned and headed down towards the stage. At least there wouldn't be two defectors in a row. That would be a harsh blow for Amity. Particularly since my name would be called soon. I watched as Florian cut his hand and held it over the soil. At least he would be happy. But at the last moment, right before the blood could fall, his hand moved over the broken glass and splashed on it.


Had he always been planning to go there? Why hadn't he said anything to me? The entire auditorium looked like they were about to either laugh or faint. It was rare to get two defectors in a row, even rarer for them to go from the same Faction to the same one. I watched as Florian sat beside Iris, who looked like she was grilling him about his choice. Well at least they weren't going to be alone.

"Both of them. They both defected, and to the same Faction," Dad said. My heart felt like it had dropped to the floor. He looked so horrified. "What is it that is so attractive about Candor? They have no filters. Everyone needs one. Can you imagine the way that their families feel?" he asked me.

Before I got the chance to respond, I heard my name being called. "Amarantha Freesia." I knew that I had to get up, but for some reason I couldn't force myself to stand up. "Amarantha Freesia," Marcus repeated.

Being pushed slightly by my parents, I weakly stood from my seat and moved down the stairs, focusing my gaze towards the ground to keep from falling. As I walked up to the front of the stage, I felt my breath hitch in my throat. My parents would be devastated if I changed Factions. Could I really do that to them? I wasn't so sure anymore. As I climbed onto the stage, I slowly grabbed the knife from Marcus. Turning back briefly I saw Iris smiling at me in the front of the Candor section. She was mouthing to me. Do what makes you happy. Don't worry about them. I nodded at her and sighed. I had to be able to do this.

It would be hard, but so went life. I couldn't stay in Amity just because my parents wanted me to. Sliding the knife across my palm, I immediately knew that it should have hurt me, but I hadn't even felt it. I was so numb to everything. I watched, completely mesmerized, as the blood pooled in my hand. Turning back to my parents I saw that they were looking at me with such hope and pride, gently motioning to the Amity bowl.

My home. The place that I had been raised and the place that I knew. I walked over to it, looking into the stained soil. Living in Amity wouldn't be that bad. I wouldn't break my parent's hearts. I knew that I could make it in Amity. It wouldn't be that bad. I watched as the blood slid over the edge
of my fingers. I was almost there. Just one more second and I would be Amity forever. Just before the blood fell though, I forced my hand away and listened as it fell into the burning coals. I'm so sorry. It hurt me to have to do it, but I knew that it was what I wanted. That was all that mattered.

The auditorium was silent for a few beats. "Dauntless," Marcus finally called, looking slightly horrified.

On shaking legs I walked over to the Dauntless section, all of whom were cheering and laughing loudly. It was the loudest set of applause for anyone that had gone up and chosen. I guessed that it really was an absolutely crazy phenomenon. No one ever defected from Amity to Dauntless. I walked over to their - my - section and found myself shocked when multiple members stood for me. I took the seat closest to me, offered up by a boy with orange and black hair and tattoos all over his arms.

"Welcome to Dauntless!" the boy yelled at me, over the cheer of the rest of the Faction. It was so warm. So welcoming. It felt like home.

Laughing softly, I nodded at him. My voice was stuck in my throat. I couldn't figure out what I was supposed to say. A boy that was clearly from Erudite extended his hand to me and I grabbed it, smiling at him. He had light brown hair and dark brown eyes. He looked nothing like Dauntless. But then again, neither did I.

"Good choice," he told me. I nodded at him. I knew that it was a good choice. "Amity seems a little too uptight for me. I'm sure that you'll have a lot more fun here in Dauntless. I'm so excited to get there." I almost laughed. The kid was pretty excited, but I couldn't blame him. I was just less vocal about it. "It's nice to meet you by the way. I'm Cole," he said.

"I'm -"

Just as I was about to give him my name, I heard the shout of a boy that was somewhere near the back of the Dauntless section. The Choosing Ceremony had finally ended. I supposed that it was a good thing that I had been at the very end of the Ceremony, considering that it had made shock waves when I had changed.

"Come on! Let's go!" the boy yelled.

All of the Dauntless were running out of the Hub and I got to my feet, starting to follow. Just before I left the area though, I turned back to see the look on my parents face. They were looking at me like they didn't know me. They looked horrified. They looked like I had torn out their souls. Grimacing at them, I muttered a small 'sorry' and turned to run before I could get left behind and be out already.

The entire Faction went sprinting down the stairs and I found myself very glad that I had worn my sneakers. I couldn't imagine doing this if I had come in what Mom would have wanted me to wear. It was the first time that I had ever taken the stairs, rather than the elevator, and I found myself panting at the exertion. But it was fun. The kids from Dauntless burst through the doors of The Hub and I laughed loudly with them as we sprinted out onto the grass.

This was definitely the most fun that I had had in a long time. Everyone around me was yelling and shoving each other as we ran to what looked like the old train station. I was in the middle of the pack and let out a long yell as I ran. It felt so good. My legs and were burning as they pumped and propelled me forward but I shook it off. I could do this. I was already doing much better than the other transfers who were all towards the back of the pack. But my lungs were still practically on fire.

As we approached the train station, I saw that people were beginning to slow down and I followed
suit. Were we going somewhere other than the Faction? Were they bringing us to kill us or try and run us over with the train? Probably not. They seemed to know where they were going. Just as we approached the overhang of the train station, I looked around for a way up. How the hell were we supposed to get up there? I didn’t see stairs or anything like that.

"Come on!" a girl yelled.

Come on, where? I glanced up to see what she was talking about. As I did, I almost immediately wished that I hadn’t. The Dauntless members were scaling the side of the supports to the train station. Why would I have been thinking that we would take the stairs? I laughed and grabbed onto the first beam that I could find. It was a big strain on my arms as I yanked myself upwards and I prayed that I wouldn’t fall. It was a long drop to the ground. As we climbed up, some kids slipped a little bit but the Dauntless born kids ran up it like it was no problem. Which I was sure that it wasn’t. Not for them, anyways.

The platform above me was about fifteen feet up from where I hung. It seemed to get taller and taller each time that I looked down and back upwards. As I continued to haul myself up the support I felt my arms getting weak. I’d never done anything like this before. Not now girl, you can do this. It’s only a few more feet. I was almost there. It was just a few more feet and I would be Dauntless. I had come this far. I could finish this.

I pushed myself up and tried to jam my foot into the next crossbeam. My legs were the only thing that were still supporting me. My arms were almost useless. But just as I put my foot onto the crossbeam, my foot slipped off and I cut my ankle on the rail. I cried out as I dropped and barely managed to catch myself. The jolt of my sudden weight went through my arm but I forced myself to shake it off. I had to do this. I was not going to be Factionless.

But my grip was beginning to give way. Just when I thought that I might be running out of energy, I felt someone grab my leg around my thigh and push me back up. Glancing down towards the person that had helped me, I saw that it was a Dauntless boy with a few facial piercings. He gave me a quick nod.

"Careful, Amity!" he called, quickly scaling past me.

"Thank you!" I called up to him.

He almost immediately scaled over the edge of the train station, disappearing from sight. I then began to climb once more, this time much more carefully. It took me a few minutes before I was finally able to pull myself up onto the platform. Most of the Dauntless born were already there and a few of the transfers were up as well. I watched and waited patiently for what was to come. It had to be something fun.

All of the Dauntless kids were shifting on excited feet and the transfers looked like they might die. For most of us, that was the most exhilarating thing that we had ever done. I heard the unmistakable sound of a train horn approaching and I sighed. At least we got to take the train the rest of the way. But that was when I noticed that the train wasn’t slowing down. It was still going at full speed and made no motion to slow down. The Dauntless born all got into running position. They were having us jump onto a moving train? Maybe they would slow it down for the transfers.

But just as I thought that, it seemed like the train had actually sped up. It come roaring past us and I watched as the Dauntless kids began to sprint alongside it. Not bothering to wait and see if it would slow down or for help, I ran with them. I watched as a kid in front of me jumped up, grabbed the railing on the side, and essentially walk in. I could do that. I waited until the next car was beside me and jumped, grabbing for the rail.
I missed the first time and stumbled slightly. The second time that I jumped for the railing, I managed to keep my grip on it. It was a sloppy grab, but it worked. Now I just had to get inside. I tried walking in, like the rest of the people had done, but I more fell in. I tripped over my own feet and fell into the compartment. No one was in there yet. I was the first person and I was glad, seeing that I’d done an awkward stumble inside. At least I had managed to keep my footing.

It had actually worked. I was on the train and I was on my way to the Dauntless compound. I laughed loudly as I realized that I had really made it. I was going to be Dauntless. Behind me, more transfers were filling in and smiled at them. I was right in thinking that I was the first of the transfers to make it onto the train. That had to count for something. Maybe it would earn me points later on.

Just as I was going to make room for more transfers to jump in, as this was one of the last cars on the train, a flash of black and white barreled into me, knocking me to the ground. The person wasn’t extremely heavy, but my footing was shaky from the climb already. I glanced up at the girl that had fallen on me and saw that it was a brown haired and eyed girl from Candor. I grunted at the impact and coughed a few times. Shit that had hurt.

"Oh I'm so sorry!" she called to me.

The girl helped me back to my feet. "It's alright," I told her.

"You know, as much as I love the idea of being Dauntless, maybe I should have thought a little more about it. I'm not exactly the lightest person on my feet," she said.

Smiling at her, I nodded and moved to the back of the train. The girl followed me and stood against the back wall. "I understand that. I can't believe that the first thing that they have us doing is jumping onto a moving train," I said with a laugh.

"That's Dauntless for you," she said.

Maybe she would be my first new friend here in Dauntless. She seemed nice. "Can you imagine how horrifying it must be to have missed the train? You're out before it begins," I said, hoping that no one had missed the train.

That would have been heartbreaking. The girl shook her head at me and I watched as her fluffy brown hair fell from its hold. "I don't even want to think about that. But hey, we made it!" she cried.

I smiled, giving her a high five. "Here's to being new Dauntless!" I chirped.

We both laughed as she wrapped me in a hug. I guessed that what they said was true. Dauntless was like one big family. "I'm Heather by the way. Originally from Candor. I just couldn't take never being able to lie to anyone. Everyone could always see right through it," she told me.

To her credit, she was wearing more black today. She had picked almost all black clothing. If it weren't for the white button-down that she was wearing, I would have thought that she was from Dauntless. It was probably so that she could blend in more with the Dauntless. If only I could have done the same thing.

"And Amity, it seems?" she asked me.

"You're right. It's nice to meet you Heather. I'm Amarantha," I said. It was obvious that she was fighting back laughter and I rolled my eyes. Everyone that heard my name - that wasn't from Amity -
laughed. "I know, it just sounds so Amity. I think I'll change it once we get to Dauntless."

She nodded at me and smiled. Heather wasn't the most Dauntless of names, but it would work for her. It was normal. Nothing crazy like Amarantha. "I think that it's a good idea," she told me with a little giggle.

I was about to ask her why she chose Dauntless when I heard someone calling her name. "Heather! Hey!" a boy called out to her.

We both glanced backwards as he ran up to us. He had cropped brown hair and brilliant green eyes. He was clearly from Candor as well. I figured that they had known each other when they were there. It was nice that they had each other being here. Not going in blind like I was.

"I was so shocked when I saw that you were going to Dauntless," he said. She narrowed her eyes at him. "Okay, so maybe I wasn't that shocked but I'm, still glad to see that you came here with me. But forget you, I already know you." She scoffed loudly as he turned to look at me. "Hey there, I'm Buck."

He gave me a little wink as he moved forward towards me. I laughed lightly at Buck, and shook his hand. Barely a beat passed when Heather pushed him away from me. Clearly she was friends with Buck the way that Iris was friends with Florian. God I already missed them. I hoped they were thinking of me too.

"Please excuse this pathetic creature," Heather said, snapping me out of my thoughts. "This is Buck, he came here with me from Candor. He's super embarrassing so just try to ignore him. It's hard at first but you can get used to it if you really try."

"Nice to meet you," I said through a giggle.

Heather turned her attention away from me and onto Buck. "Buck, this is Amarantha. Please leave her alone," she said.

He rolled his eyes and started arguing with her as I smiled at them. We would be good friends. I could already tell. Another boy laughed from behind me and I turned back to check who it was. Not that I would know them. Maybe from around school, but definitely not from home. I was the only Amity transfer. It was another Candor transfer, this one with blonde hair and green eyes. He had a bright smile on his face and I figured that he must know Buck and Heather.

"Wow, this is so great. We haven't even been here for ten minutes and we're all already having a great time together. It's nice to meet you all," he said. He moved forward, shaking everyone's hands. He seemed to be very chipper. Evidently he hadn't known them. I guessed that Candor was a big Faction. "I'm Dante. Originally from Candor."

As we were all laughing together and talking back and forth, I heard the scoff of another person from behind us. We hadn't been on the train for more than a few minutes but we seemed to already be friendly with each other. Of course, we were all in the same situation here. There was no point for us to be nasty with each other. I turned back to see a male dressed in Erudite clothing. He had black hair and green eyes and looked like he could kill any one of us. It was no surprise that he had transferred from Erudite.

He looked like a Dauntless guy. "Yes, look at how nice this all is. You know, we're all just going to be competing against each other in a few days for the best spots in Dauntless?" he pointed out. It wasn't a nice thought but he was right. We were competing for the best spots in Dauntless. But there was no point in having to bring it up now. "It's nice to make friends, but better not get too attached."
A boy that was clearly from Erudite as well laughed and come up from behind the black haired boy. He had brown hair and brown eyes. I watched as he threw his arm over the black haired boy, who immediately shrugged him off. I assumed that the Erudite boy had a nastier bite than his bark.

"Come on guys, we can all be friends here. It isn't that hard, now, is it?" he asked. I scoffed at him. It might be for some people. "You'll have to forgive Jax here. He isn't always the nicest guy but that's what Erudite does to a person. It makes us cold. I'm Cole by the way."

It was the same boy that had introduced himself to me at the Choosing Ceremony. "Amarantha," I responded.

His grin was bright as he moved into me. "Maybe the Dauntless fire can heat me up? Or maybe you can help me out?" he asked with a wiggle of his eyebrows as he looked at me.


We all turned back to see a girl from Candor with black hair and brown eyes. "What is?" I asked.

She smirked at me and stepped forward slightly. "A poor little Erudite trying to make moves on a pathetic Amity?" Her cruel eyes trained themselves on me. I narrowed my eyes at her and sneered slightly. Bitch. "I don't know why you even bothered to let your blood drop in those coals, sweetheart. We all know that you aren't going to make it. There hasn't been an Amity in Dauntless in... ever! There's a reason for that," she said, a little more seriously this time.

Well that was a nasty thing for her to say. She had no idea what I was capable of and she had no idea what the transfers before me had gone through. I opened my mouth but before I got the chance to say anything back to her, a boy came up to her side. He patted her on the shoulder and pushed her back gently. He had blonde hair and brown eyes and seemed to be from Erudite originally.


Colt began to walk around me and I gritted my teeth. "A Nose?" I responded, feeling a little bad for potentially insulting the other Erudite transfers.

But judging by the looks on their faces, they didn't mind. I had to do everything in my power from reaching out and hitting Colt. That asshole didn't scare me. "I think it's been... what? Maybe twenty three years since an Amity transferred into Dauntless," he said, and I nodded. It was something like that. "Something must be pretty shitty out there. Or maybe you were sick of the birds singing in the morning as you clean the floors and sing to the Heavens?"

Not wanting to hear any more from Colt, I walked up to him with a sickly sweet smile on my face. This was what I was the best at. "Please tell me, what pathetic excuse for a boy are you?" I asked him and his smile faded. Now he just looked extremely pissed. Good, I was just getting started.

"You watch your mouth," he warned.

"Oh, wait. Actually, I'm not quite sure that I can even consider you a boy. You'd have to have the parts for that," I said with a little sneer, completely disregarding his last comment.

Without wasting any time to think about why I probably shouldn't have said what I had just said, Colt advanced on me, making the air in the train compartment even tenser than it had been. It looked like everyone was about ready to explode. Even the people who hadn'tspoken up yet were looking pretty nervous. My legs began to shake but I refused to let Colt see that he was scaring me.
"Little bitch!" Colt sneered at me.

But I had been called much worse. And I wasn't going to let him make a fool out of me. He walked up to me with one arm out, ready to strangle me for what I had just said to him. In a sudden panic, I did the one thing that I could think of. It wasn't very Dauntless, but it was good enough for an ex-Amity. I reached out and slapped Colt across the face, leaving a bright red mark in the shape of my hand.

"Bitch!" he hissed at me again.

It was almost certain that Colt was moving forward to attack me again. Holding my breath, I braced myself for the impact. But before he could speak up, or actually hit me, another person spoke. Dante pushed Colt back and motioned out of the open door to the compartment. Everyone glanced off into the distance to see that the ground was speeding past over a hundred feet below us.

"Hey, assholes, save the fighting for one minute. It looks like we have a bigger problem coming up," Dante said.

We all glanced out of the compartment and I nodded blankly. Heather and I were the first two to stick our heads out of the train compartment to see what was happening. I gulped as I watched the Dauntless born kids jumping out onto a roof about twenty feet below us and ten feet off to the side of the train tracks. They were hitting the gravel roof and bouncing back to their feet. What if we missed?

Everyone froze in their spots. "The Dauntless compound must be right beneath us," Dante said, as we moved our heads back into the compartment.

No shit, Dante. A few girls began to jump out of the compartment ahead of us. I watched as three people jumped out of the first door of our compartment. I was standing by the second door. "So they have us jumping from a moving train?" I asked Heather, who looked like she might urinate herself. Not that I blamed her. This was terrifying. And I wasn't even afraid of heights. Here's hoping that no one here - other than Colt - was afraid of heights. Another condescending snort came from behind us and I turned back to see Jade looking at us with killer eyes. She was probably hoping that we either wouldn't jump or would end up a human pancake. Not to say that I wasn't hoping that the same thing would happen to her.

"Too scared?" she asked me with a smirk.

"Are you?" I shot back.

If she wasn't jumping out of the car, there must have been something holding her back. "You know, if you don't jump that means one thing. I think Factionless will look good on you," she told me.

I growled under my breath at her. I was not ending up Factionless. Grabbing Heather, I pulled the two of us to the edge of the train car. God, we seemed so high up from the roof. "I'll jump if you jump with me?" she asked me.

My heart was pounding in my chest. "Okay," I whispered.

Silently the two of us counted to three before taking the plunge. Our hands were locked together as we jumped straight out. I screamed loudly as we fell down towards the roof. It came up faster than I had been expecting. I stuck my hands out, fearing that I would land on my stomach painfully, and braced for the impact. Of course, that wasn't quite how it worked. I landed on my knees and tucked into myself.
Instead of stopping like I had been hoping, I went through two frontward rolls before popping back up to my feet. I staggered around for a moment before managing to steady myself. I was sure that from far away it had looked pretty Dauntless, but it had really just been luck. My head was spinning as I wobbled a few times. My legs were shaking from a mix of fear and adrenaline. We had actually made it to the Dauntless compound. I laughed once as I steadied myself.

"That was awesome!" Heather cried out behind me.

I turned back and saw that she had not had as graceful a landing as I had. Pebbles from the roof were all over her outfit and in her hair. "I can't believe we did that!" I shouted gleefully.

"That was great for a first time. But seriously, is it just me or are they trying to kill us? I mean running onto a moving train and then jumping off of a moving train onto a roof feet below us. That's crazy, even for Dauntless," she said with a laugh.

Smiling at her, I brushed a little bit of blood off of my hands onto my shirt. The gravel had cut up my hands from the impact. The landing had hurt slightly but I was better looking than most of the other transfers around me. Even the Dauntless born looked a little shaken from the jump. It was easy enough to tell that this wasn't something that they did often. Still, they looked better than the rest of us.

"That was so incredible!" I yelled, adrenaline still pumping through my veins. This place was already so much better than Amity. "I don't think I've ever felt a rush like that. I mean if we get to do that every day then I wish that I had been a Dauntless from birth. It would have been amazing!"

The two of us laughed at each other. "Sixteen wasted years in Amity and Candor," Heather sighed.

A slow clapping from behind me came and I turned back to see Colt's ugly face. He seemed to have made the jump relatively unscathed. He was smirking at me, probably impressed that I hadn't missed the jump. At the moment I wanted nothing more than to throw him off of the damn roof. The chatter began to die around us as Colt took a few steps towards me, Jade following him. Heather stayed at my side.

"Wow, I'm impressed. The little Softie got up the guts to jump off of the train," he told me, making me smirk.

"So did the Nose," I quipped.

The corners of his lips turned upwards. "Too bad you didn't get smeared all over the pavement. Would have added a nice pop of color," he said.

My eyes narrowed at that comment. Making fun of me was one thing, but joking about me dying? That was crossing the line. Even for Dauntless. Stomping up to him, I noticed that Jade took a step back. Was there a chance that she was afraid of me? Hopefully. Maybe she just thought that it was better to let Colt and I get in trouble for premature fighting. Either way, I had to make sure that people didn't think that I was some weakling just because I was from Amity.

"What the hell is your problem, Colt?" I hissed at him, effectively cutting off all conversation around us.

The few people that had still been chatting had fallen silent. Even the Dauntless born were looking at me, eyebrows raised in amusement. No one ever heard the Amity's getting into fights. It was something rather strange. But I was no longer Amity. I was a Dauntless now.

"What did I do to you? Is it maybe just the fact that a little Amity girl might have a better shot at
I asked, noticing that his eyes went dark at my comment. "You know, I can give you another mark like that to match the other cheek."

Colt made a step forward but one man clearing his throat stopped all movement. Even the way that he cleared his throat was enough to signal that he was not a person that we wanted to cross. Both Colt and I immediately glanced upwards, stepping back from each other. We might hate each other, but neither one of us wanted to ruin our chances in Dauntless because we were fighting and not listening to a leader. So I glanced upwards and my eyes shot nearly out of my skull. I knew this man.

He was the same man that had been watching me before the Aptitude Test. He was so much better looking close up. He was gorgeous. He looked nothing like anyone back in Amity. And seeing as he was standing on the edge of the roof, towering over us, he looked like a god. He had block-like tattoos going up his neck that dropped under his shirt as well. His muscles were taunt and protruding from his shirt, something that made my core heat up. His hair was blonde and shaved short on both sides, slicked back in the middle. He had cold grey blue eyes that were scanning over us. He had two in his piercings in his eyebrows and one in each of his ears. He exuded pure confidence and power.

Everyone up on the roof of the building were completely silent. Everyone looked terrified of the man. Even the Dauntless born were smart enough to take a step back and respectfully listen to him. But he didn't seem that old. Not much older than us. His startling gaze made me a little nervous. He could clearly break me in half if he wanted to. And by the looks of it, he wanted to. His eyes were locked onto me and I felt like I was burning under his intense stare.

"All right, listen up! There will be plenty of time to fight later," he yelled to us. His eyes were still on me but I refused to look away. I could not look weak. He merely scoffed at me and shook his head, looking over the rest of the group. "I'm Eric."

Rule number one in Dauntless: Don't make Eric mad.

"I'm one of your leaders," he said. My eyebrow raised at his words. He was a leader? He couldn't have been older than twenty two. If even that. "If you want to enter Dauntless, this is the way in." He motioned off the back of the building. "And if you don't have the guts to jump, then you don't belong in Dauntless. I think we'll give our initiates the honor of going first," he said, giving me the longest look as he glanced over us.

As was expected, no one made a move to jump first. I looked back over to where Eric was standing and gulped deeply. This building was at least twenty stories and he wanted us to jump down? What the hell was at the bottom? I wanted to ask Eric what was at the bottom, but the last thing that I wanted was for him to think I was even more pathetic than I already looked. I could see it in his eyes. He looked at me like I was some stupid Amity just playing games.

"It isn't that far of a jump, is it? Or it there water at the bottom or something?" Jade asked. As much as I already despised Jade, I was thankful that she had finally gotten up the guts to say something. Pulling his eyes away from me, Eric looked back at her and smirked. Clearly he enjoyed when people were nervous about jumping. I guess they looked at it like it was a leap of faith.

"I guess you'll find out," Eric said happily. I rolled my eyes. Asshole. Of course he wasn't going to tell us what was at the bottom. "Or not," he added mysteriously.

I snorted as the terrified look on Jade's face widened. Perhaps she was afraid of heights. Or dying. Well that one I couldn't blame her for that one. I wasn't overly fond of dying on my first day in Dauntless. For now it seemed like no one was willing to jump. Even Colt looked a little hesitant to make the jump.
"We just jumped. They want us to jump again?" Heather whispered to me.

"Guess so," I whispered back.

Eric's head snapped back over to me. Almost immediately I glanced back towards the ground. He didn't seem to like me that much, and if he really was a leader, I had to stay on his good side. I noticed that Eric was quickly becoming annoyed with our hesitance. He was probably used to people not wanting to jump and year after year, it must have gotten old. He sighed loudly and motioned to the transfers, as we were all standing close together.

We were looking back and forth to see who would get up the nerve. "Someone's gotta go first. Who's it gonna be?" he asked irritably.

Once more I glanced back down at the area where Eric was standing and let my mind wander. Dauntless were crazy, but they weren't cruel. People died during Dauntless training, but they didn't purposely kill them. They wouldn't be having us jump to our deaths. That would have stopped immediately if they had ever done it. I couldn't imagine Abnegation would stand for that. Plus Eric was standing right on the ledge. One wrong move and he would fall to his death. I was sure that he would never fall, but accidents happened. So maybe I would have made a good Erudite.

Figuring that there was nothing to hurt me here, I shrugged and walked forward. "I will," I said loudly.

Eric had been looking back to where some of the bigger guys were standing, particularly glancing towards Colt and another Erudite transfer that had yet to speak, but his eyes shot back to me the moment that I spoke. The piercings in his face rose as he scoffed at me.

"You're kidding me. A Softie?" he asked me.

"Problem?" I asked him.

The moment that the words had left my lips I realized that it was probably a mistake. But Eric said nothing about them. Come on up then, Softie," he said.

For a brief moment, I hesitated. "You've got this," Heather said, gently pushing me forward.

Eric was smirking at me, probably thinking that I would back out of it at the last minute. "I don't think that Dauntless has ever had one that actually made it. Make this as a lesson to the rest of you. If a Softie has the guts to jump before you all do, then you're pretty damn pathetic," he said with a sneer.

Giving me some room to get up on the ledge, Eric moved off to the side slightly. It wasn't very much room though. I was still pressed up against him. I hoped that he couldn't feel my heart hammering in my chest. I stepped up and noticed just how tall he really was. He must have been at least a foot taller than me, seeing as I only came up to his chest. He was looking down on me, making me feel even smaller than I was.

Determined to show him that I was not afraid, I turned to face him, leaving us almost chest to face. "Are you calling me pathetic?" I snapped at him.

Clearly he did not like that comment, as he leaned over me with a deadly glare in his eyes. If I had had anywhere to back up, I would have. It was either stand here and let Eric berate me for my fat mouth, or take a swan dive off of the building. I wasn't sure which one was a better idea. Damn it, I was already breaking rule number one.
"Go. Before I throw you down," he sneered. I gulped at the threat. He would probably throw me wherever there wasn't a safe landing. I turned and looked over the ledge, praying that I wasn't being an idiot. "Just because you want to be the first jumper means nothing to me, Softie."

I was sure that everyone else had heard him, and the thought made my blood boil. How dare he make me look foolish in front of these people. Not that I hadn't already managed to do that myself. Looking straight down, I saw nothing. Only the blackness in between the two buildings. I had to do this. I couldn't let Eric win. Sucking in a breath, I got ready for the drop. Thank God I wasn't afraid of heights.

Taking in one last breath I pushed one foot over the edge and waited. Gravity did most of the work as my body slipped from the roof. I gasped loudly and hoped that Eric hadn't heard it. It turned out that I had almost no time to regret making the rash decision to make the twenty story drop, without knowing what was at the bottom. I grunted as my body hit something rough and I bounced a few times. Once I had settled, I let my hands splay out to the side. Rope. It was a damn net.

Breathing heavily, I laughed as the net was pulled down to the side and I slipped off. A man offered me his arm and I grabbed it, letting him catch me and pull me to the ground. He was damn good looking. Not in the gritty, manly way that Eric was. He had curly, brown hair and a tattoo that disappeared over his shoulders, down his back. I wanted nothing more than to know what it was. He was tall too, just a little shorter than Eric. He was broad shouldered and full of muscle, but again, nothing like Eric. He had hazel colored eyes and I smiled at him.

He didn't seem super friendly, but he looked a hell of a lot nicer than Eric. He was looking me up and down and I blushed slightly. I looked so out of place. "What? You get pushed?" he asked me and I scoffed, letting the smile drop off of my face.

Popping one hip out and crossing my arms over my chest, I realized that the man was laughing at me. He probably thought that I was just some kid getting ready to throw a fit. I stood back up straight, realizing that I looked like a kid that was about to throw a fit. I did keep my arms crossed.

"No. Come on people, is it really that shocking to see an Amity here? And a first jumper at that?" I asked.

"It is," he said.

"Maybe you Dauntless kids aren't as brave as you all think that you are," I said slyly.

His somewhat teasing eyes had turned hard at my words and I groaned. I had now managed to piss off two Dauntless members, and at least one of them was a leader. I hadn't even been here for five minutes. That must have been a new record. Maybe I could go for three members in ten minutes.

The man leaned into me and I stepped backwards. "Watch it Softie, you might be the first jumper, but that doesn't mean anything. Not really," he told me.

I growled under my breath. That whole Softie thing was going to get real old, fast. "My name is not Softie," I hissed.

"I don't think that I care. The real challenge doesn't start until tomorrow. See if you can try to live that long. I see you've already made some enemies," he told me. I sighed at him. Maybe he had heard my argument up on the roof. Or maybe he was counting himself. Damn me. "What's your name?" he finally asked me.

"It's..."
My jaws suddenly snapped closed. I was about to answer that my name was Amarantha when I realized that this was my chance. I had wanted to change my name for as long as I could remember. Even long before I'd wanted to leave Amity I had wanted to change my name. This was the perfect opportunity to give myself a new one. Amarantha was way too Amity. I had to come up with something more Dauntless.

The man crossed his arms over his chest and I knew that he was getting pissed with me. I had to say something before he found something to throw me off of. Or have Eric live up to his earlier promise. "Come on I know you aren't from Erudite but is that a hard one?" he asked me.

Obviously we were going to end up being good friends. "I'm thinking," I barked at him.

It was hard to pick a new name. Realizing what I was doing, his eyes softened slightly. Just slightly. "You can pick a new one if you want, but make it good. You don't get to pick again," he said.

As I thought about what to make my new name I saw that his eyes had gone hard again. He didn't seem very sweet, but he was definitely nicer than Eric. Not that it was a very hard thing to be nicer than Eric. I was reasonably certain that Eric would have just told everyone that my name was Softie by now.

"Okay..." I said slowly, trying to force a name out. Before I got the chance to take it back, I spit out the first name that I could think of. "My name is Alex."

Cocking my eyebrows at myself, I nodded. That actually wasn't a bad name and it sounded Dauntless to me. Plus I still got to keep the first letter of my original name. I wasn't sure where it had come from, but I didn't think that it mattered very much. I liked it. The man watched me for a moment to ensure that I was positive that it was the name that I wanted. I hesitated for a moment before nodding at him.

"First jumper, Alex!" he yelled to everyone waiting around us. The people in the dimly lit cave all cheered loudly and many of them that were close enough to touch me were patting me on the back. "Welcome to Dauntless," the man told me quietly.

It had actually happened. I was officially here and I was officially a Dauntless initiate. I couldn't believe that after everything that I had been through - today and for the past sixteen years - I had actually made it here. I smiled at the sight of everyone cheering around me and nodded to him. This place was already incredible. This was what a real family was like. Not polite smiles and fake laughter. Real people being loud and shoving each other around like they had known each other forever. I knew it already. I was going to love it here.
Chapter Three

As I gathered my breath once more, I let out a deep breath and took a long look around the Dauntless compound. In some ways it was everything that I had been expecting. And in other ways it was nothing like I had been expecting. The net that I had just been pulled off of was hanging high in the middle of the room, the opening between the buildings directly above it. The net was hovering around ten feet off of the ground and I nodded, glad that the man had pulled me off of it. I would have gone sprawling off of it if I had tried to jump off. That would have ruined the credit that I had gotten from being the first jumper. It would just label me as the pathetic Amity transfer.

The net was hanging over everyone else in the large area. Shaking the thoughts of my failure away from my mind, I glanced around at the rest of the compound. Well, this side of the compound. It looked like we were standing in the loading bay at the back of the compound. There was no way that everyone could fit back here. I knew that this was only a tiny part of the entire compound. This place probably wasn't very frequently used. Especially considering there weren't that many people around.

Off to the side of the platform that I was standing on - with the man that had pulled me from the net - was a connecting platform that looked like it would take us to the rest of the Dauntless compound. I could hear the chatter coming from that side. Above us were a few platforms that I could tell were designed for people to keep watch over those of us that were standing on the main level. Off to my right side was a set of train tracks as well, but I could tell that they were only designed for shipments of goods considering that the track ended not far past where I was standing.

Glancing around me to check on who was standing around me, I saw that they weren't the craziest looking Dauntless that I had ever seen. I'd seen some insane-looking people before. Most of the members here actually looked rather normal. They were wearing black jackets with black shirts and dark gray pants. Maybe they were trying to look a little normal for all of the new transfers? That would have been something nice. Make us feel a little more like we were at home. Although that didn't sound like something that Dauntless would do.

Shaking my head, I took a mental count of how many people were standing around. There were six men that were around the net, including the man that had pulled me down. Up on the platforms that were above us, there were another two men, both armed. My eyes trained onto the guns and I wondered if we would be learning to shoot. Of course we will, you idiot. This was Dauntless. We were going to learn every way to defend ourselves. That included shooting. Off to the side of the net was a woman, the only one beside me in the room. She had dark hair and a bright smile. She actually looked extremely friendly.

Most people here seemed to be reasonably friendly. Save Eric, that is. Above me I heard a sharp scream and I glanced up towards the net. Whoever it was, it was a female that had taken the plunge. The scream was high-pitched. I hoped that it wasn't Jade. Or, if it was, I hoped that the net would tear. That might have been a little cruel but I could tell that she would be a royal pain in my ass. On a longer look though, I saw that it was a Candor transfer with big, brown hair. It was Heather.

Smiling, I watched as the man pulled her off of the net. "Name?" he asked her.

"Heather."

"Second jumper, Heather!"

Everyone in the crowded area began screaming for her, cheering her on for taking the plunge from the rooftop. The man let her move away from the net and I watched. Heather came bounding over to
me and I smiled at her, bringing her into a tight hug. It was nice that the two of us were going to be together in Dauntless. I had been a little afraid of not making friends, as much as I hadn't wanted to admit it.

Even from here I could tell that her hands were still shaking. "That was incredible! I can't believe that you jumped first," she told me, smiling brightly.

"Trust me, I couldn't believe that I did it either," I joked.

The two of us stood together and chatted as a few Dauntless born began to jump. "You should have seen the look on Eric's face. I don't think he believed that you would really do it," she told me.

The grin on my face widened at her words. Eric was exactly the type of Dauntless that I had been expecting. Someone that thought that there was no way that anyone from Amity would ever make it in Dauntless. I had already been expecting someone like him. I just wished that he wasn't the leader. Whatever. He was dead wrong about me. I would fight for my place here. I hadn't come all this way to turn around now.

"Honestly for a minute there I didn't think that I was going to do it," I told her and she laughed.

"I don't think that I would have blamed you. Even after you jumped I almost didn't go through with it," she admitted.

"Just think of it this way; there is no way that I was going to let Eric win. He seems like the type that would visit the Factionless district just to laugh at me," I told her.

We both grinned at the thought. "He does seem the type, doesn't he?" she quipped.

Honestly, if I were to not make it in Dauntless, I would expect Eric to come throw rotten fruit at me and laugh. It bothered me how well I could imagine it. "Plus I left Amity for a reason. It was to become Dauntless," I said loudly.

The man that had caught me on the net turned to me with a smirk and I nodded back at him. He looked almost impressed with me. Okay, maybe he wasn't as bad as I had originally thought that he was. He seemed to have more faith in me than Eric did. Not that I was expecting Eric to ever have any faith in me. Heather cleared her throat and I turned back to look at her. Some of the other initiates were behind her now. It seemed like after Heather and I had jumped, people were now beginning to come down faster.

It must have pleased Eric. "Well girl, I think you have what it takes. I mean, it takes real guts to be the first jumper," she told me. I guessed that was true. "Anyways, did you change your name?"

Nodding at her, I noticed that the man that had helped me down looked over to me with a cocked eyebrow. He was probably curious what my name was before I had changed it. "Yeah. It's Alex now," I told her and she grinned wickedly.

So it seemed that Alex was a good fit. At least it looked like Heather liked it. "I like it, it fits you better than Amarantha," she told me.

Smiling softly, I nodded at her. I heard the man that had caught me snort behind me and I rolled my eyes. "Go ahead and laugh. Everyone does," I mumbled to him.

"I see why you changed it," he told me.

No offense to my parents. It was an adorable name, but it screamed that I was from Amity. But still,
did everyone have to laugh when they heard it? It was still my name after all. "Alex sounds so much more Dauntless. So far you have a good start to making a life here," Heather said.

Behind me I heard a heavy thump on the net and I snorted. That must have been a big ass initiate to make that kind of jolt on the net. Maybe it was one of the larger Dauntless born boys. I jumped slightly as the owner of the large body landed next to me heavily, leaving no room for the man that had been helping initiates off of the net to help him. I turned back to give the initiate a piece of my mind but scoffed loudly when I realized who it was.

No wonder they were standing so close to me. "That jump is pretty sweet, huh, Softie?" Eric asked me.

"Sure," I snapped.

The last thing that I wanted was to stand and have a conversation with him. "I wouldn't get used to it," he told me. My head snapped over to him. "Plenty of people jump that don't make it into Dauntless. The easy part is over."

"Thank you for letting me know," I gritted through my teeth.

"You're welcome," Eric sneered, waiting for me to say something. Don't rise to the bait. "Do you have something to say to me?" Forcing myself to swallow my pride, I shook my head and sighed. "Move it initiate," he growled at me, shoving me to the side, closer towards where the man that had caught me was standing.

My feet tripped over themselves as I nearly went sprawling onto the ground. Eric moved behind me and I watched him walk over towards the man that had helped us off of the net. I would definitely have to learn his name sometime soon. It was sure to get old quickly, calling him Net Guy.

Heather helped me steady myself. "God he's such an asshole," I groaned to her.

She was watching me with a smile. Apparently she found my banter with Eric amusing. "You had to be expecting someone like him in Dauntless," she said.

"Oh, I expected lots of people like him. Just not right off the bat."

"Maybe he won't be around that often," Heather suggested.

And just like she had predicted, Eric was gone from sight. Everyone seemed much more relaxed now that he was gone. "No wonder everyone avoids him like the plague," I muttered, watching as Heather's eyes widened.

I was about to ask her what was wrong when I realized what it was. She would have either laughed or agreed with me under any circumstances, except for one. Turning slowly, I saw that Eric was now standing behind me with his arms crossed over his chest. I watched as his muscles contracted and expanded with every breath. If I'd been a little less concerned with what he was going to do to me, I would have smacked myself for wondering what his arms looked like without the jacket.

"You know there are punishments in Dauntless, Softie?" he asked me.

"I'm sure there are," I said.

They couldn't have been worse than the Calming Serum. That shit was awful. "You can get them for plenty of things. Uncontrolled fights, ignoring duties, and speaking poorly of fellow Dauntless members," he told me with a little smirk.
Obviously he wanted me to get in trouble for what I had said. There went trying to make friends with Eric. The two of us had not gotten off on the right foot and I was sure that we never would. But I had to try. I was pretty sure that he wasn't going to let me go on this one, but it wouldn't hurt to give it a shot.

So I stepped towards him and smiled. He was watching me with a raised eyebrow. "Oh, come on, Eric. Have a heart. It's my first day here and it was just a joke," I told him.

"I didn't laugh," Eric said, grinning at me.

It was obvious enough that he was a leader. He liked the authority that came with it. He continued to watch me with a condescending smirk. So I tried my luck another way. "You aren't going to punish me already, are you?" He smirked even wider at my desperation.

"I think I will."

I merely sighed. It was worth a shot. "Okay. Fine. I guess I deserved that. So what is my punishment?" I asked.

Eric smirked at me, probably glad that I didn't have the resolve to fight him. Well it wasn't that I didn't have the resolve, it was that I didn't want to be Factionless an hour after the Choosing Ceremony. Once I was gone from Amity, I was gone. They wouldn't have taken me back. Not even Abnegation would take me now. It was either Dauntless or Factionless. And no one, not even Eric, would ruin Dauntless for me.

He walked towards me and narrowed his eyes. "Tonight, once dinner is over, I expect you back in the offices," he told me.

My eyebrow quirked. "Where are those?" I asked.

"You can meet me outside your dorms and I'll take you up there." We must have been heading to the dorms sometime soon. "There are files up there on everyone in Dauntless, including the new transfers. Those files haven't been made yet. Normally myself and one other leader would do them. Tonight you'll do them by yourself," Eric told me.

My smile spread a little bit. I'd been punished with paperwork and filing plenty of times in Amity. I forced a frown onto my face. "Sounds like fun," I said.

His gaze narrowed on me. "I'll come up to check on you every few minutes," he said.

Scoffing loudly, I shook my head, much to Heather's displeasure. She was watching the exchange over Eric's abnormally large shoulder and shaking her head rapidly. She was probably hoping that I wasn't going to make things worse. But I had spent sixteen years laying down and taking beatings. Not any more.

"I don't need a damn babysitter," I snapped at Eric.

Of course, that was the wrong thing to say. Eric leaned even closer into me, so close that I could smell his breath. I had thought that he might smell like rancid octopus or a pile of garbage, but I was wrong. He actually smelled like peppermint and... alcohol? I guess that wasn't very shocking. Not when he was a Dauntless man.

"I am not yours, or anyone else's, babysitter. I'll be checking on you to make sure that you aren't looking at anything you shouldn't be and to make sure that you aren't slacking off. Then we can just add on another night," he said.
My jaws ground together. "Wouldn't you like that?" I mumbled, a little bit louder than I'd meant to.

His jaw set as he stepped to practically press himself against me. This was not something that I wanted. No matter what my lower regions were telling me. One night with Eric - at least as a punishment - was already one too many for me. My stomach was twisting in knots as Eric smirked down at me. I wasn't sure if he was going to punch me or do something else. All I knew was that I wanted him away from me.

"Watch your mouth, initiate. I've already let you get away with more than I should have. I can assign physical punishments, too," he told me, and I felt my skin crawl. I didn't think that Eric would hesitate to hit me. "Would you like that?"

"No," I said, barely above a whisper.

He nodded at me, his hand laying itself on my shoulder. "And you listen to me. Because I'll say it loud and clear. I. Will. Not. Hesitate. Are we clear?" he asked.

Gulping deeply, I realized that a small part of me was worried that he might hit me. His fists were curled at his sides and a vein in the side of his neck was bulging out. So I had definitely made him extremely mad. Here I was, breaking my first rule again within only a matter of minutes.

"Yes," I said softly.

Eric leaned in closer to me and I took in a deep breath. He was close enough to kiss me but I was sure that he would have sooner taken me back up to the roof and throw me off of the edge. In fact, he might. Tonight we would be alone together and I wasn't sure that I trusted him not to kill me.

"Yes, what?" he asked me lowly.

For a moment I was going to ask him what he meant but there was a good chance that he would look at that like I was defying him or something. So instead I went out on a limb and hoped that I was right. "Yes sir," I said, more as a question than a statement.

"Don't be late," he snapped.

Obviously I was right that he wanted me to call him by a term of respect. Knowing that he wasn't joking, I nodded at him. Eric walked by me, roughly bumping into my shoulder. I stumbled backwards at the impact. He was a lot heavier than he looked. And he looked extremely heavy. Jax was standing behind me and he caught me, helping me stand back upright. I thanked him and went to turn and glare at Eric, but he was already gone.

"What the hell happened?" Jax asked.

"Eric is a dick," I snarled.

Heather came up to me and helped straighten my clothes out. I hadn't even realized that they had become disheveled in my fall. "Tough break. I wish I could come up there and help you. There's a lot of us to make files for," Heather told me.

She was right about that. Even without me, there were twelve transfers. That was a lot of people to make files for. And they were probably extremely detailed. "Leave it to Eric to give me the most irritating job," I whined.

"Don't worry. You'll get it done. And maybe you can trick Eric into helping you?" Heather asked me with a smile.
Scoffing at her, I shook my head. There was no way that I was going to be saying anything more to Eric than I had to. "I don't think I ever want to speak to Eric again," I growled under my breath.

"Doubtful," Heather said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked her.

She smiled and motioned off towards where he had stalked away. "I saw the way that you two looked at each other. They say that when you're angry, it's always the best kind of -"

"No!" I cried out. We both laughed for a moment as I gave her a gentle nudge. We definitely had the same kind of sense of humor. "I mean, damn. He's hot but that personality is a major turn-off," I told her.

We both giggled at my wording. "He is kind of hot, isn't he?" she asked.

Once more I laughed at her. At least I wasn't alone in thinking that he was attractive. But that didn't change the fact that no asshole like him was worth it. "It's whatever though. I'll take care of it and then come back for bed. I'm sure that we won't be doing anything that serious tomorrow," I told her.

They would take it easier on us since we were transfers, right? Maybe that was wishful thinking. Heather nodded at me and we both stood in silence before glancing up at the sound of a deep yell. I stared up at the opening in the roof and saw that Colt had hit the net roughly. He was now being clumsily pulled off. He looked nervous, but the moment that the two of us locked eyes, his cool demeanor returned.

"Coward," I muttered. Heather nodded her agreement.

We were motioned towards the man that had pulled all of us off of the net and I took my place in front of him, crammed between Buck and Heather, with Cole behind me. Colt was standing opposite me with Jade and the still-silent Erudite transfer. The two of them both looked proud. But why were they? I had jumped first and Heather had come behind me. They were some of the last ones down.

"Dauntless-born, I assume you guys don't need a tour of the place," he said, earning some laughs from the Dauntless. "Go with Lauren, transfers stay with me. Go," he ordered.

There was only one female full-fledged member. I watched as the Dauntless born walked over to where Lauren was standing, laughing with some of the Dauntless members. She smiled at the initiates, most of whom I assumed that she knew. She only looked to be about three or four years older than the initiates. If she was also Dauntless born, they had probably all grown up together.

"This way," Lauren called.

We all watched as she motioned for the Dauntless born to follow her. Net Man waited for Lauren to disappear behind the corner with the Dauntless born before turning back to us. By this time, nearly everyone else had left the room and we were now alone with Net Man. I really had to come up with a better name than that.

He began pacing in front of us. "Most of the time I work in Intelligence, but during your training, I'll be your instructor," he told us. I nodded at him. That made sense then why he was the second person that we met coming into Dauntless. We met a leader first and then our trainer. "My name's Four."

At least I knew his name now. My eyebrows shot up at his name. It was definitely Dauntless. I wasn't sure what about it sounded so badass, but it definitely was. It was also much better than Net Man. I assumed that Four was a transfer, seeing as Four was a strange name, even for Dauntless
parents. Or maybe he had just changed his name when he'd become an initiate. Colt snorted loudly and I saw that Four whipped around to him, eyes completely narrowed.

Rule number two: Don't make Four mad.

"Four like the number?" Colt asked.

He was wearing a wide smirk that I knew was going to get him in trouble. Attitudes like that might have gone over well in Erudite but not here in Dauntless. Eric had already taught me that lesson. While Colt was still busy laughing about the joke that he must have thought was very cute, he was unaware that Four found it anything but funny.

"Exactly like the number," Four growled, walking up to Colt. The transfer shrank back and I smiled. Even I hadn't done that when Eric had gotten in my face. Colt definitely wasn't as tough as he liked to pretend that he was. "Is that a problem?"

Colt almost immediately shook his head. The color had drained from Colt's face at the sight of Four towering over him, considering that he was six feet tall, definitely taller than most of us. Heather snorted next to me as she leaned towards my ear. I was about to warn her to be quiet and tell her that Four was watching us, but she spoke before I could get the chance. A little louder than I had thought that she would speak.

"What happened, one through three were taken?" she asked me.

It was definitely obvious that she was waiting for a response, but I said nothing, staring at Four with what I assumed was a light blush on my cheeks. He had overheard her comment. Eventually it seemed that she got the hint that something was wrong and looked up. Four was standing in front of her and I immediately saw the color drain from her face. Unlike how Eric just merely annoyed me, I could tell that Four genuinely scared Heather.

"What's your name?" he asked her.

For a moment I didn't think that she was going to be able to say anything, the fear very evident in her eyes, so I thought about answering for her. But eventually she managed to get her act together and look Four in the eyes. Well maybe in the chin, but it was something. Four was much taller than us but Heather was tall too, probably only a few inches shorter than Four.

"Heather," she answered, trying - and failing - to sound confident.

Four seemed to know that she was trying hard to look tough. But it clearly didn't amuse him as he merely smirked at her. As far as I could tell, Four was a hard ass like Eric, but he at least had a little more of a sense of humor. He also used more psychological intimidation and less physical.

Although right now he was towering over her. "Well, Heather. Seems like you and your little friend need to learn a lesson," he said, his eyes shooting over towards me briefly. I narrowed my eyes but kept my mouth shut. I was so sick of them treating me like the out of place Amity. "So here it is. The first lesson you learn from me if you wanna survive here, is keep your mouth shut. Do you understand me?" Four asked Heather.

Heather nodded her head, now not trying to look tough at all. Instead she looked like she was trying not to cry. Not that I really blamed her. Softly she responded to him, "Yes."

Taking a moment to stare Heather down, Four slowly nodded and turned away from her. "Good. Follow me," Four said.
Without saying anything else, he went stalking off, apparently not interested in bothering to say anything more. We all began to walk with Four, myself struggling to keep up. He had long legs, ones that took long strides that I couldn't even begin to match. But still, I pumped my legs quickly to make sure that I didn't fall behind as we walked. The air was warm in Dauntless and I almost wished that I was wearing something a little longer. Like maybe jeans.

Rather than the shorts that I was wearing, which were a little shorter than I'd initially thought. I should have been wearing something a little bit longer. As we walked, I found myself right next to Heather with Cole on my other side. The three of us were right behind Four as he pulled us into a huge open space. It was full of noise that must have been what I was hearing out in the loading bay. It was ten times louder in here than I had ever heard Amity.

In fact, it made Amity sound like Abnegation. "This is The Pit," Four spoke loudly over the noise. I nearly laughed. Of course it was. "The center of life here at Dauntless. You can come here to buy anything you need or want. We have taken the liberty of giving you a certain amount of credits to use. Just to get started with." Everyone smiled. That was nice of them. "Once you become full-fledged members you will be given credits based on what your job is."

Everything was rather nice that they were doing for us so far. Maybe we would have a good time here, after all. As long as we could manage to avoid Eric for the most part. Being a leader, hopefully he would be a little bit too busy to spend time around a bunch of initiates. I couldn't imagine that we were that thrilling to watch.

Before Four could lead us out of the Pit, I looked around to see what it had to offer. The damn place was huge, making me feel like a shrimp standing in it. The Pit was exactly what it sounded like. It was a gigantic pit in the ground where Dauntless members milled together, talking, laughing, and dancing. It opened all the way up to the roof, back up above ground level.

Loud rock music was blaring in the background and I watched as people rocked their bodies together. It was the middle of the day but they were already in the middle of what looked to be a very fun party. Towering stories above the Pit was a large glass dome, sending in a blast of natural light. Adding to the effect of the underground cave system were blue lanterns that were hung at various points along the rock walls that surrounded the Pit.

Glancing up towards the upper levels of the Pit, I saw the shops that Four had been talking about. Ledges were carved into the rocks where people could walk back and forth. I noticed that there were no railings protecting anyone from falling off of them. It was so in the Dauntless style. It was almost shocking to see the way that no one had a care in the world of the dangers that were there. In the event that someone fell, they would die from the impact. At least, it seemed like someone would die. It was a long fall to the ground.

Kids were running back and forth and I smiled at how confident they were. They knew they weren't going to fall. Instead of reprimanding them, their parents merely watched with smiles, probably reminded of how they acted as children. Looking at the parents only reminded me of my own and how crushed they had looked when they'd realized that I was not going to stay in Amity.

Fighting back tears from the heart wrenching decision that I'd made, I glanced away from the families that were still running around and shifted my focus to the shops. The one thing that I had carried over from Amity was that I really loved to shop. But Amity had never had shops. We made our clothing most of the time and the few shops that we did have were second-hand, for the parents that were either working too much or were first-time parents that couldn't sew.

These shops here in Dauntless were badass looking. It was what I had imagined Dauntless clothing looking like. Most of the stores had neon signs that were made with jagged lettering. The first one
that I saw looked like a clothing store, everything in the window completely black. Next to it were a few more clothing stores, one looking completely dedicated to more formal clothing. Still black of course. Next to that was a makeup store, the only store that looked like it had anything of color. Next to it was a hair salon and I grinned. I would probably cut my hair a little bit. Eventually. Being in Amity I rarely cut it. The last shop that was visible to me was a tattoo and piercing shop, one that I knew I would be visiting soon.

Heather grabbed my arm and I glanced up at her. We were moving once more and I hadn't even noticed. I had been so caught up in looking around the Pit that I hadn't bothered to watch if we were moving on or not. I could have stayed in the Pit forever and never wanted to leave. Four led us on without saying anything and we all mindlessly followed.

As we walked through the Pit I saw that there was a dining room to the right, almost completely empty right now. Of course, it was still around five or so and no one was ready for dinner yet. Although I could smell the food cooking as the chefs prepared for the dinner rush. As we were led past the dining room I wondered if I would ever find my way around this place. There were so many twisting pathways.

We walked out of The Pit and into the next room, and we immediately heard the rushing of water. Water? I wasn't the only person that glanced up. Just past where we were standing was a magnificent waterfall. It fell in plumes down past a bridge that connected one side of the rock to the other. It was beautiful. It also looked extremely dangerous. It had to be, considering it was the only walkway in Dauntless that I had seen with bars along the path.

"This is The Chasm," Four told us, shouting over the roar of the water. Dauntless were definitely not the most creative people. "The Chasm reminds us that there's a fine line between bravery and idiocy. A daredevil jump off this ledge will end your life." I believed that. It was a long fall to the bottom and I assumed that the water wasn't that deep. "It's happened before and it will happen again. You have been warned."

Without another word we left the area and I scoffed. I figured that the Chasm had been there long before Dauntless, but did they really have to build the compound right around it? There were probably plenty of other good places. Although it definitely reminded us that there was a point where being brave became foolish. Just past the Chasm, Four brought us down two hallways to a set of metal doors that were closed. I had initially figured that they were our bedrooms, but apparently I was wrong as Four kept the doors closed.

"This is the training room. Training is every day from eight to six," Four announced. Everyone let out a sigh. That was a long day. And an early one too. "Dinner is served at six. You will have an hour at noon to take a lunch break. After that you're free to do as you please. Lateness to training will not be tolerated. You come on time or you do not show up."

Four walked past us once more, everyone stepping out of his way to let us through. So I guessed that we wouldn't be seeing the training room until tomorrow morning. It kept at least one thing a surprise. Although I was sure that they would be sending us a number of surprises.

"Great," I moaned to Heather, as we walked out of one hallway and down a new one. She smiled at me. I could tell that she wasn't fond of the hours, being from Candor. "That's really early," she mumbled.

We turned another corner as I tried to add it to my mental map. How did anyone find their way around this place? Everything looked the same. "Just what I wanted. Working late tonight and then having to be up early tomorrow, where they're probably going to try and kill us," I groaned, making
her laugh. "I think Eric is really out to get me."

Hopefully he wasn't hiding anywhere to overhear my comment. At the end of the long hallway was another set of doors and I looked up. It looked almost exactly like the training room but instead of double doors, it was one sliding door. Four slid the door open and I glanced inside. It was a bedroom. Well, the bedroom by the looks of it. There were twelve single person beds, not very comfortable looking. Each bed had a set of clothes on it and I grinned. Thank God, I was sick of looking so out of place. The bedroom was nothing spectacular and it was a little cold, but it was fine for the short time that we would be going through initiation.

"And this is where you're gonna be sleeping for the next eight months," Four informed us.

Okay, so maybe not that short of an initiation.

As far as I knew, Amity initiation only lasted two months. Some years I had heard of it being as short as three weeks. There wasn't much that they could teach you about farming and friendliness. I guess in Dauntless, there was a lot more that we all had to learn. But what could possibly take eight months?

"Initiation lasts eight months?" I asked Four.

"Yes. Problem?" he asked me.

Smiling at him, I shook my head and brushed past his shoulder. "Not at all. I look forward to the next eight months with you, Four," I teased.

He rolled his eyes at me as he stood by the door. The initiation seemed like a long time to me, but whatever they said, I would go with. I would much rather take eight months of training for Dauntless over three weeks of training for Amity. At least we'd be learning practical things in Dauntless, not how to properly smile for certain occasions.

"Girls or boys?" I heard a Candor transfer named Raven ask.

It was my own theory that she had changed her name to fit her image. She had black hair and dark brown eyes. I didn't blame her for the name. It suited her well. I glanced back at Four and saw that he had a bright glint in his eyes. I knew what a look like that meant. It meant that he was about to enjoy whatever it was that he was going to say, but we weren't.

"Both," he said, making every eye shoot back towards him.

What the hell did he just say? Boys and girls were sleeping together? Oh no, if that was the truth then I was picking the bed farthest away from Colt. I didn't trust him in the slightest. Not even to sleep next to me. I didn't trust that he wouldn't put a knife through my eye or something of the likes.

"There aren't even enough beds," I pointed out.

Four glanced over at me and smiled. "There will be." I raised a brow at him, wondering what that meant. Were they really going to kill us? "We've never separated the genders and it's worked well for nearly one hundred years. There aren't any problems, are there?" he asked us.

Everyone in the room shook their heads, although almost everyone seemed to have some sort of problem with the room. We all went about looking through the room, choosing to gripe silently to ourselves. I picked the bed closest to the door, right up against the wall, and smiled as Heather took the bed behind mine. Cole took the bed across from mine and Buck took the bed behind his, across from Heather. I sighed happily as I realized that Colt had picked a bed all the way across the room.
"Nice. I could get used to this," Jade said, a devious smile on her face. I rolled my eyes at her as Colt gave her a sideways grin.

Colt dropped down onto his bed and spread out for a moment, effectively dumping the clothes that were sitting on the bed onto the floor. Idiot. "That works for me," he said with a sleazy smile.

That was the last thing that any of us needed. I didn't care if anyone wanted to hook up with each other, I just didn't want them doing it in front of me. That wasn't what I had come here for. Colt's eyes met mine and he grinned as he saw that I was clearly uncomfortable with the whole arrangement. He swaggered towards me and I noticed that Four stiffened at his post by the door. He obviously wasn't a fan of Colt.

"Come on Softie, lighten up. Aren't you guys out there all about being out in the open?" he asked me. I rolled my eyes. Amity were all about keeping things in the open to avoid confrontation, but that was not about bodies. "I'm sure that you've seen plenty of things before. Maybe had a few yourself - "

Before Colt could finish and I could cut him off - with words or fists I wasn't sure - Four cut him off for me. "Drop it," he hissed at Colt, who immediately stopped talking.

If he was afraid of Four I would hate to see how afraid he was of Eric. He had only met him briefly on the rooftop. But that was only if the rest of them were ever going to meet him. I figured that a leader wouldn't have much time for initiates. If I was a leader I certainly wouldn't want to spend my time with the initiates.

"I will not hesitate to kick any of you out of Dauntless for acting like children," Four said to us. Somehow I didn't doubt him. "You're adults now, act like it." He turning back towards Jade. The previous glint was back in his eyes. "If you like this, you're gonna love the bathroom."

That's disgusting. Turning back to where Four was looking, I groaned. "Great," Heather moaned. "Well our day just keeps getting better and better," I told Heather.

I glanced over to Raven to see that she looked like she might faint. The bathroom was like something you would expect to get murdered in. It was all gray stone with showers that lined the front wall. They had little plastic curtains on the front side but it looked like nothing separated the inside stalls from each other. At least there was some privacy. I guess we could work it out so that girls could take a shower at one time and boys at another.

Next to the showers were the toilets. Thankfully those had doors, but there were urinals that were out in the opening. The dorms were only getting better by the second. Here's hoping that the apartments that the actual members were in were much nicer than the dorms. In some ways, Colt was right. I had seen that part before, a few times, but that didn't mean that I wanted to see everyone's.

Dante turned to Four and I was shocked to see that he actually looked a little angry. I cocked my head at him and waited for him to say something to our trainer. "You're kidding aren't you? I mean, not that I mind this or anything but isn't this a little perverted?" he asked Four, mostly motioning to the girls.

Four merely shrugged, clearly not the slightest bit concerned about whether or not we were comfortable in our new home. "Of course it is, but do you really think that they care?" I asked him, realizing that Four wasn't going to say anything. "This has to be something about training. They're trying to push us as far as they can. This is part of what they're going to do to us. We just can't let it bother us."
Obviously Four was listening to me closely. His head was turned towards me as a strange look flitted across his face. I wanted him to know that I wasn't just some pathetic Amity. Cole popped up from his spot on his bed, looking like he felt extremely bad for Raven. She was still staring at the bathroom in horror. Part of me wondered if she was getting ready to leave Dauntless right this second.

"Is there no other area?" Cole asked Four.

A snort came from behind all of us and I turned back to see that Jade was laughing. She was perched on Colt's bed and I groaned. I really hoped that we weren't going to have to deal with the two of them getting a little friendly during training. I could deal with some people being together, I'd walked in on people plenty of times, but I did not want them together. Please let them be able to wait until we are all members.

"Are you kidding?" Jade asked us. So apparently she didn't think that this was any big deal.

For a moment everything was silent before I realized that Four was walking up beside me. I had been listening to Jade so intently that I had almost forgotten that our leader was still in here with us. He probably thought that we were all the biggest babies in the world. But maybe this was something that happened relatively frequently. I couldn't help but to wonder what Eric would think of us right now. Probably that we were a pathetic bunch of kids. "You should feel right at home, Candor," Four smirked to Heather. "Everything out in the open. You too Amity." I rolled my eyes at him. "They never seemed to have a problem with bearing it all."

Scoffing loudly, I stood from my bed and dropped my arms to my sides pathetically. There wasn't much argument left in me. I was tired and starving. All I wanted to do was take a long nap and forget about today. The weight of leaving my parents was still heavy on my shoulders. Oh yeah, dealing with Eric tonight was going to be a blast.

"I did. Why the hell do you think that I left?" I snapped at him before sitting back on my bed.

Draven shook his head at Four and scoffed. He looked as offended with this as the rest of us did. I mean, I could see why we were sharing a bedroom, but an open bathroom? Even I thought that was a little over the line. "This has to be a joke? Right?" Draven asked Four.

Obviously fed up with the way that we were all acting over the news of the shared bedroom and bathroom, Four rolled his eyes at us and headed to the door. "Get changed," he snapped before rolling the door shut and leaving us alone.

I glanced up at the clock mounted on the wall and nodded. It was only five minutes to six. Four wanted us to get changed so that we would be ready for dinner. Which was fine with me, considering that I was starving. The room was plunged into a sudden awkward silence without Four around to keep the questions rolling. Cole smirked at me and stood up, letting his shirt fall to the floor. Damn that was fast. At least someone was getting the weird part out of the way.

"Right. Shower, anyone?" Cole asked with an awkward laugh.

The dorm remained silent and I rolled my eyes as the tenseness in the air merely intensified. That hadn't made things any better. Shaking my head clear of my thoughts, I took in a few deep breaths before kicking my shoes off and unbuttoning my pants. None of the girls, not even Jade, had bothered to get undressed yet, and I knew that someone had to be the first. I noticed that almost all of the boys were at least half dressed and I sighed. They had nothing to hide.
Unfolding the new Dauntless clothes, I opened them up and looked them over. It was a black tank top, a dark gray jacket, and a pair of black pants. Everyone seemed to have the same outfit and I nodded. Boys and girls would wear them, although ours were a little lower cut than the boys' version. These must have just been starter outfit to carry us over for a day or two. Until we could go buy something for ourselves.

Leaving the clothes over the edge of my bed, I unzipped my shorts and said goodbye to the bright colors. I had a lingering feeling that I would never see them again. My shirt came off next and I dropped it into the pile. They stood out so much against the dark colors of the bedroom. It didn't help that no one else had red or yellow clothes. I began to pull the tank top on when I heard a whistle come from my right.

My head snapped up to see Colt giving me an appreciative stare. "Damn I changed my mind. I think that I'm glad that you decided to leave Amity," he told me.

My jaws set as I yanked the clothing on. "Really? Because every time that I look at you I wonder why I left," I sneered at him.

All of the other girls were beginning to get changed now, looking grateful that I had been the first one to get undressed. Not to mention the first one to get a comment like that thrown at them. I scoffed at Colt and pulled on my pants, quickly gathering my jacket into my arms and sliding it onto my shoulders. It was too big but it was fine for now. Colt looked like he wanted to say something else, but Jade grabbed him and pulled him out of the room.

The moment that we were gone it felt like a huge weight had been lifted off of my shoulders. "We should probably head down to get something to eat now. I have to serve my prison sentence soon," I told Heather, grabbing her.

"At least he's letting you have dinner," Heather said, trying to find the bright side.

She was right about that. Eric could have always made me come do the files without giving me anything to eat. We walked to the side of the room, searching through the large selection of combat boots. They were the exact same, we just had to find our size. I finally settled on my size, grabbing them and lacing them up. Waiting for Heather to get her size as well, she finally found them and nodded at me to leave.

We exited out the door that Jade and Colt were leaving out of at the same time but we were all stopped by Four. "Bring your old clothes with you," he ordered us.

We all nodded, grabbing our old clothes and packing them under our arms as we made the short walk back to the dining room. Before we were allowed to walk in though, we were stopped in front of a large fire pit. The flames were gently burning against the coals and I glanced up at Four, wondering what we were doing.

" Burning these clothes from your old Faction severs the last ties that you had with your home Factions. You're Dauntless now and we take 'Faction before blood' very seriously here," Four informed us.

They seemed to be the most familial-like out of all of the Factions, so it wasn't surprising that they thought that way. I nodded along with his words, and without hesitation, threw my clothes in. Watching them burn to a crisp, I realized that the yellow and red mixed well with the flames.

"Go eat and get to bed. It's going to be a long day for you tomorrow," Four told us.
As we walked away from the fire pit I let Heather pull me to the food line. Unsurprisingly, I had no idea what most of the food was. So I merely let Heather have my tray and stack it with whatever she felt like was a good fit for me. I trusted her not to poison me. Everything looked so strange and most things had a funny smell to them. That was what happened when I'd only ever eaten fruits and vegetables for my entire life.

"They might want us to act like adults, but they treat us like children," I told Heather after we had gotten our food together.

The two of us went searching for a seat together. "Can you blame them? We've kind of been acting like children," she said.

"You're right about that. It's just that this place is so weird. We've never been here before. Some of them - Eric - seem to think that we should already know everything," I muttered.

"He doesn't seem like the type to forgive weakness," Heather said.

It was almost impossible to find a place to sit. The only seats that were open in the area were next to Four, so we decided to go with it. He looked less than thrilled to have us next to him. Not that I was thrilled to be there next to him. Not when he seemed to think that I was just some dumb Amity girl that had gotten in way over her head. Maybe I was.

Not even a moment later Cole came over to us, sitting on our opposite side. Buck was with him and planted himself on the other side of the table, directly in front of me. Dante found us just a second after and sat in front of Heather, next to Buck. Jet and Skylar, the only Abnegation transfer, were on the other side of Buck and somehow Draven had found room next to Cole. Rock music was carrying over loudly from the Pit and I smiled. Dauntless may have been a little strange but it was so full of life. I loved it. And it seemed that I was already making friends.

"Hey Heather. Amarantha," Cole said and I smiled. I was pretty sure that he didn't remember anyone else's names.

We would learn them in time. My smile faded though when I realized that he had called me by my Amity name. A few odd looks were passed around the table and I sighed. Damn it Cole, I was hoping that only Heather and Four would know my real name. There were a few snickers coming from Jade and Colt's side of the table.

"It's actually Alex now. I thought that Amarantha was a little too Amity for my liking," I said softly.

Buck smiled at me and I nodded back at him. He was lucky. His name had already suited Dauntless. "It was. Alex suits you well. And it sounds pretty Dauntless," he told me.

I thought so too. "Thanks," I chirped happily.

"So what were you saying earlier about serving a prison sentence?" he asked.

Had no one else realized that I had already been punished by Eric? I had almost forgotten that the only person that had been there to watch the exchange between Eric and I, was Heather. She was the only one that knew where I had to go after dinner.

"Oh it was nothing, I just mouthed off stupidly to Eric and he got pissed at me," I said, waving my hand flippantly at him. Four looked sideways at me and I shrugged. For some reason I would have thought that he would have known.

Jet's jaw dropped. "You mouthed off to Eric?" he asked.
My face colored slightly. "In my defense, I didn't know that he was standing right behind me," I said.

"I was trying to warn you!" Heather shouted.

Turning towards her, I smiled and shoved a piece of bread in her mouth. "I know. That's why I've been saying that it was my own fault. He's making me put together files on all of us tonight after dinner. It was so stupid. I can't believe he just gave me a punishment. Couldn't he have let one comment go?" I asked with a little huff, stabbing at my potatoes.

Heather snorted at me and I looked up to her. She had already finished half of her meal and I had only picked at my potatoes. Maybe I wasn't as hungry as I had thought that I was. "You made three comments," she told me.

There hadn't been three comments. Were there? Of course not. I wasn't that stupid. Or, if I was, I wasn't going to admit it. I huffed softly and shoved her slightly. Three comments or one, it was my first day in Dauntless. Eric should have let me off with a warning. A fork dropped on the other end of the table and I looked around to see that Cole was gaping at me around Heather.

"You really mouthed off to Eric?" he asked me.

It set me on edge slightly that apparently no one ever mouthed off to Eric. Maybe he really was going to kill me tonight. Or maybe I would get that physical punishment. God I hoped not. I didn't even want to know what that was. "It wasn't like I said anything that bad," I defended.

Heather huffed softly, letting everyone know that it had actually been that bad. "Girl, you have a death wish after you mouthed off to Four too," Cole said.

Once more I noticed Four glance up a bit at our conversation. I shrugged my shoulders and looked back down to my burger. I was sick of talking about my upcoming punishment. I would rather stare at my less than fascinating food. Heather had grabbed the burger for me and now I was just staring at it stupidly. Being an Amity, I had never had meat before. I guess now was as good a time to start eating meat as any.

It took me a long while to realize that the others were watching me watch the hamburger. "Have you never seen a hamburger before?" Dante asked me, looking completely confused.

I shook my head at him and picked it up. I wasn't sure if I really wanted to eat it but I needed to eat something. And protein was probably vital in Dauntless. "No, I've seen one. I just have never eaten one. It's like the Abnegation's. We don't really eat meat," I said. A loud scoff came from Buck and I rolled my eyes. The other Factions would never understand Amity and Abnegation. "We eat mostly plants and fruits. Amity believe that killing animals is almost as bad as killing humans. They keep cows out in the fields but mostly for milk and cheese. Some are pets too. But no one ever cultivates them for food."

Jet laughed loudly and I turned to look at him. He shrugged his shoulders and devoured the little piece of his steak that was left over. I grimaced at the blood that was running down his chin and looked away. I'd rather see human blood than animal. I guessed that not all of my Amity traits would leave me.

"I see why you left," Jet told me without swallowing.

Poking him in the shoulder, I smiled as Skylar shook her head at Jet. The two seemed to have become fast friends, like Heather and me. I supposed that everyone would need new friends. Especially considering that we were all in a new Faction. At least somewhere in Candor, Iris had
Florian with her. Maybe they would finally learn to get along without having me there to mediate between them.

"She's right though. Abnegation and Amity are actually pretty similar," Skylar said. "I've fed Factionless people hamburgers before but I've never had one. I've always been curious to eat one though. People always said that they were so good."

Giving her a huge smile, I picked up the burger and motioned to Skylar. "I'll eat it if you do," I told her.

"Together," Skylar agreed.

"On three?"

"On three," she said.

"One, two, three," I counted down, before taking a huge bite of the meat.

At first the texture made me want to throw it back up. But as I chewed I realized that it was better than I had thought. Most of the foods that I had ever eaten were either sweet or bitter, but this was salty. Wonderfully so. I finished my bite and smiled, turning to my friends that were eagerly awaiting on our verdicts.

"Hey, that's actually pretty good!" I chirped.

Skylar didn't seem as fond of the new food as I was. "Well it's better than tofu," she said, earning some laughs.

"Man, I can't believe that I spent all of my life having never had one of these things before!" I yelled, Skylar nodded her agreement.

"Glad we got that settled," Draven said, making both Skylar and I laugh. As he patted both of us on the backs, I continued to eat the plain meat. "God I'm glad that I never had to eat anything like that. Plants I mean. Erudite eat a lot of fish. Fish have lots of Omega Three vitamins that help brain development. Erudite's think that fish are good to help with intelligence."

I was reasonably certain that I'd heard that in school one day when we'd been talking about the other Factions and their ways of living. There was a snort from the other side of Heather and I rolled my eyes. It seemed that Cole was quickly becoming our comedian. But that was a good thing. We could all end up way too serious here in Dauntless. A little humor could go a long way. Maybe Four needed to learn that lesson.

"You know, it's people like you that are why I left Erudite," Cole said. We all laughed at the comment, teasing Draven. "I couldn't stand always feeling like the least intelligent one in the room."

I knew how it felt to always be the odd one out. Iris and Florian were always great at pretending like they could fit in. I was good at it, but I knew that most people could see through me. Mom and Dad were the only ones that had never been able to tell that I wasn't an Amity.

"That was the good thing about Candor," Heather said. I looked over at her. "You never had to be the most intelligent person in the room. All you had to do was say something that would start an argument," she said.

Maybe Candor wasn't as bad as I liked to think sometimes. I smiled at her. It sounded like something that was rather fun. Getting to start arguments for no reason other than because you could.
Throughout the years I had always heard Candor's engaging in polite debates. Florian and Iris would love that, they were always arguing with each other.

"Candor's love to argue. Then you felt like the smartest person because you were the reason for the debate," she continued.

Buck laughed loudly at Heather and dove back into his food. Before he could pop a tomato into his mouth though, he looked over at Heather with a big grin. "You know, you might have wanted to stay in Candor. I mean I don't think even a Dauntless could be that cruel. Poor Amity over there. All peace and love. How could we say such things in her presence? Cover your ears, Alex!" Buck yelled at me.

Everyone was laughing at his comment with calling me such a little kid. I leaned forward and smacked the tomato off of Buck's fork, laughing as it went flying across the table and hit Jade. She turned back to me with a nasty glare but I merely laughed even harder. That was what she deserved for being a bitch.

"Fuck you guys. Maybe I should have stayed in Amity," I said.

Everyone knew that I was joking though, as laughter was racking through my words. "If you're going to be talking like that you should have stayed where you were," Four said.

The laughter was broken as everyone glanced over at him. He sounded much less excited than any of us did. Of course, this was just a normal day with the added irritation of new kids. He had been so silent throughout the whole meal that I almost had forgotten that he was there. All of us were looking at him, even Jade and Colt were looking across the table to listen to our trainer.

"We don't want people that sob over their old Factions. I don't want to hear about your old Factions. You're Dauntless now," he said with a little sneer.

Suddenly a stupid urge came over me. Four had changed his name. I was absolutely positive he hadn't been born with that name. He could have been a Dauntless born, but that didn't make any sense about why he didn't like people talking about their old Factions. I was just pretty sure that he was a hard ass Dauntless born, but maybe he wasn't. Maybe there was a chance that he had been just like us a few years ago.

"Were you a transfer, too? Or Dauntless-born?" I asked.

While I had been thinking, Four had looked away from us. But his head had shot back up to me when I had spoken. So far I had seen Four angry, amused, bored, and pissed. Now I was pretty sure that I was getting my first look at disbelief and maybe a little hint of hatred.

"Are you kidding?" he asked me.


Honestly I had really wanted to know. I didn't think that it was that big of a deal. "What makes you think you can talk to me?" Four asked me darkly.

Scoffing loudly, I shook my head at Four. He was a little scary and kid of mean, but that didn't mean that he was above me. Just because he was a member and I was an initiate did not mean that he could speak to me that way. The people sitting around me had silenced themselves to stare at the two of us, wondering what was going to happen next.

"I think it's the same reason that makes Eric so easy to talk to," I said, noticing that Four did not look
happy at that comment. "Maybe all of you here in Dauntless have it. Something in the water maybe? Four, it's because you're so approachable."

There was a sickly-sweet smile on my face. The same one that I had used so often on the people back in Amity. Four leaned into me the same way that Eric had, but for some reason it worked much better when Eric did it. He actually put a little fear in me. Four made me a little nervous, but he made me angrier than anything else.

"You better watch yourself, Amity. You might think that you're making yourself look more Dauntless, but you're only putting a target on your back. I can make your life hell and Eric will make you wish that you were dead. Do you want that?" he asked me.

What could I even say to that? There was nothing that I could think to say to him. I said nothing back to him and instead just stared stupidly at Four. Eventually he just scoffed at me and stood up, leaving the table and storming off. Okay, note to self, don't ask Eric that question. If that was the way that Four had responded, I would hate to see how Eric would. I really was on a roll today. Eric and Four both seemed about ready to pull my head free of my shoulders. Or maybe send me away from Dauntless. I wasn't sure what was worse.

For a while, everyone at the table was silent until Heather leaned over to me and patted me on the shoulder. "You, my friend, have a death wish," she said with a little laugh.

Apparently I did have a death wish after everything that I had done in the past twenty-four hours. I nodded at Heather and looked over as Colt began to speak. I really did hate him, but I was somewhat curious about what he was going to say. Although I couldn't stop myself from rolling my eyes at him. Although I quickly realized that he wasn't saying anything stupid or sexist. He was whispering so I had to lean in closer to hear him.

"You know, he was first in his class. They tried to recruit him for leadership twice, but he said no." I raised my eyebrows. Four had said no to a leadership position? Twice? Why would he deny something like that? "Yeah Softie, that's right. I know things."

Did he really have to say things like that? I couldn't stand the fact that he thought that he was so much better than me. I rolled my eyes and was about to rebut what Colt had said when a loud alarm began to blare. Everyone at the transfer table had jumped about a foot into the air, making the Dauntless born laugh. They were all banging their cups against the table as a black man stood on the catwalk that went around the top of the dining hall. As I looked at him closer I realized that he was probably the oldest person that I had seen in Dauntless.

"Initiates, stand," he ordered. Without thinking, we all did. I blushed as I saw all eyes on me and wanted nothing more than to run. "My name is Max. I am one of your leaders here in Dauntless. You have chosen to join the warrior faction tasked with the defense of this city and all its inhabitants. We believe in ordinary acts of bravery and the courage that drives one person to stand up for another. Respect that. Do us proud."

All of the Dauntless born and members began to cheer loudly and laugh along with us. It wasn't long before they were all standing with us. Not even a moment later I felt arms grab my legs and I screamed as a few Dauntless men lifted Heather and I into the air. A few nonsensical terms shot out of my mouth as they picked us up and began to pass us around the dining hall. It seemed that all of the initiates were up in the air, laughing loudly.

"None of you had better drop me!" I yelled, making the couple that were currently holding me laugh.
The cheers continued as I was passed around the dining hall, back towards the doors that led to the bunks. This is awesome. This is what a real family is like. Just then I felt someone grab a little high on my leg. One of their hands was underneath my thigh and the other was wrapped around my hip. I leaned down to give them a piece of my mind. Before I could though, they pulled me down back into the crowd and I slipped a little, grabbing the person's arm to help steady myself. They held onto me just long enough to catch my balance before letting go.

I looked up to ask them why they had taken me down when I realized who it was. "Keep your hands off of me," I snapped at Eric.

"Aren't Amity's all about touching each other?" he asked.

"In case you hadn't noticed, I'm not an Amity," I barked.

Eric moved towards me and smiled, towering over me. "Is that so? Because that's all that I see in front of me. An Amity pretending to be something she's not."

Even I had to admit that his comment hurt a little bit. And so did my hip. He had grabbed me harder than I'd been expecting. "How hard did you have to grab me?" I muttered.

"Don't whine. That's nothing," he snapped at me. I rolled my eyes at him as he placed a hand behind my shoulder and shoved me forward. "There are girls that would love me to touch them like that."

"So it's true. Dauntless really are brainless."

The moment that I'd said it, I wished that I could have taken it back. Eric walked over to me and pressed a hand on my shoulder, squeezing it to the point that I was sure it would pop out of place. He only let go when I cringed and practically dropped onto one knee. He smiled at me and let up on the pressure. Well there goes my dignity.

"Come on Softie, enough celebrating. Time to own up," he said.

Without bothering to argue with him, I nodded and began following him out of the dining hall. Everyone was still cheering and I watched as Heather and Jax passed each other up in the air, exchanging high fives. Max was smiling down on the initiates and I rolled my eyes. All of the initiates were having fun, except for me.

"Buzzkill," I muttered as we walked.

Eric turned slowly back to me and I jumped back slightly at his short stop, nearly running into him. He didn't whip around to me as hard as Four did and for some reason it unnerved me. Eric was like the scary calm kind of angry. But I was sure that it wasn't always like that. He seemed like he could have an extremely nasty temper.

"What was that, initiate?" he asked me.


Eric smirked at me and I rolled my eyes as we walked through the Dauntless compound. "I thought so," he hissed at me.

As we walked I realized that he was taking me a completely different way than we had gone before, when Four had been taking us around. Dauntless was a hell of a lot bigger than I had thought that it was. It was probably about the size of Amity. Which was a little strange considering Amity was
outside. As we walked I found it slightly odd that no one was walking around, although this looked like mostly records and bookkeeping. I supposed that most people were either back in their rooms or partying in the Pit. Lucky assholes. I'd much rather be doing that.

We walked for about five minutes before Eric finally stopped in front of a metal door with a little window in it. Eric shoved a key into the door and pushed it open. I had expected papers to be everywhere, especially if this were Eric's room, but it was surprisingly neat. Nothing was out of place. In fact, nothing was anywhere. There was a desk with nothing other than blank and empty files on it, a file cabinet, and two grey chairs. It looked more like Abnegation than Dauntless.

"This is the Dauntless office? It looks so... dull," I muttered.

Turning towards me with a little groan, I noticed that Eric looked exhausted. What the hell had happened with him in the few hours since I had last seen him? "Are you done?" he asked me.

"Yes."

I said nothing else, not wanting to make things worse. I preferred to stay alive my first night in Dauntless. "Alright, you are going to make the files for each new initiate this year, yourself included. Each of you have a small folder filled with files of academic and disciplinary records from your old factions. You will not read them. Just place them where instructed," he told me. I nodded at him. It sounded easy enough. And maybe I could be done early. Although he was a fool if he thought that I wasn't going to read them. "You will put together every file except for your own."

Raising my brow, I watched as Eric grabbed the lone stack of papers that looked completely disheveled. I watched out of the corner of my eyes as he dropped them next to me. He began to pull out the blank folders. Twelve, I noticed. That was my folder that he had left out.

"Who's gonna put that one together?" I asked him.

Eric pulled a few papers out and I watched as he took them in his arms and sat in the chair on the far side of the room with them. It looked far more comfortable than the one that I had. "Me," he said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

So those were my papers. It bothered me probably more than it should have that Eric was reading everything about me. What was even in that folder? Had I really done that much that Dauntless cared about? I got average grades and had never had anything that serious, disciplinary wise. There was nothing that I could imagine that would be of importance. Maybe the Aptitude Test results, but they would only say Amity. Maybe they'd be interested in why I'd transferred.

Shaking my head at him, I took a seat behind the desk and grabbed the first folder. I grabbed a pen out of the desk and stared at the folder for a moment. "I should have figured that. So what?" I asked, wanting to push off the irritating task for as long as possible. "Are you going to read through it and find out all of my dirty little secrets?"

It was only teasing, but there was something in his eyes that told me that I should have been quiet. He glanced up at me with an irritated stare. Okay, maybe he wasn't as easily amused as I had assumed that he would be. But was there something in his eyes that looked almost amused.

"Are you sure that you aren't from Candor? Or maybe Erudite?" he asked me, making me smile. For once it hadn't been something cruel. It had actually been something close to a joke. Not quite, but close.

"Not the last time that I checked," I said.
"You ask way too many questions and always speak what's on your mind. Those are not traits that we want here in Dauntless," he told me.

For a moment I merely stared at him. Weren't those things that everyone should say? The things that were on their minds? "It's better than lying all the time," I said.

Eric scoffed at me, continuing to flip through my paperwork. "Come on. No Amity would have any dirty little secrets," he scoffed.

And there he went. Back to annoying little Eric. I could see why people kept their distance from him. He was a bit of a downer. And he never seemed to be in a good mood. Of course I had only known him for a day. But still, I was good at reading people. It was an Amity trait.

"Well I never was Amity now, was I?" I asked him.

Eric scoffed at me and looked up. Suddenly I wished that I hadn't said anything as he sent me a stare that could have pierced me through to my soul. Suddenly I felt like he knew everything about me. I felt like he was laughing at me for feeling terrible for leaving my parents. I thought that he was judging me for everything that I had ever done with Florian. I felt like he could hear all of my silent doubts about being able to make it in Dauntless.

"So you have secrets?" Eric asked.

"Doesn't everyone?" I shot back.

He smirked at me. "Care to share any of them?" he asked me, a cold glint to his eyes.

That was something about his eyes that I had noticed. They were such a pretty color. They were somewhere between grey and blue. They were cold but I could tell that somewhere deep down, there was a brightness to them that no one could see. Eric raised one eyebrow, snapping me from my thoughts and I shook my head, my eyes following his piercings.

"I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours," I said.

The corner of his lips turned upwards in something akin to a smile. He almost looked friendly. Almost. I wasn't sure that Eric knew how to be friendly. "You don't have any worth my time," he said.

"You might be wrong," I quipped.

"So tell me."

"No. They're secrets for a reason."

That was a lame excuse. It was just my reasoning for keeping my secrets to myself. Did I even have any that were that interesting? No. I hooked up with my best friend sometimes and snuck beyond the Fence once. There was the Divergence, but that was dangerous, and not a secret to be share. Eric laughed loudly and I watched as he flipped through my papers, which I wanted nothing more than to tear out of his hands and rip into a million shreds. I hated him knowing everything about me.

"I thought so. Get to work, initiate," he told me. I rolled my eyes. What was it with him and Four, never calling me by my name?

There had to be a reason that they refused to call me by my name. More than just to annoy me. Or maybe it wasn't. I started to spread the papers around the desk. It looked like Colt's was on top.
Good. I was looking forward to his. I wanted to know all of his dirty little secrets. But I had to wait until Eric left to read them. Until then, I had to distract him.

"Are you ever going to call me anything other than initiate or Softie?" I asked.

Stopping reading over my file, Eric looked up at me and raised a pierced eyebrow. I guess no one had ever asked him when he was going to call them by their name. I guessed that most people didn't say a lot of things to Eric. Not that I really blamed them. I didn't know why I was saying all of these things. Maybe Heather was right. Maybe I did have a death wish. It was just fun to try and mess with Eric.

"No," he told me. I scoffed at him. That figured. "Do you have a problem with that?"

I shook my head back and forth quickly, my long blonde hair swishing in front of my face. It was so much longer than I had thought that it was. "No," I answered Eric, when I saw that he was waiting for an answer.

Slowly I stood up, walking over to the filing cabinet, pretending that I needed another blank file. In truth, I just wanted to see what else there was that I could peek through. I was a naturally curious person. As I looked through the files, I passed Tori's, the woman that had done my Aptitude Test. I saw Four's as well and debated on pulling it out. But then I saw something that caught my eyes even more. It was Eric's. And it was huge. I reached my hand out to grab it and just as I wrapped my fingers around the file, Eric's voice made me jump nearly ten feet into the air.

"If you touch that, you're going to lose that hand," he told me quietly.

My heart was hammering in my chest. I'd almost forgotten that he was here. "How did you even see that?" I asked.

"Eyes in the back of my head."

Glancing back, I saw that Eric was looking down at my file, making little notes here and there. He hadn't even looked up. He looked very interested as his eyes scanned over my pages. Apparently I was that interesting. How the hell had he seen me try to take the file? He had probably just figured that I would see his file in there and try to grab it.

But that wasn't fair. "Oh come on, you're looking through my file," I tried to argue, but he looked completely unconvinced. So instead I tried for a different route. "What? Does the little Dauntless leader have secrets of his own?"

It had only been teasing. I was really hoping that he wouldn't kill me. Instead of telling me to shut the hell up and go back to work, Eric looked up from my file and put it down on the table. He stood from his chair and began to walk over to me, making me extremely nervous. Okay, screw Eric not scaring me. Right now he was terrifying me. He walked up to me, backing me into the filing cabinet. He was so close to me that I could feel the heat radiating off of him. As he spoke to me, his voice was dangerously low and rumbling.

"Ones that would send you running screaming from me," he said to me. I gulped deeply. But to show him that he didn't scare me, I forced out laughter. "Something funny, initiate?" quickly sobered and shook my head at him. "Good. Get back to work. You haven't even touched the first file. Good thing you weren't going to Erudite."

There it was. There was another one of the little backhanded comments that I was getting used to him making to me. "Do you have to do that?" I snapped at him, making his head jump up to look at
"What?" he asked, sounding utterly bored.

"Every time that I say or do something you always have this little biting comment that you make," I said. He stayed silent though, merely watching me. "I didn't go to Erudite because they're all stick in the mud pricks. Plus you're bad, but you're nothing compared to Jeanine Matthews."

Eric snorted and I watched a strange flash of emotion go through his eyes at the mention of the Erudite leader. "What the hell do you know about Erudite? Have you ever even set foot in the Erudite compound?" he asked me.

"No." I had just always heard that they were boring. They were all about learning. "Plus I somehow doubt that you know anything about Jeanine Matthews," he growled.

Was he getting defensive of her? That was one thing that would certainly shock me. It seemed that Eric didn't like a lot of people and Jeanine seemed like the type that he wouldn't like. As much of an asshole as he was, he had a rather teasing personality. And she was always so uptight and tense. I would have thought that he would hate someone like her.

"I know enough to know that she's the wrong type of person to be running the government," I said and he raised his eyebrows. "The whole bullshit about choosing wherever you think that you should go? It's all a lie. She thinks that the test is the only thing that we should listen to. And she hates anyone that isn't in Erudite and thinks that Dauntless are nothing more than brainless soldiers. Doesn't that bother you in the slightest? I mean come on Eric, you are an asshole but you aren't an idiot."

For once Eric looked like he might have been the slightest bit impressed with me. But before I could distinguish what it was that I had seen on his face, he merely shook his head and turned from me, folding my file up. Good, maybe he would leave now. I could finally read the file.

"Jeanine isn't as bad as she seems. She's just trying to protect the Faction system," he told me.

Maybe it was good that he wasn't in Erudite either. I kept that comment to myself though. "Are you trying to convince me or you?" I asked.

He glanced up at me and ignored my words. Although it looked like I might have struck a chord. "And as for the comment about me being smart, I might be smarter than you think," he said.

I merely laughed and shook my head. I was positive that Eric wasn't an idiot. You didn't get a leadership by being an idiot. He had to have at least some sense of intelligence. But that didn't meant that I had to tell him that. "Don't get cocky. It doesn't suit you." It looked like he almost smiled. "And please don't tell me, you have a crush on Jeanine?" I asked with a smirk.

The little smirk that was on his face faded and he looked like he might hurl. That went over better than I had thought that it would. I thought that I would get yelled at for that one. "She's old enough to be my mother. It's like I said Amity, it's a good thing that you didn't choose to go to Erudite. Drop it. You're getting nothing done," he told me.

It was strange that I found myself slightly disappointed. I had almost been enjoying the banter between us. "You've been distracting me," I said, ignoring his scathing glare.

"Get back to work. I have something to take care of. I'll be back in a little bit. Don't even think about
touching that file. There are cameras in this room that I will be checking," he hissed at me.

"Fine."

He gave me a last glare before turning. I watched as he left the room and closed the door, locking it behind him. Wow, he really didn't trust me. Not that I blamed him. He was right not to trust me. As he walked out of the hallway and past where he could see me, I pulled out Colt's papers and began to read through them.

There wasn't much on him. It just had that he was from Erudite originally and his parents were both scientists. They had apparently been doing research on expanding the human life. Actually, that was pretty cool. As I read through I saw that they had his blood type, which creeped me out a little, and a few trips to the Erudite Medical Center. Apparently he had gotten in a fight last year that had broken two bones in his fingers. I smirked at the thought of Colt crying in a hospital and went to set his file down. Right before I could, though, I saw a little number. The note was labeled Training Status, and next to it, there was a little number one. What the hell did that mean?

Ignoring the note I went to making the next file. This one was going to be for Heather. I felt a little bad for looking through her file but I knew that there wouldn't be anything too bad on her. She seemed like a sweet girl, maybe just a little bit of a troublemaker. Of course, I couldn't really say anything about being a troublemaker. Wasn't I the only person that had managed to get in trouble on the first night?

Just like Colt, her file had her birth Faction, Candor, and her Aptitude Test result, Candor. What? She had scored Candor? Why the hell had she left if she had scored her home Faction? Her parents had been just normal citizens of Candor, but my eyes narrowed on the title next to her mother's name. Deceased. Her mother had died? Poor Heather. Glancing at the date I noticed that it was only a few weeks ago. I couldn't help but to wonder if she had left because it was too painful for her to stay. Feeling like I was intruding on something far too private, I stuffed the rest of her papers in but right before I closed it. I noticed the same Training Status note. The number next to her name was ten.

Placing her file gently on top of Colt's, I went to pick up the next stack of papers. It was Buck's. Buck seemed like the kind of guy to have a squeaky clean record. Like the others it had his home Faction of Candor and his Aptitude Test result, Dauntless. He had apparently been raised by his grandparents and I couldn't help but to wonder where his parents were in the picture. Maybe they had died when he was young. He had apparently been a big troublemaker as a kid, judging from the teachers notes that were all stapled into the file. One of his pranks had been slipping his teacher a truth serum. I would have to ask him about that one day. As I glanced at the number that was printed on his file, I saw that it was six.

As I placed Buck's file off to the side I couldn't help but to wonder if these numbers were ranking us. It made sense with the whole Training Status thing. It also made sense that Colt was number one. He was probably the biggest of us and he looked like he was made for Dauntless. If that was the case though, I wondered what number I was. Draven's file was next and it was rather bland. He was from Erudite and had scored Dauntless on his test. His parents were normal citizens and he had never been in much trouble. The most exciting thing in his file was his ranking. Number five. He was expected to be pretty good.

Closing Draven's file, I opened the next one. It was Skylar's. I began to grab her papers. There was almost nothing on her. But that was the way that Abnegation were. They never really told people about themselves. It made sense. As I looked through her files, I realized that she hadn't scored Dauntless on her Aptitude Test. She had scored Amity. Why had she come to Dauntless then? What
a strange change of plans. Her grades had been mediocre and it seemed that her family was nothing special, just rather large. There were five kids besides Skylar. I glanced down to her number and narrowed my eyes. Her number was thirteen. They were expecting her to be the worst. I was sure that it was only because she was from Abnegation.

As cruel as it was though, I was a little glad that I wasn't the one who was number thirteen. I placed her file off to the side and grabbed the next one. I scoffed when I realized that it was Jade's. Too bad she wasn't number thirteen. I would have loved to rub that in her face. Jade was from Candor originally and had scored Dauntless on her Aptitude Test. Apparently she had been quite the fighter growing up, having many suspensions on her record. It must not have come as a shock when she had transferred over to Dauntless. She was number nine and I growled lightly. She was above Heather.

Smacking the file down onto the pile, I nearly screamed when the papers came dangerously close to flying off of the desk. I did not want to replace them all. The next file that I picked up was for an Erudite transfer named Hunter. He was the one that I hadn't heard speak yet. He had brown hair and green eyes. He was big and spent most of his time with Jade and Colt. I made a mental note to stay away from him. His file was relatively simple. He had come from a family like mine and had gotten average grades. His number was impressive though, he was ranked three. It made me wonder who number two was.

Part of me wanted to believe that it was me, but I was smarter than that. I would probably be placed in the middle of the group, somewhere around Jade and Heather. Dante's file was next and I smiled. I liked Dante. He had scored Dauntless on his Aptitude Test and it made me wonder if he was tougher than he let on. He seemed like he wouldn't hurt a fly. His family was on the older side and I noticed that he had a few half siblings. His father had apparently died when Dante was younger. He was ranked at number seven and I smiled. Right in the middle of the pack. It was a fair ranking.

Placing Dante's file down on the pile, I sighed. I was almost done, only four more to go. And once I was done I would also know my own ranking. Raven's was next and I perked up slightly. I was curious about her. She had been from Candor and I was right, she had changed her name. While living in Candor her name had been Courtney. Raven suited her better. There wasn't much about her, she had made good grades and had no disciplinary notes. She was ranked number twelve and I scoffed. I was sure that she was better than that.

But at least I wasn't number twelve. That meant that I was at least number eleven, but that was still way too low for me. As I placed her file off to the side I picked up Jax's. He was a strange one. He didn't seem that friendly, yet some part of me liked him. Maybe it was because he reminded me a little bit of myself. He was from Erudite and had scored Dauntless on his Aptitude Test. That wasn't surprising. He seemed like the type to come to Dauntless. Brooding and strong. It appeared that he had been raised by his single mother. Apparently his parents were divorced. It was pretty rare for couples to get divorces, but it was the most common in Erudite. There didn't seem to be much love in their Faction. Jax was ranked number four and I nodded. It sounded about right.

His papers were filled with old experiments that I had to shuffle through. He had been very busy in Erudite. His transfer might have been surprising. It took me a while to put in everything that Eric deemed to be important. I picked up the next file and smiled. It was Cole's. He seemed like a good guy and Heather clearly thought so too. Even though I could tell that Cole annoyed her. Opening his file I saw that he was frequently caught in Candor trying to lie to get himself out of trouble. They must have known forever that he would be a transfer. I looked over at his ranking and saw that he was in the eighth position. I frowned at the number. Cole wasn't that bad, was he? I was pretty sure that if he tried, he could beat at least half of us.

Placing his file off to the side, I picked up the last one. I knew that it would be Jet's so I skipped over
the name. He had apparently been enrolled into speech therapy when he was younger. Apparently in Candor, two was too young to not be speaking yet. That must have been embarrassing. I shook my head and looked through his file. There wasn't much on him. His parents were married young. They were only in their early thirties now. They probably weren't that much older than Tori. They were like my parents. He had no disciplinary files on him and his grades were evidently very good. I glanced at his rank and nodded. He was number two. That was unsurprising. He was huge and looked like he could tear someone's head off. I wondered why Colt was number one and not him.

Finishing his file off, I placed it off to the side and sighed. Finally I was done. That meant that I only had to wait for Eric to get back to let me leave. As I thought back to the files, I wondered about the rankings. I knew everyone else's, so what was I? I knew the order. Colt was number one. Jet was number two. Hunter was number three. Jax was number four. Draven was number five. Buck was number six. Dante was number seven. Jax was number eight. Jade was number nine. Heather was number ten. Raven was number twelve and Skylar was number thirteen. That meant that every number was taken except for number eleven. I was number eleven.

My heart nearly stopped as I realized that they had put me at number eleven. No, Eric had put me at number eleven. This was what he had done. How the hell could he put me at number eleven? He was giving me one of the lowest chances of making it in Dauntless. I mean come on! I had hit the number one ranked initiate. Of the transfers anyways. Just as I was huffing, Eric walked back into the room with a confused look adorning his face.

"You scored Amity on your Aptitude Test?" he asked me.

He dropped my file into the pile with the other transfers and immediately my anger was gone. Why had he just asked me if my results from my Aptitude Test was Amity? That was when I remembered. I was Divergent. I fit into four of the five Factions. But Tori had written down that I was Amity. Eric thought that I had scored Amity.

"What?" I asked stupidly.

Eric rolled his eyes at me and showed me a tiny portion of my file. There is was. Amarantha Freesia: Amity. "Right here. It's on your file," he told me. How the hell was I going to explain this one? "The woman who administered your Aptitude Test said that you scored Amity on your test. Why the hell did you come to Dauntless if you scored your home Faction?"

I shrugged my shoulders, hoping that Eric would just let it go. The last thing that I wanted to do was hint to Eric that I was Divergent. Like Tori had told me, Divergent's were dangerous. Apparently we somehow threatened the Faction system. I couldn't imagine that something like that would go over well with a leader of one of the Factions.

"I didn't want to stay in Amity," I told Eric, rolling my eyes as he scoffed. "Screw whatever the test said, I know that I'm not an Amity. I wouldn't be able to do that for the rest of my life. I'm not like you." His eyes shot over to me. Clearly he had no idea what I was talking about. "I couldn't stay in my home Faction."

Eric stood up and walked over to me, his arms hanging by his sides. He looked genuinely surprised by what I had said and I raised my eyebrows. Had I said something weird? "Come again?" he asked.

Turning to face him I realized that Eric was slightly closer to me than I had expected. There was only a body or two space between us. It was unnerving having him stand this close to me. As attracted - physically - as I was to him, I would have loved for him to take a few steps backwards.

"Like you. I guess that you knew from birth that you wanted to stay here in Dauntless," I said to him.
He raised a pierced eyebrow. I scoffed and shook my head. Eric would have never had a doubt. He was Dauntless inside and out. His parents must have loved that he would never leave them. "I mean come on Eric, you scream Dauntless. Whenever you took your test it had to be easy. You knew that you were going to stay."

I'd been hoping that he would end the conversation right there. We'd gone down a strange road with this conversation. I wanted to go back to the dorms. Naturally it wasn't going to work out that way. Hardly anything ever seemed to work out in my favor. And it definitely didn't seem that Eric would.

"I took my Aptitude Test four years ago." I nodded at him. That meant that he was twenty. It was actually a little younger than I had thought that he was. I couldn't help but to wonder if he had been in the same class as Four. It seemed like they were. "It was hard then and it's still hard." There was something strange in his voice. Maybe there was more to Eric than I thought that there was. "Staying in your home Faction or leaving, it's tough either way. You always wonder if what you chose was the right Faction."

That wasn't what I had been expecting him to say. There was something strange, something weak, in his voice. I hated to admit it, but he was right. We would never really know if we had chosen the right Faction. Something different would have happened no matter which Faction that I ended up in. We would always have at least three Factions that could have also been the right one. But that didn't mean anything. Eric had only ever lived in one Faction. He had no idea what it was like to ever live in any Faction but Dauntless. He'd never had to walk away from his family.

"And how would you know that?" I snapped at him, angry that he really didn't know what it was like to leave a Faction. To leave everything.

"What was that?" Eric snarled.

I knew that it was his warning to get me to stop talking, but I couldn't. "I've never seen someone that was more suited for any Faction than you were suited for Dauntless. It was easy for you, just admit it. Don't try to sympathize with me," I hissed.

It seemed that I actually was able to make Eric a little angry. His eyes narrowed at me and I took in a breath. I hadn't really meant to say that. I was just angry that I had left my family and he had never had to do that. It wasn't his fault that I had walked away from my family. It was my own fault.

While I had been thinking, Eric had been steaming. "I don't care what happens to you," he growled at me.

I couldn't help but to feel a little hurt. I didn't like Eric but still, it hurt for someone to say that they didn't care about you. "Thanks for that," I deadpanned.

"I'm not sympathizing, I'm telling you the truth. No matter what, it's hard to know that you made the right choice. You won't ever know. We can't go back and see what the other side was like," he said.

Scowling, I decided that I was done with this conversation. Grabbing the files off of the desk, I shoved them over to Eric, folding my arms over my chest. "Here, I'm done," I told Eric, who looked less than impressed. I glanced up at the clock in the room and groaned. It was already well past midnight. "It's past midnight and I want to get back to the dorms. I have to be up early tomorrow for training."

For a moment I thought that maybe he would have a heart and let me go. After all, he had been an initiate once too. He must have known what it was like to wake up early and train all day. He had probably known what it was like for his entire life. I imagined that it was awful. It was already awful
and the first day of training hadn't even passed. Things just seemed so strange. Everything with changing Factions and my parents. It was all finally hitting me.

"It doesn't matter how much sleep you get and how well rested you are, Softie," he said, sneering the word like it was poisonous. "It's like your Test said. You're Amity, inside and out. You're just pretending to be Dauntless. You'll fail tomorrow, and I'll be there, watching every second of it."

It was like he had slapped me in the face. That wasn't exactly something that I had been ready to hear. I hissed at Eric and dropped back against the door. He really was one of the nastiest people that I had ever met. The few moments that he had said something a little funny, or even the slightest bit nice, I had faith that he might have been making some progress, or maybe showing me the real side of Eric. But that just showed the kind of person that he really was.

"I don't know why people don't want to be around you. You're so charming," I told him.

He scoffed at me, knowing that I was being facetious. "Goes both ways," he snarled back.

Say something, you moron. Don't let him win. "I bet it was something you got from your parents," I told him with a bright smile. If he was going to be an asshole about everything so was I. Eric might have been my leader, but I was not going to let him treat me like dirt. "Maybe your mother had the same sweet glare that you have. Or maybe your father gave you his comforting personality."

Come to think of it, I wasn't sure why I had said it. It was completely uncalled for. Eric was an asshole but there were certain things that I had noticed that he never brought into the conversation. One of those things was my family. And I was grateful for that. They were a sore spot with me and it seemed like they were a sore spot with him too.

"Get out," he said darkly at me.

The room had gone completely silent. Even the air conditioning had turned off. Eric had creeped me out plenty of times in the short span of time that I had known him, but he had never really scared me. Not really. Not genuinely. But now I was scared. I had said something brutal and uncalled for. Now he was angry. Not just yelling at me angry. He would have had every right to turn around and punch me in the face. I knew that what I had to do was apologize to him. He deserved that much. I had brought in his family and that was uncalled for.

Swallowing my pride, I took a step towards Eric. "I'm so sorry. It was just a joke. I didn't mean anything -" I said softly before being abruptly cut off.

"Get out!" Eric bellowed at me, loud enough to rattle the walls.

He stormed up to me and I cried out as he pushed me back against the wall, his hand around my throat. I had thought that it might be for dramatic effect, but he was really putting pressure on me. He was to the point where he was really going to choke me. Oh my God, Eric was going to kill me. I struggled against his grip as he leaned into me, tightening his hold. My vision began to spot and he finally loosened his grip, maybe realizing just how much he was hurting me.

It just loosened a little bit though. "Please," I begged, my voice cracking.

"You listen to me Softie, and you listen well. I'm not going to babysit you and I'm not going to go soft on you. Watch your back, from now on you're in deep. You wanted to be Dauntless so bad, well now you are. Are you ready?" he asked me. No. "Leave, before I show you just how tough Dauntless can be."

Eric threw me backwards and I was ripped off of my feet. I fell out of the door, landing heavily on
the platform outside of the office. I was a little dazed from the impact, but I didn't want to linger around here any longer. Eric was turned back to the wall, panting slightly. Without a second thought, I pulled myself up off of the platform and went sprinting back to the dorms. I was sure that I was taking plenty of wrong turns but I couldn't have cared less. I just wanted to get away from him before he came through on his threat.

My feet propelled me forward to tear through the halls before I finally recognized the door that led to my dorm. I threw it open and dropped into the bed, throwing off my jacket. Everyone was already asleep. I was dripping in sweat from my run and the encounter that I'd had not even two minutes prior. Laying down, I closed my eyes and turned over, fighting back tears. I wasn't suited for Dauntless. Not if every day was going to be like this. And I sure as hell wasn't ready to face the next day. I would never be ready to face Eric again. I had made too many mistakes already, and I couldn't fix any of them.
Chapter Four

Loud metal suddenly began clanging against my bed rails and I jumped up, panicked that someone was breaking into the compound. I shot up shouted softly, bashing my head against the wall. Jesus Christ, that hurt. I hadn't realized that I had been laying facing the wall when I'd fallen asleep. My sudden movement had jolted me right into it. Covering my throbbing forehead, I looked for the source of the noise through blurry vision. The lights quickly flashed on and I groaned. This was not the way that I wanted to wake up every morning. I looked to the door of the dorms and growled.

Standing with a smirk on his face was my second favorite Dauntless. Four. Right now, I actually liked Eric more than I liked Four. At least Eric had shouted at me the whole time. Four looked like he was genuinely enjoying my pain. He was watching me with a big smile and I rolled my eyes. Of course he was happy that I had hurt myself. I had annoyed him all day yesterday and now he was happy to see me pay for it. He glanced down to me as I flopped back against the pillows. This was a great way to start off training, and my life as a Dauntless.

"Sorry, did I wake you?" he purred at me.

"Actually, you did," I responded.

The others were still asleep, now that Four and I were focused on berating each other. "Nice face," Four told me. I glanced into my reflection on the metal bed frame and moaned. A large red mark was already forming.

"You're an ass," I muttered into the sheets.

Four's boots pounded on the floor for a moment as he kicked my bed, making me slide off of the pillows at the force. "Watch what you say to me. That was nothing. Quit your whining," he snapped.

There must have been something in the air here in Dauntless. Why were Four and Eric such dicks? "Who pissed in your corn flakes?" I muttered under my breath

It wasn't quiet enough. Four had heard me. "What was that?" When I didn't answer, he looked away from me. "I want everyone in The Pit. Two minutes," he yelled.

With that last encouraging word for our first day in Dauntless, Four stormed out of the dorms and nearly every person dropped back into their beds. It was way too early and our wake-up call hadn't exactly been the nicest. At least, mine hadn't. I wished that I could go back and never complain about waking up in Amity. At least the sun streaming through the windows was a nice way to wake up. We had always woken up this early, but it was because the sun had woken us up.

In the dark dorm room if felt like it was still the middle of the night. I stood weakly from my spot on my bed and pulled on my shoes. I had my only outfit already on - just like everyone else - and pulling my hair up only took a few seconds. Apparently Four had known that we had almost nothing to do. Of course, he had been us once more. I jumped into the bathroom and brushed my teeth quickly before stuffing my toothbrush back into the bag of toiletries the Dauntless had supplied us.

Taking a deep breath and blinking the crust from my eyes, I grabbed onto Heather with one of my hands and Cole with the other, pulling the two of them out of the room. I was pretty sure that neither one of them were quite ready to go yet, but I didn't want either of them to be late. Eric would only make their lives a living hell and I knew how shitty that was.

As we walked out into the hallway I found that no one was speaking. Clearly no one was used to
waking up this early. It was rather miserable being awake this early when we probably had a miserable day of training in store for us. Even Jade and Colt were silent, both looking like they were about to keel over and die. Not that I blamed them. As we walked I found myself frequently tripping over my feet, as I wasn't quite paying attention to my movements.

Clumsily catching my foot on the bridge of the Chasm, I growled and hissed out a few curses. The boots that Dauntless provided us were nice but they didn't provide much protection. Heather and Cole hadn't even noticed that I'd been hurt as the two of them continued to walk, almost like zombies. I didn't blame them. They probably wanted to get to the training room so that they could sit down. I grumbled out a few more curses before I continued to walk, a murderously look on my face.

My foot was gently throbbing as I walked back and forth over the passages. If I couldn't see Jet and Raven ahead of me I was sure that I would have taken a number of wrong turns. Not far behind me I could tell that there was a man, but I made no effort to move. He could go around me if I was annoying him. Of course, that wasn't my luck. Eric walked up behind me and I rolled my eyes. This wasn't something that I wanted to deal with this early.

He stormed up to my side and looked down at me. "Something bothering you this morning?" he asked me.

"Just tired," I answered softly, shaking my head. I didn't want to argue with him.

"Isn't that sad? You didn't get a good night's rest," he sneered at me. "Take the jacket off. The training room is over eighty degrees. You'll pass out from heat exhaustion."

The two of us stared at each other as I rolled my eyes. He was such an ass to me, and I didn't understand why. The comment had been uncalled for last night and I'd admitted it. But there was no way that I was going to take the jacket off. I had a perfectly good reason to not take off the jacket. And he was most of that reason. Not him, particularly, but the nice little set of bruises that he'd left on me.

"I think I'll leave it on," I muttered.

Eric caught my arm as I tried to brush past him. I found myself extremely nervous to be standing over the Chasm with him. "Do you have something to be embarrassed about?" he asked.

"I don't need anyone's eyes wandering more than they already have," I answered weakly.

There wasn't really a good reason that I was keeping the fact that Eric had injured me from him, but I didn't want to admit that he had hurt me. "I'm sure that you wouldn't like that, Amity," he responded.

Of course I knew what he meant by that. Amity's tended to not always have the best reputation with their comings and goings with the opposite gender. "Excuse you?" I hissed before I could stop myself.

"Move it, initiate," Eric snarled at me, ignoring me.

"Did you really just call me a ?-"

Eric cut off whatever I was about to say to him. Clearly I wasn't walking fast enough from him as he shoved me forward, straight into the rails of the Chasm. I took in a deep breath and gently pushed myself back from it nervously. He could have damn well just killed me. I turned back to snap at him but it was Heather who was behind me. She merely grabbed my arm and pulled me back so that we could get to the training room.
She was watching Eric storm away from us. "Damn, what did you do to him last night? And what time did you get in? I didn't hear you," she asked.

"It was pretty late. A little after midnight I think," I said.

It was a little surprising that she hadn't heard me come in. I hadn't been exactly quiet last night. "I mean, I figured that you would come back. I don't think that Eric would be willing to kill you. Not yet anyways. He would do it sneakily. Like during a fight or something," she said, laughing at me.

Shaking my head at her, I pushed open the doors of the training room and walked in. In all honesty, he probably would kill me. Particularly after what had happened between us last night. As I walked into the room I glanced around. Cole was standing with Buck not far from the doors. Clearly they had managed to wake up in the last two minutes. They were laughing and shoving each other around.

"Honestly Heather, I'm not really sure what happened last night. Eric was annoying but he was fine. And then we started arguing and all of a sudden I said something totally uncalled for," I said, making her raise her eyebrows.

"What did you say?" she asked.

For a moment I thought about telling her. But I figured that it wasn't something that I should tell anyone. No one needed to know other than Eric and myself. "It doesn't matter. I didn't really mean to say it. It just sort of slipped out. I felt terrible afterwards but I couldn't take it back. Anyways, Eric grabbed me and choked me. I really thought that he was going to kill me for a minute," I said softly.

Evidently it hadn't been quiet enough. In under a second, Buck was at my side, leaving a very stunned looking Cole by himself. Buck looked completely shocked at what I had just said. Heather looked nervous too. She looked like she wasn't sure if she should kill Eric or fawn over me.

"What?" Buck hissed.

I looked over at him and shrugged my shoulders. "Nothing," I said quickly.

But it was too late. The damage had been done. "Eric choked you last night?" he asked me.

Should I admit what happened? "Yeah, but it wasn't like I didn't deserve it," I argued.

Despite the fact that I really didn't like Eric, he had been in the right. I was the one that was in the wrong. I deserved what had happened. "Alex, I know that Dauntless gets a little crazy sometimes but that has to be against regulation or something. A leader shouldn't be allowed to nearly kill an initiate," Buck told me.

"You didn't hear what I said," I whispered.

"Doesn't matter if they had it coming," Buck said.

Before I could rebut his last comment, Cole came over, his eyebrows knitted together. "Who nearly killed an initiate last night?" he asked, making both sets of eyes turn to me.

"No one," I said quickly.

"You don't have to protect him," Heather said.

Cole was clearly very lost with the conversation as his eyes were darting back and forth between the
three of us. He finally landed on me with a smile. "Hey, Alex. Girl you look rough. Long night with Eric?" he asked me.

Did I really look that bad? I'd seen myself in the mirror this morning and so I knew that I didn't look the best. But I hadn't thought that it was that obvious. His eyes were locked on my own and I looked away. I'd seen the dark circles underneath them from my lack of sleep. I was exhausted and had been up most of the night.


"Sorry," he responded.

It really wasn't that big of a deal. I'd known that I wasn't much of a looker today. Cole's eyes fell to the side and I knew that he felt bad for what he had said. I hadn't meant to make him feel bad, I was just pissed at Eric and myself. "It's fine. Anyways it was no big deal. I said something to piss of Eric and he choked me last night," I told him, making his eyes shooting out of his head.

"That's a big deal," Cole said.

I shrugged my shoulders once more. "It really isn't anything to be concerned with. It was my own damn fault with my big fat mouth," I said softly.

We were interrupted from our conversation when Four finally came into the training room with some of the other Dauntless members. They went over to the far corner of the room, looking like they were setting something up. Eric was here, too. He was standing with two men that looked like trainers. I assumed that they were talking about training, as they were motioning to different ends of the room.

"Oh?" Heather hissed, drawing my attention back to her. She was standing with her hip cocked out to the side and I raised my eyebrows. I had no idea why she had suddenly copped an attitude. "Is that why you have that stupid jacket zipped up all of the way?"

She had spotted the same thing that Eric had spotted. It was stupid of me to be wearing it, but I wasn't really in the mood to show them all what was underneath. In the mirror, while I had been brushing my teeth, I had seen the nearly black bruises that made a perfect ring around my throat. I had my jacket on and all the way up, unlike everyone else. I'd been hoping that no one would say anything.

"Come on, Alex, we aren't stupid. It's like eighty degrees down here and everyone else is in their tank tops. Everyone except for you," she said.

Shaking my head at her, I pulled away from my friends and headed to stand a little closer to Four. Maybe they would leave me alone if we were standing near one of our trainers. Our main trainer, that was. Eric was standing with him and I scowled. I had been hoping that once they had everything set up, it would just be Four training us today. But it appeared that he would be staying. Heather, Buck, and Cole followed me a moment later.

"Walking away won't change anything," Heather said.

It was no wonder that she had scored Candor on her Aptitude Test. She was very obviously one at heart. "Guys, drop it. I don't want to talk about it anymore," I hissed at them.

Cole and Buck looked like they felt bad for pushing me, but Heather looked completely unimpressed by my nonchalant attitude. She reminded me of Iris in that way. Neither one of them wanted to take my shit. Iris never had and I was positive that Heather wouldn't either.
"And I have this damn jacket on because I feel like it. I'm always cold and there's no need for Colt to see anything more than he already has," I snapped.

It looked like Heather was about to say something back to me, but before she could, she shut her mouth and motioned for me to turn around. I noticed that she had paled a little bit. I followed her line of sight and groaned when I saw that Eric was standing directly behind me. So was everyone else. They must have been waiting for us to be quiet so that Four could talk. Not that either one of us had noticed.

Of course Eric could have called both of us out. But, no, he would only call me out. "Something you'd like to share with the rest of the initiates, Softie?" he asked me with a little sneer. "Something that's more important than the instruction that Four is trying to give you?"

Yes. You're an asshole. "No," I said, not in the mood to get into it with him.

"I didn't think so," he snarled.

Four silently motioned Eric back to him. I was rather surprised that, for once, Eric listened to someone else. He didn't seem like the type to listen to anyone. In the background I could hear a man yelling orders and plenty of muffled conversations. We must have been closer to the Pit than I thought that we were.

Four cleared his throat and began speaking. "There are two stages of training. The first is physical. Push your bodies to the breaking point and you'll master the methods of combat." I had been expecting that. "The second is mental. Again, breaking point. You'll face your worst fears and conquer them unless they get you first." That wasn't something that I liked to hear. I wasn't sure what I was afraid of and I didn't think that I wanted to find out. "You'll be trained separately from the Dauntless-born, but you'll be ranked together. After initiations, rankings will determine what jobs you move into. Leadership, guarding the fence, or keeping the Factionless from killing each other. The rankings will also determine who gets cut."

And that was where I stopped understanding what he meant. Until then I had only been half-listening. But right when Four had said that, my eyes had shot up. So did everyone else that had only been half-listening. What the hell did getting cut mean? Every other transfer was giving the same look, wondering what Four was talking about. Heather was looking over at me, wondering if I knew what he was talking about. I shrugged my shoulders and looked back at Four.

"What do you mean, cut?" Jade finally asked.

For the first time since I had met her, I actually wanted to thank her. I was glad that someone had asked the question. I had been thinking about asking myself, but I didn't want Eric raking me over the coals for asking a question. "At the end of each stage of training, the lowest-ranking Initiates will be leaving us," Eric explained to her.

My eyebrows shot up as I thought about what he was insinuating. There were a few things that I could imagine he was talking about, but I wasn't sure that I liked any of them. Eric had a cold grin on his face and goosebumps rose on my arms. I didn't like the look that he had on his face. He was too pleased with himself. And I noticed that his eyes were lingering on me. He clearly thought that I wouldn't do well here.

I'll show you. "To do what?" Cole asked.

If I'd thought that Eric would be irritated by people asking questions, I was dead wrong. Glancing over at Eric, I saw that he looked genuinely pleased that someone had asked. It seemed like this was
the one thing that he didn't mind questions being asked about. I knew that it meant something bad was coming. It was obvious by the way that Four and Eric were staring at us. Plus I figured that bad news was the only kind of news that Eric would want to deliver.

"There's no going home to your families, so you'd live with the Factionless," Eric said carelessly.

My legs gave a sharp quiver. Did he just say that we would be Factionless? I felt a hand grab onto me and I knew immediately that it was Heather. I wasn't shocked that she was worried. I was worried too, but Eric was looking at me and I didn't want to look scared that I might not make it here. I would. I could manage.

His gaze was still locked on me. "I wouldn't worry, some of you will fit in with the Factionless just fine. Might work out even better for some of you than your home Factions," Eric hissed, clearly aiming the hit at me.

Asshole. I scoffed and shook my head at him. Even though it felt like he was speaking directly to me, Eric turned away from me and didn't look back as the news finally sank into everyone standing around. In the meantime, I was still boiling over his words. He was such an ass. I didn't belong in Amity and I sure as hell didn't belong as Factionless either.

"Why didn't we know that?" Heather hissed at Eric, clearly angry that she had not been told that transferring to Dauntless meant that there a potential to end up Factionless.

Of course, that was a chance that we took in any of the Factions. It wasn't just here in Dauntless. It happened everywhere. If you didn't make it through initiation in any of the Factions, you went to the Factionless. But as far as I knew, none of the other factions would kick you out in the middle of initiation just because you weren't at the top of the initiation class.

"It's a new rule," Eric said, like he couldn't have cared less that we were all worrying over our spots here in Dauntless. He probably didn't.

Jade scoffed at the leader and I noticed that Eric turned an angry glare on her. He looked almost as angry as he had last night. Almost. I was pretty sure that he wouldn't physically harm Jade right now. Not with everyone watching. He should have though. She hadn't really called for it, but it would have been funny. To me, at least.

"A new rule? Somebody should have told us that," she snapped.

Like I had been expecting, Eric stormed up to Jade. She shrank back a little bit and I smirked. Even I hadn't shrank back that far when Eric had confronted me. Except for last night, but that had been different. I'd said something that would have justified him ending my life.

"Why? Would you have chosen differently? Out of fear?" he hissed at her. Jade said nothing. That was probably the wise choice. I couldn't imagine the look on his face if she had told him yes. "I mean, if that's the case, you might as well get out now. If you're really one of us, it won't matter to you that you might fail." I hated to say it but he was right. It didn't matter that I had a chance to end up Factionless. I knew that I wouldn't. I would make it here. I had to. "You chose us. Now we get to choose you," he said darkly, his eyes lingering on me for a moment.

The room was silent for a minute and I took a breath in. We were all incredibly tense over what we'd just learned. That was quite the shocking revelation that we had just gotten. But I was glad that they had told us. At least now we knew what the stakes were. Now I would be trying ten times harder. They would be watching us and I had to look impressive. Especially to Eric. I knew that he would have a huge say on who stayed in Dauntless and who went.
Right now I imagined that he wanted me gone. "Alright initiates, normally we start with gun training but we are going to start with something different today," Four said, snapping me out of my thoughts. "First off we want to get your bodies to the point where you will be able to tolerate the fighting that you will start in a few days' time. So be ready." Would I ever be able to fight another initiate? "In the meantime, you'll be running drills. Calisthenics and the likes."

Sounded fair to me. It was good training for the eventual fight. Although the thought of fighting another initiate meant that I had to be prepared. A loss could dock some serious points from my ranking. Hopefully I would get paired with someone on the smaller side. Raven or Skylar would be nice. They were about the closest to my size. It wasn't that I doubted my own abilities, I just wanted to make sure that the first fight that I was in, I won. But I was sure that everyone felt that way.

"We're feeling a little generous today so we have let up different stations. You get to choose what you want to do. But by lunch time you will have had to do everything. You have different options of what to work on. We have upper body, mid body, and lower body. You will also have the running track that you are expected to use. Ignore the punching bags and mats. We will get to those after lunch. There will also be basic sparring when you get back," Eric said, making nearly everyone groaned. The last thing that we wanted was to have to spar after working out all morning. "Four and I will be assisting initiates there. Sparring is not an option. Get to work!"

His sudden shout sent everyone into a sudden panic. No one wanted to hang around and make Four or Eric mad. Not when we would have to spar later. I sighed and turned towards the rest of the training room. That was just fantastic. We had to spar but we had to spar with either Four or Eric. I was confident that Four would only make it hard for me to walk, but I was sure that Eric would be dead set on maiming me.

I walked over to Heather and hung my head. "Great. Just what I wanted. Eric being allowed to nearly kill me after last night," I told her.

She sighed and put her arm around me. "They can't kill us. Can they?" she asked, sounding a little concerned.

"Do you think that Eric would care?" I asked her.

"He hates you, but he isn't going to kill you," Heather said.

Was he going to kill me? Yes. "Okay, it's official. Today is the day that I'm going to die. You can have my points," I said with a little snort.

We both laughed at my wording. She was a good person. Better than most of the people that I had ever met in Amity. "You aren't going to die today. I'll go with you to all of the stations and during the sparring we can split between Four and Eric," she told me.

"What?" I asked.

She looked at me like I was the most moronic person that she'd ever met. "I'll make sure to take Eric," she said. My mouth nearly fell open. Had she just offered to be beaten to death to let me avoid him? It was official. She was the best friend ever.

"You're an angel," I cried, wrapping my arms around her shoulders.

She laughed and gently peeled me off of her. "Yeah, you better love me," she snorted.

"I do!" I chirped happily.
We were both laughing softly as I tried to grab her for another hug. She had no idea how much that meant to me. Even though I was sure that one day I would have to deal with fighting Eric, I was glad to be able to put it off one more day. Eric turned to glare at us, considering that we weren't doing anything productive, and I let go of her, pushing her towards the upper body section. I didn't want to get chewed out by Eric right now. Not after everything.

Behind us I could tell that Eric was still watching me closely. "Well not to worry, that won't be until after lunch. Where should we go first?" I asked her, as the two of us walked through the training room.

"It all looks terrible," she said.

We would be walking around forever so I decided to stop at the closest station. Upper body. Great. I knew that it would be my weakest area. "Might as well start on upper body, right?" I asked.

"Sounds like fun," she snorted. She was clearly just as excited about this as I was.

"What the hell?" I asked as I saw what we were supposed to be doing.

There was a bar that was hanging up in the air. It was held up by two bars on the side. What were we supposed to do with it? I looked at the instructional pictures and groaned. Now I knew what this thing was. I used to see some boys do this in Amity. But they would always use the tree branches.

"Pull ups. I've never even done one of them and they expect us to do twenty," I said, reading the board next to the bar.

Dante came up to my side and shook his head at me. "I don't think you guys read the instructions quite well enough. Look again," he said. I glanced over at the instructional sign. My heart dropped into my stomach when I read it over. "We have to put weights on us too. Apparently it depends on how much we weigh. We have to put on a portion of our body weight. Looks like it's about twenty percent of our body weight."

Twenty percent of our body weight attached to us? That was a lot for people that had never done this before. I weighed about one hundred and twenty pounds. It was certainly less than Heather and Dante weighed but it was all relative. They had more muscle than I did. We'd all thought that they would be starting us slowly. I guessed that it was a foolish thought. This was Dauntless and they did everything quickly.

"Twenty four pounds for me. Great," I groaned.

It could have been worse, but that didn't mean that I wanted to do it. I grabbed the weights from the rack and a belt to hold them, hooking it around my waist. Automatically I felt awkwardly heavy and began to lean to the side. It was digging into the skin on my hips, hurting pretty badly. I wasn't even sure if I was going to be able to do one. Plus there was the awkward fact that I almost wasn't tall enough to be able to grab the bar. I would have to jump to reach it.

Heather and Dante were still staring at the bar. Dante began to hook it onto ourselves. "I can tell that by lunch we are going to hate ourselves," I groaned.

"Good luck, ladies," Dante said.

"Welcome to Dauntless," Heather groaned.

They both looked to be pretty weighed down by the added weight. Dante was strapping on almost forty pounds and Heather was putting around thirty pounds. I felt horrible for them both. Even
though they were bigger than me, that was a lot of weight for them. I stood in front of my bar, acutely aware that Eric was watching my every movement. He had his arms crossed over his chest, his brow quirked. I jumped up towards the bar, missing by less than an inch. My hands scraped the bars and I hissed as a piece of skin was torn off. Shit that hurt.

Unable to catch myself, I hit the mat roughly and nearly stumbled over onto my back. I heard a snort behind me and shook my head. I knew that it was Eric laughing. He must have thought that my failure was funny. Asshole. Dante looked like he was about to release his bar and check on me but I shook my head. I could do this. If nothing else, to prove to Eric that I could. Taking another deep breath, I jumped back up. This time I managed to catch myself on the bar, but it was hopeless. I fell right back off.

The weight was too heavy to keep me upright. Looking to my right, I saw that Heather and Skylar were having about the same amount of luck as I was. Jade was there too and she seemed to be doing only a little better than me. She was at least getting half of the up motion done. Still, it bothered me. Eric had thought that I would be worse than everyone but Raven and Skylar, and so far I was proving him right. Taking in a deep breath and blocking out any intrusive thoughts of the leader, I jumped back up. Like last time, I caught myself on the bar. I let out a shaky breath as I hung there. It was almost impossible to pull myself up. Heather was hanging too, currently working on her second pull up. As she dropped off of her bar, I forced myself upwards. My arms weren't nearly as strong as I had thought that they would be. I thought that I was reasonably strong. Apparently not. Halfway up the lift, my arms gave out and I went tumbling onto the mat. Eric laughed loudly behind me and Four walked up to give me a hand. I batted him away from me, determined to do it myself.

Four nodded at me, looking the tiniest but impressed. Not that I had fallen - that was utterly embarrassing - but because I was determined to do this on my own. I didn't need a hand back up to my feet. It wasn't that hard. I supposed that it was very Dauntless, falling down and pushing myself back up. For a fourth time I hopped up onto the bar, my arms burning. At least it was getting easier to hang there.

Struggling with every bit, sweat dripping down my brow, I forced myself up the first lift. It took well over thirty seconds for me to manage to complete it. Once I had my chin up to the bar I dropped off of it. I hit the mats roughly, my feet unable to take the sudden weight, and dropped down to my knees. It was almost embarrassing, but I knew that Jade and Skylar were yet to get their first full ones in and Heather was still only on her second. Even Dante and Buck seemed to be having a hard time. For nearly half an hour I fought with the pull ups. It seemed that everyone agreed that this was the hardest thing that we would be doing for the day. Most of us had never done anything like a pull up. As I fell from my last pull up, nearly crashing back into the ground, I was sure that my arms would fall off. I had done somewhere between one to two pull ups at a time before stopping and resting for a moment. It probably put a lot of strain on my arms and legs but I didn't care. I couldn't hold myself all at once.

Hopefully in a matter of weeks I would be able to. I waited for Heather to finish her round and nodded at her once she fell off. She looked even worse than me, but I knew that it was because she had been given more weight to pull up. For a moment I was jealous of Skylar. She had only had to apply twenty pounds. It wasn't a lot but it was still four less pounds than I'd had. That made a big difference.

Not ready to speak yet, as my lungs were still burning from exhaustion, Heather and I made a silent agreement to head over to the pushups. This was one thing that I had done before. Not very often, but I was no stranger to the proper form and technique. So I got down and began to count down. My
arms were burning but I knew that the faster we got done with the arm exercises, the faster we would be able to do something different. My legs or abs; anything. The target here was fifty pushups in standard form and twenty with alternating legs. That was not something that I had done.

To my credit, and Heather's, we were both much better at the pushups. I did about five at a time - leaning on my knees to rest - while she did about ten. She was better, but I was steadier. While she rocked back and forth, I was completely steady. It slowed me down significantly. But it was much better than the pull ups that everyone seemed to be having a problem with. I sighed as I finished the normal pushups and moved to the alternating legs.

They were much harder than the normal ones. About every other attempt, I slipped and fell onto my stomach, a few times hitting my chin on the ground. I'd heard Eric and a few other Dauntless members laughing at my fall. So I grit my teeth and continued to work, pushing myself to work even harder. But after nearly another half an hour, I was finally done with them. As I glanced up at the clock, I groaned. There were another three hours before we would be done with this.

Moving on to the free weights, I nearly smiled. They looked heavenly compared to the last two drills. There were plenty of things that I had seen and hadn't seen. There was the dumbbell press, where I was slightly afraid the weights would fall on me. I had been forced to lift forty pounds, nearly dropping it on my neck a few times. Thankfully a member was spotting us. There were also the free handed weights, which felt like they were tearing huge holes in my arms. After spending almost another half hour with the weights, I finally finished my drills. Heather had finished a few minutes before me and was waiting.

She had a cup of water in her hands and handed it to me. "Thanks," I said.

My breaths were still coming in short pants as the sweat poured off of my face in droves. At least everyone else looked the same. I downed the water practically in one gulp. It turned out to not be such a good idea as I nearly threw it up. Clearly it was not wise to take a ton of water at a time. At least, not after a workout like that. Some of the water was pouring down my chin, but I hardly noticed. It just mixed in with the sweat. I pulled my jacket away from my body a few times, fanning myself off.

"Okay, I say it's time for something polar opposite," I said, shocking myself at how hoarse my voice was.

"Agreed."

"Maybe we should do the leg workouts? I mean, it doesn't say how fast we have to run, it just says that we have to run for a certain time. We at least can have the energy for the leg workouts," I said pathetically.

I was panting heavily and I nearly fell onto Dante as he walked up to us. He patted me on the shoulder and I groaned, letting my weight fall onto him. He wrapped his arm around my waist, not looking much better than us. He let me stay there for a few moments until we both began to heat up. He pushed me off of him gently and I moved away, resting my hands on my knees. I had just needed a minute to take a breather.

"Sounds like a plan to me. Come on," Heather said, motioning for Dante and I to follow her.

Taking a few steps, I began to follow her but I turned back as I saw that Dante wasn't with us. "Actually guys, I think I'm gonna do core now. I'll see you guys at lunch," he said.

We both nodded at him and, without saying a word to each other, Heather and I went to work on the
first of the leg workouts. It was something that I had heard of. Lunges. It almost sounded like fun. But as it turned out, I was completely wrong. The more that I did them, the harder it became to jump back up. My legs were burning with each set. For some horrible reason we were forced to do thirty at a time. By the twentieth, I was nearly toppling over with each movement.

My legs were shaking and a few times my legs had given out. My knees also were hitting the ground every once in a while, forcing me to start that part of the work out. God, please kill me now. I was pretty sure that I was actually dying. This was death. I was going to be the first initiate to die. Well, it looked like Raven was on her way out too. Once I was done, I collapsed onto the mat, sweat spreading out in pools around me.

I groaned loudly at the disgusting pool of sweat around me and jumped up from my spot. My legs shook slightly as I stood back up on them, but I forced myself to keep my balance. I would look pathetic if I fell now. I wasn't even doing anything. Eric was watching me and I wiped the sweat off of my face, putting a snarl on my lips. I was going to do this. He wasn't going to make me out to be some pathetic Amity.

Forcing myself to get over the pain that was protesting every movement, I went to the next work out. It was squats. One more thing that would make my legs even more pathetic. At least my ass would look damn good in a few weeks. I'd be sure to rub that in Eric's face once I was a member. As I did the tenth of the fifty squats that we were supposed to be doing, I forced my legs to stop shaking.

Like he had been for most of the day, Eric was watching me with a raised eyebrow, clearly expecting me to fall. I merely began to laugh and forced the pain down. It hurt like hell and I was sure that I was going to pull something at this rate but I refused to stop. I was better than him. He was not going to make me feel like a failure. Not today.

Forcing myself to stand up as I finished the fiftieth squat, I got ready for the next leg killer. We were learning kicks. I moved over towards the punching bags. Trainers were there, demonstrating each movement, and I watched carefully. The first was a kick to the side, one that if demonstrated correctly, would break a rib. Or six. I did as shown, twenty times on each side. Of course the trainer had said that my kicks weren't strong enough and had ordered me to do twenty more. I had done them, grumbling irritably the entire time.

The next kicks had been aimed to the head. Naturally, I had imagined that it was Eric's head I was pounding in. Twenty on each side, as hard as possible. I was sure that I was going to knock the head off of the dummy. The trainer had been thoroughly impressed with that. We were also taught leg sweeps and kicks that would break shins. Not to mention defensive movements that involved blocking with our legs. By the end of that demonstration I was sure that I had more bruises on me than my assailant would have had. They were already blue; I wondered how black they would be in the morning.

Once I was done with the kicking demonstration I moved over to the leg lift. I was slightly impressed with how high I was able to lift my leg. Without thinking about it, my leg went nearly vertical. It was something that I had gotten from Amity. We had always liked to do splits and walkovers. They were stupid flexibility things that we were always doing to try and outshine each other. It was nice to see that it had carried over into adulthood. I noticed that Eric was watching me, his eyes slightly darker than normal. I blushed deeply, well-aware of what he was thinking. It made it even worse that I was thinking the same thing.

Heather whistled to me playfully as I did the leg lifts and I made it a point to finish them off quickly. I was done with them before ten minutes were up and I moved to the other side of the mats, as far from Eric as I could get. I didn't want him looking at me like that. The jump squats were next. They
were just one more thing that nearly made me fall. They were doing their job. Time after time with the squats, I fell onto the mat. My legs were screaming at me to stop but I knew that I couldn't. For as long as I could, I had to keep going. So I continued, my legs burning with protest by the time that I had stopped.

The hip bridge was next and I grinned. That was something that I could do. I put my legs into the half planked form and raised my hips, making it a point to place my torso towards Eric and the initiates. Colt was watching me do my lifts and I grimaced. At least with Eric I could have a little bit of fun imaging things. Not that I would ever admit it out loud. Colt, on the other hand, made my skin crawl. The last thing that I wanted to think about was doing some workouts with him.

Finishing up the hip bridges, I headed over to the core section, joined by Heather a few moments after. We were both red in the face and out of breath, not willing to talk. But that was the way that everyone was. It was the first time that I had heard every initiate, even Colt, silent. People were just doing their work outs, hoping that Four and Eric would leave them alone. I let out a deep breath as I looked over to what my first punishment on my midsection would be.

It was another thing that I had done before. We were supposed to do sit ups. Those weren't anything too bad. Heather and I exchanged turns holding each other's legs and I found that together we hadn't taken more than fifteen minutes. Even when it had been fifty each.

We moved on from the sit ups without another word, heading to the crunches. We kept in pace together, doing fifty each. My breath was coming in short wheezes but I refused to stop. I knew that both trainers were watching me, waiting for me to give out. But there was no way in hell. I felt my body wanting desperately to give out. Wanting nothing more than to stop and never move again. But I couldn't. There were only a few things that I still had to do before getting the break for lunch. I could do this.

With my crunches done, I moved on to the next stage. It was now torso twists. Moving into a half sit up motion, I grabbed the fifteen pound ball and began to twist it across my torso. I was moving fast, hoping to get my fifty reps over with. Before I could finish, Four saw me and yelled at me to do it once more. Slower this time. I wanted nothing more than to curse him out or flip him off or cheat, but he sat with me, watching and counting. I followed his count, dripping sweat and shaking pathetically by the end. But I had made it. My reps were done and Four had left me to finish off the last core exercise by myself.

The last workout was a plank. I had seen a few men doing it yesterday. They were all trying to outdo each other. I knew for a fact that it was hard. They had all been watching each other, dripping sweat. It was a thirty second plank. Maybe this would be easy. As it turned out, a thirty second plank was harder than it looked. I failed three times before finally succeeding. Even then I had been about to fall over. My arms were shaking, my core felt like it was about to rip in half, and my legs were like jelly. By the time that I had finished, there was a pool of sweat on the mat below me that I had fallen into. I knew that I would need a good shower after this.

I glanced over towards Heather, who had finished her plank a few minutes earlier, and nodded to her. Like before, I really didn't have the energy to tell her that I was ready for the run. My heart was pounding in my chest as I moved towards the track. The two of us headed over towards the track as I noticed that Jade was finishing up her run. She stopped right in front of us, dropping to the ground and clutching her stomach. I didn't blame her for the momentary cease in movement. She sat there for a moment before being scared off by Four, who was yelling at her to get back to work. I shook my head and sighed, glancing at the board. The run time was one hour. I was pretty sure that tears were about to come out. One hour? They had to be kidding. Not getting a kidding vibe
from Four, though, I got down into a duck and let the trainer count me down.

Right as he hit one, I took off like a bullet. It wasn't until I'd even made it two laps though before I had to slow down to a steady jog. I glanced up at the clock and saw that it was a little bit past eleven. Right after I was done with the stupid run it would be time for us to head over to lunch. Thank God. I was pretty sure that my body was about to fall into a million pieces. To Heather's credit, she was running pretty fast, but she also has much longer legs than I did. She looked like she was debating slowing down for me but I shook my head at her.

No point in slowing down just to be miserable next to each other. We could be miserable near each other. Plus she would get yelled at for running slower than she could. "I think you're running a little too slow initiate," Eric called from next to me.

He was now running with me, startling me. I had been so caught up in my own thoughts that I had forgotten that he would even be there. "Don't you have something else to be doing?" I asked him.

"Training the initiates. That's what I'm doing. Run faster," he warned.

As the two of us ran across the track I noticed that there were people moving even slower than I was. "There are people running slower than me," I growled.

"Someone else will get to them. Speed up," he hissed at me.

Desperate to get away from him, I pushed myself a little more. I wanted nothing more than to trip him, but I knew that it wouldn't go over very well. So instead I picked up the pace a bit, knowing fully well that it was hardly anything more than I had been doing. And Eric noticed that, too.

"Come on now, it's just a run. You haven't even started anything hard yet," Eric said and I scowled. This was hard as hell. "You haven't even fought anyone yet. You should have stayed in Amity.

That was where I drew the line. Stopping short, I nearly tripped Jax, who had been running directly behind me. I felt a little bit bad that I had screwed him up, but I was so focused on Eric that I couldn't say anything. My legs shook at the sudden stop of movement and I forced myself to stand upright.

"What the hell do you want from me, Eric?" I snapped at him. He looked furious that I had spoken to him like that. "I'm exhausted, I've never done anything like this. None of us have. Everyone else is the same way that I am but you're only calling me out for it." I motioned to the other twelve exhausted initiates. "Leave me the hell alone. I'm sorry for what I said last night but that doesn't give you a right to bully me the way that you have been."

"Watch the way that you speak to me," he warned me lowly.

"If you'd leave me alone, I wouldn't speak to you like that."

"You don't get to make the rules. You do what I say, Softie. If I decide that you're running too slow, I'll tell you. And when I decide that they're running too slow, I'll tell them. Until that moment comes, run faster. It'll be good training for the Factionless district," he teased.

Nothing would have made me happier than tearing out his eyebrow piercing. "I have the same chances of making it here as anyone else. Sorry about last night. Leave me alone," I sneered.

Eric growled deeply and took a step towards me. I thought that he might hit me and for a moment I actually welcomed it. I didn't want to have to do this anymore. A short coma might be nice. "I think that you mistake my actions, Softie. I'm not here because of what you said to me last night. That was nothing."

I raised my eyebrows. It hadn't seemed like nothing last night. "I'm here because of what
you are. You're trying to be something that you're not," he said.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Someone that comes here thinking that you are something you aren't. You're nothing but Amity, inside and out. You always will be," he said. I sneered at him. "I've seen you struggling at every station. Even the Stiff is better than that."

I hated to admit it, but that actually hurt. I liked Skylar but I knew that I was better than her. I had to be better than her. "What the hell is your problem, Eric?" I snapped, making a few heads turn to me.

"Speak to me like that again and I'll crush your skull," he warned, placing his hand on my shoulder. Very unwisely, I batted it away from me and continued on my rant. "I know that what I said to you yesterday was wrong and I'm sorry. I know you say that it doesn't bother you but I know that it does. I didn't mean it. It was stupid," I said softly, hoping that people would look away from me. "Look, I know that I'm not the best person out here and I'm fine with that. I wasn't expecting to be the best by any means. But come on! I'm not pathetic. I'm not an Amity. And I am not your punching bag!"

He looked like he was about to say something but I ignored him. Turning on my heels and starting off into a run, I took in a deep breath. My legs were about to give out but I shook off the feeling. I needed to get away from Eric. "Get back here initiate," Eric said and I ignored him. "You take one more step and I promise that you will be Factionless."

That made me stop. As much as I hated it, Eric did have the power to make me Factionless and I knew that I had to obey him. His sudden comment had drawn attention from all over the room. "Get back to work!" a trainer called in the distance.

Everyone went back to work but I noticed that they were still trying to watch us. "Good, now come back here," he snarled. I walked over to him but kept my distance. "You are nothing more than a Softie and I'll show you. Now get back on that track and run until either your legs break or it's time for lunch."

Crossing my arms over my chest, I popped out a leg, feeling it throb at the sudden movement. "Or what?" I scoffed stupidly.

Eric smirked and leaned into me. He was close enough to snap me like a twig and for a moment I thought that he would. I seemed to get that feeling a lot from him. His head was placed right in front of mine, but high enough that I had to glance up to look into his eyes. One move and he would be able to take me down.

"Or I'll break them for you," he sneered.

There wasn't a doubt in my mind that told me that Eric wouldn't go through with his threat. My blood ran cold as he backed away from me and motioned for me to run once more. It was creepy when people said things like that, but it made it that much worse that I knew that Eric would break them. He'd probably smile while doing it.

Not wanting to test his resolve, I broke back into a run, ignoring the way that my legs and back protested. I continued to run as fast as I could, praying that we were getting close to noon so that I could finally get lunch and get the hell away from Eric. I saw Heather's brown hair come up from behind me and I nodded at her.

"What was that all about, Alex?" she asked me.
"Eric is being an ass," I answered shortly.

She rolled her eyes. "You know, I've always known that Amity are considered to be a little brainless but I didn't think that they were suicidal too," she scoffed.

Shaking my head at her, I had to resist stopping and glaring at her. "I'm not suicidal Heather," I said, noticing that Colt had stopped running to watch the two of us. "What the hell are you looking at?"

"Dead girl running," Colt laughed.

"Move it, initiate!" Eric snapped at Colt, effectively making him turn from me and continue running.

His gaze turned onto me and I sped up before he could say anything else. "I'm so sick of him. We've been here for a day and I already want to kill him. I mean I've never met someone as rude or pompous as him. He thinks that he can just push me around and I'll just take it. I'm not his fucking play toy!" I shouted. Quieting down I took a few deep breaths and slowed my pace. "I'm serious about this place and he thinks that I'm just a joke."

Before I knew it, Four came running up on my other side and I slowed for him. He looked tired. Of course, I could guarantee that I was worse off than him. Not that I knew what he'd been doing this entire time. Knowing this was a private issue, Heather sped up and sprinted off, leaving Four and I behind her.

"Here's a hint. Stop telling him off and stop trying to act like you're as tough as him," he told me. "You aren't. Eric could kill you, initiate." I rolled my eyes. Why was it so hard to call me by my name? "He knows it and he knows that you know too. You want to make it here, just let Eric think that you're done fighting him."

Looking at Four like he had lost his mind, I laughed under my breath. He was essentially telling me to let Eric win. He was telling me to stop fighting back with Eric and take all of his beatings. "That's letting him win," I pointed out.

"That's letting him think that he won," Four said.

There were plenty of things that I was willing to do to make it in Dauntless, but being Eric's chew toy was not one of them. "You're serious?" I asked Four.

He merely stared at me with a look that told me that he wasn't kidding. I had to be sure that I knew what he meant. "Do I look like I'm kidding?" he asked me.

Not particularly. He looked completely serious. "Nope," I said.

"Yes, I'm serious. Stop fighting Eric. Take initiation seriously, stop joking around, and stop trying to act tough," he told me. But I loved acting differently from the way that I'd ever acted in Amity. I loved getting the freedom. Maybe Four was right though. Maybe I was taking it too far. With Eric at least. "Be tough and I guarantee that he'll ease up on you. You just have to have a bigger resolve than him. He's got a strong one but it isn't impossible to beat him."

It sounded like he knew that from experience. Part of me was actually glad that he had said that. It was something that I needed to hear after the day that I'd already had. He actually could be a good guy when he wanted to be. Now it would just be nice if Eric could be that way too.

"Thanks Four. You know, you might not be half of the stick in the mud that I thought that you were," I joked.
Four glared at me and I knew that I had fucked up by going back and doing the same thing that I had just been told not to do. I sighed and shook my head apologetically at Four. "That's exactly what I mean," he told me. Damn me. "Keep running, initiate."

Picking my feet up, I continued to run as I glanced up at the clock. It was just under ten minutes until it was time to go to lunch and I laughed. That was the break that I needed. Putting on a last burst of speed I decided to spend my last ten minutes with a bang. I sprinted past Heather, who yelled after me and Colt, who I debated on shoving. I ran past Eric and debated on flipping him the bird, but I kept that urge to myself. He was watching me with a raised eyebrow and I smiled. I was going to make sure that Eric knew that I wasn't going to lay down and die.

"Initiates!" Four yelled. I turned back to him, grinding to a halt. Everyone else stopped what they were doing and looked at our trainer. "It's time to break for the lunch." Everyone let out laughs and yells. I fell to the ground, Heather dropping next to me. Everyone else dropped too. "Head to the dining room. You have an hour for lunch and then I expect you all back here for training. You've all done well. This is hard. It's new this year. We are pushing you as far as you can go. You need this break." He was damn right about that one. "When you get back here it will be one on one training with Eric and myself. Alex and Buck, you two will be with us first." I turned to Heather, who gave me a sorry glance. "Eric will help you out, Alex, and Buck, I'll be helping you. The rest of you will go throughout the rest of the week. Go eat."

My stomach dropped to the floor as Eric walked out of the room, giving me a little nod. He had a huge smirk on his face, knowing that this was driving me nuts. Heather looked like she wanted to say something but I shooed her away. I had a bone to pick with Four before I had to go to lunch. I stomped up to the trainer once everyone had gone with my hands on my hips.

"What the hell, Four? Why would you put me with Eric and not you? I thought that we were finally getting on better terms," I snapped at him.

Four glared at me, clearly looking like he was about to explode on me. "You wanted Eric to take you more seriously, this is the perfect opportunity to do it," he said with a little smirk.

"What? By dying?" I hissed.

"Fight with him and prove that you're tougher than he thinks you are. Just do what he tells you," he told me.

He obviously saw that I was not impressed with anything else that he was suggesting. We were both standing there, clearly angry with each other. It seemed like Four thought that I had potential and the fact that I was being a pain in his ass was bothering him. He also seemed to think that my dealings with Eric were petty. They probably were, but that didn't mean that they weren't horrible for me.

So I settled on the childish route. "If I die today, I'm blaming you," I said, before turning and leaving the training room.

Even as I walked I could hear Four let out a little breath. He eventually caught up to me as we both walked down towards the dining room. I thought about last night when I had gotten back. I had actually noticed that Cole was sleeping on the floor and it made sense. There were thirteen initiates and only twelve beds. Until the first of the cuts, not everyone was going to have a bed. At least he hadn't taken my bed. Maybe we would be able to switch off letting him sleep in our beds.

I couldn't imagine that sleeping on the floor and then spending most of the day in training was very fun. I felt bad for Cole. He was so nice and he had given up a bed. As I walked into the dining room I saw that my friends were already sitting down at the table near the center of the dining room. They
had a plate out for me that was loaded with food. It was in between Jax and Cole, Heather and Buck sitting across from them. I took my place and groaned. Everything hurt.

"Okay, Cole, my bed is yours after today," I said.

Everyone laughed at me comment. "Come on, it won't be that bad," Cole said.

I rolled my eyes at him. "It will be that bad. I mean Eric is training me in hand to hand combat and we all know that he's going to come up with some way to kill me. At least I got to get one day of being a Dauntless member before dying," I said.

Everyone else laughed too. They all knew that I wasn't really telling the truth. They knew that I was just being melodramatic. Although that wasn't to say that I wasn't nervous. I really was nervous to have to fight him. It didn't help that I really wanted to get this whole day over with. I did not want to fight Eric today. He wasn't going to take things easy on me.

"Oh stop being so dramatic," Buck told me.

My head snapped over and I turned an angry glare on him. "You see the way that he treats me," I growled.

It was pretty obvious that he actually felt a little bad for what he had said. But I didn't blame him. Everyone was tired. "Alright, he does treat you a little worse than anyone else," Buck admitted.

"A little?" Jet asked.

"A lot," Buck admitted. "But come on. Eric might not be your biggest fan but he isn't going to kill you." I snorted at the thought. "Okay. He might try to injure you, but he would do that to any of us! And it isn't just you. Six other people are going to have to train with him. He can't just take it harder with you than he can with the others."

No way. Eric was going to take it harder on me just because it was me. "He's going to kick her head off her shoulders," Jax said.

"Thanks for that," I muttered.

As everyone laughed at my impending doom, I groaned and dropped onto the table. I was exhausted, nervous for the fight, and every part of my body was killing me. I just wanted to go back to the dorms and take a long hot shower. The sweat and overwhelming heat from the jacket was driving me insane. Plus I really wanted to go out and get some new clothes. Even after showering, we would still have to put the uniforms back on. It was beyond disgusting.

Jade's voice brought me out of my internal complaints. "Well done, Amity," she said.

I turned my head towards her, almost curious at what she wanted. "What are you on about?" I asked.

"Since you just had to flirt with Eric and fuck it up, now he's going to take out his anger with you on the rest of us," she said. "Nice going, Amity."

My eyes narrowed at her and I wanted nothing more than to slam her head down into the table. Or maybe stab out her eyes with my fork. Anything other than sitting here and letting her run her big, fat mouth. Flirt with him? I hated him. He was an arrogant ass that wanted to see me wind up Factionless.

The conversations around the table died so that they could listen in. "Come on, Jade. I get that you
probably got dropped on the head a few times as a child, but are you really that stupid?" I hissed at
her. I couldn't believe that she thought that I was flirting with Eric. I hated him! "In what world
would you think that I'm flirting with Eric?"

She laughed at me and I rolled my eyes. If I ever got the chance to fight her I would not hold back. I
was going to make sure that she got sent to the infirmary. "Come on, Amity. We all see it. Eric's hot.
It's no secret," she told me, making me snort.

"Well done for pointing out the obvious," I said.

For once she was right. "But you're the one that decided to act on it," she continued. I rolled my eyes
at her. There she went, getting everything wrong again. "You can't even flirt properly. Instead of
batting your eyelashes and teasing him, you got all uppity and tried to act tough. It backfired and
now he's taking out the embarrassment that you put onto him, on all of us."

For a moment I thought about it. Was there a chance that he was irritated with me and taking it out
on everyone else? No way. He was just a natural asshole. And I had not flirted with him. I never
would. I turned away from her and looked towards my friends, who were all watching me with a
strange fascination.

"She's really an idiot. It isn't just me, is it?" I asked. They all shook their heads, smiling devious
smiles. "Okay, Candor. I was not, was never, and will never be flirting with Eric. I hate him. I said
something stupid to him last night and he tried to kill me. See?" I pulled down my jacket. The bruises
that were around my neck were nearly black and were in the shape of male hands. Jade's mouth
nearly dropped as did the rest of my friends. I unzipped my jacket let it fall to the side, now that my
secret was out. "Now if that's your version of flirting, that's fine. But it sure as hell isn't mine. Now
leave me the hell alone and get over it. I know you're sad that Eric doesn't pay attention to you."

Before she could say anything or I could tell what kind of look she was giving me, I turned away
from her. I knew that she would be mad for my last comment, but I couldn't have cared less. She was
just a piece of shit girl that wanted to act tough. I really was tough. I'd prove it in time.

Cole looked back across the table and back at me with a little sigh. "She's pissed," he said softly.

Scoffing loudly, I stabbed at the remainder of my food with a knife. My arm screamed with strain
and I groaned. I was going to hate myself in the morning. "She can build a bridge and get over it," I
snapped.

My head was turned towards my food that was sitting, barely touched, on my plate. We were silent
for a while until I finally looked back up. I saw that everyone was watching me with a confused face.
I knew that I was being a terrible bitch to them and I felt bad for it. It wasn't their fault that Jade was
a pain in the ass and Eric was just as asshole.

"Sorry guys, I'm just mad. Of anyone that Eric could have picked a bone with, it had to be me. It
couldn't have been Jade or Colt. Nope, it had to be little old me," I said.

They all nodded sympathetic smiles. The rest of lunch was eaten in silence, not that I minded. It was
actually nice to have peace and quiet where I wasn't busting my ass to impress Eric. It was also nice
to have lunch with people just like me. Not quite Dauntless, but people that were willing to do
anything to become Dauntless. I heard the ringing of a bell and groaned. It meant that we were going
to have to go back to the training room now and I was going to have to deal with a fight with Eric. I
let Jax help me up from the bench as we headed back with everyone else.

Not surprisingly at all, Eric was standing on the mat, watching me with narrowed eyes. This was
"Softie. Get over here," Eric snapped at me. I waved at my friends and went to stand with him. On the very short walk to his mat, I prayed that I would still be alive in five hours. "We're going to go through basic rundowns of certain defensive and offensive moves. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Good. The first thing that you have to do is learn how to block a punch. Keep your arms up in front of your face. One should always stay in front of your eyes, but not blocking your vision, the other in front of your mouth. It protects vital areas. Don't be concerned with your jaw. It's stronger than you think. It can take hits," he told me. I nodded, placing my arms where he said. He moved my arms a few inches and then backed away once more. "Now, make sure that you always block with the broad side of your arm. It's where the muscle and bone is the strongest. You'll take the least amount of damage on that side. Got it?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now I'm going to hit you. Your job is to block it," he told me.

My eyes widened drastically. Yep, this was my last day on Earth. Eric had free reign to hit me. "No. I think I'll pass," I said.

"It wasn't a question. Don't worry, I'll go slowly," he said.

"For some reason, I don't believe you."

Something almost akin to a smile appeared on his face. Bracing myself for the impact, I tightened my core and forced my feet back into the mat. I didn't care what Eric said, I knew that he was going to hit hard. I was shaking slightly, still exhausted from this morning. I saw Eric's fist come at me and I panicked. Unsure of what to do, I held my arm out in front of him, effectively blocking the hit. I knew for a fact that it wasn't nearly as hard as he could hit, but that didn't matter.

My arm was burning and I could already see a dark bruise forming. "Shit! That hurt," I said, cradling my arm. "That was soft huh?" I snapped at Eric, who looked completely unimpressed.

"Yes."

"I knew that you were going to try and kill me today but I didn't think that it would be with one hit," I groaned loudly.

He scoffed at me and shook his head, taking a step back from me. "Get over it, I barely hit you," he said. I rolled my eyes. "If you can't take that, then you are not suited for Dauntless." It effectively halted my complaints. He was right, this would not be the first time that he was going to hit me and I had to get over it. I put my arm back down at my side and Eric nodded. It was still throbbing, but I pushed the pain to the back of my mind. "Now put your arms back up in front of your face. You're going to hit me this time. Somewhere in the midsection," he told me and I grinned.

"See? Now that I can get behind," I said.

His gaze narrowed and I knew that I had to be careful. He'd still hurt me. "This time you make a fist," he told me. Eric rolled his eyes, motioning to my thumb that was tucked into my fist. "Thumb on the outside. You'll break your fingers if you hit me like that." I nodded and corrected my fist. "Now hit me." I swung forward roughly, aiming for his stomach. Eric backed away at the last second though, making me stagger forward.

"What the hell?" I barked.
"You missed," he stated nonchalantly.

Popping my hip out and narrowing my eyes at Eric, I scoffed. He was completely useless. I took a deep breath, trying to bury my embarrassment and shake off the burn that was on my cheeks. I was sure that I wasn't the first initiate to miss hitting Eric. "Thank you, Eric. I see that I missed. You know, I might be a little more observant than you think that I am," I snapped.

He walked up to me and I took in a deep breath. Here in training I knew that he could really hit me. It wouldn't even have to look like an accident. He would just say that we were fighting. "Watch what happens if you keep speaking to me like that. I will hit you as hard as I can next time. And you won't like that," he told me.

"I don't doubt that," I muttered.

"Your target isn't going to stand still, Softie. Now try it again. We are going to do it until you can hit me," he told me. Before I could attack him again, he gave me some last-minute advice. "Watch where I'm watching. Chances are, wherever an opponent is looking on you, they're thinking of attacking next. Keep that in mind."

There he was, actually being useful. As I got back into fighting position - while Eric looked like he was bracing himself to move at any moment - I thought about his direction. Look somewhere other than where I intend to hit. And that was what I did. I looked to his stomach and swung out, hitting for his chest. He had seen the blow coming though, and had stepped back in time. I groaned and moved forward once more, swinging for his chest. Once more, he saw it coming. Without taking a break, I aimed for a third time. This time I went to hit his chest, which he had seen coming, and broke away at the last second, hitting him square in the shoulder.

It did almost nothing to him, not even making him flinch, but I had still hit him. "Hey, I did it!" I chirped.

Eric looked like he wanted to hit me back and I desperately hoped that he wouldn't. "Not awful. But definitely not good. You've got a long way to go, Softie," he told me and I scowled. I knew that it hadn't been much, but I had still managed to hit him. "But you might get there. Eventually. With plenty more hours of practice."

Laughing slightly, I shook my head. It was almost like Eric was going to give me a compliment. Almost. But we were still a long ways off from that happening. "Wow, I think that was as close to a compliment as I'm ever going to get from you," I said with a grin.

"You will never get a compliment from me," he said.

"I doubt that. I have to say, it was absolutely marvelous to hear. Is there a chance of it ever happening again?" I asked.

"No."

Shrugging my shoulders, I stepped backwards on the mat. "Okay, fine. Baby steps. You know, one day you'll actually find me funny. They all do," I said with a little lilt in my voice.

Eric shook his head at me and I rolled my eyes. He had no sense of humor. Not unless it involved belittling me or actually causing bodily harm to me. Maybe he would become good friends with Colt. I was sure that the two of them at least had that in common.

"I'm sure," Eric said. I smiled, thinking that maybe we were making some progress. "Keep going initiate. You aren't nearly done." One step forward and two steps back seemed to be Eric's motto.
"I'm not stopping until one of us is bleeding."

Well that doesn't sound fun. My skin crawled at the knowledge that Eric really wouldn't stop until one of us was bleeding. And I knew for a fact that it would be me. There was no doubt in my mind that Eric was going to make the two of us go until I was up in the infirmary. Probably for a few weeks, at least.

So I was going to put off that fight. "Initiate. There's that damn word again," I said, hoping to keep him at bay for a few minutes. I was nervous to actually do drills with Eric. "How do you keep us all separate?"

Eric was shaking his head at me, his arms crossed over his chest. "Stop talking," he snapped.

But I was not going to stop talking. Not for a little while. "Oh, and as for the bleeding, that's a charming picture. Maybe you should have been a poet instead of a leader. I might have read something of yours. I'm cracking you, I can see it," I said, smiling brightly.

He still looked to be completely bored with me. My stalling would probably only last for that much longer. Faster than I had thought that he was capable of, Eric stormed over to me and picked me up by the front of my tank top, throwing me backwards. I shot back a few feet and landed down onto the mat. My head connected with the surprisingly hard mat and I groaned.

"Damn it. Okay fine, I'll shut up," I said softly.

Stumbling back to my feet weakly, I realized that most eyes were on me. Heather looked like she felt terrible for me. I felt terrible for me too. Dante looked like he wanted nothing more than to smash Eric's teeth in and Cole looked like he was debating on taking my place. Even Buck had stopped to watch me, but he was quickly forced back to his lesson with one bark from Four. I sighed and looked back to Eric.

He was smart enough to know that I wasn't going to mess with him anymore. I really didn't want him to end up hurting me. Actually hurting me, not just surprising me. He stood across the mat from me and went into a long explanation about the different types of drills that we would be doing. They were all fighting techniques.

We started with the arms. Eric taught me how to block hits to the face and midsection, while also teaching me to hit back correctly. Multiple times he had caught me leaving some part of myself open, and was quick to physically demonstrate why I shouldn't do that. One of his harder hits had sent me flying out of the ring, landing roughly on the cement. It hadn't really hurt, it had just more stunned me than anything else.

Although I did limp for a while afterwards. I had gotten back up and nodded at him to continue. It was the first time I'd seen him look surprised. After that, we had moved to legs. He had taught me different kinds of kicks and had made sure to teach me to use my flexibility to my advantage. We both knew that other initiates wouldn't be able to move out of holds like I could.

It quickly became obvious that one of his favorite things to do was grab me by my leg, showing me that I had done the move wrong, and throwing me as hard as he could. At least ten times now, I had been launched out of the ring. In the meantime, Four was showing Buck the same moves, but he had only been tossed out of their mat once. I felt pathetic. Standing back up, I made it a point to not let Eric keep throwing me out of the ring. It worked surprisingly well. He was still tripping and throwing me, but I wasn't going sprawling across the training room anymore.

Once Eric had decided that we had done enough of leg training, we had moved to getting out of
holds. Needless to say, even after an hour of that, I was hopeless when it came to removing myself out of one of Eric's death grips. Clearly upset that I wasn't learning as fast as he wanted me to, Eric stood up and faced me, letting me know that we were done with the drills. I sighed and smiled. That had made my day. I was getting bored of being thrown across the mat time and time again. I glanced up at the clock and saw that it was just now five.

That meant that I only had one more hour of this to endure before I was finally allowed out of this damn room. Eric paced for a moment before stopping in front of me. "We devise training routines for all of the new initiates. Four and I decide what are the best ways to teach you to fight. I'll be teaching you," Eric said.

"Okay."

"You're weak," he pointed out.


If I had thought that he might apologize to me, I was wrong. "But you are fast. That'll come in handy. You're small. You can move in and out of tight spaces and fight with limited room. That's not a bad thing. And, as much as I hate to admit it, you listen," he said.


"I told you where you want to hit. Vital areas that cause pain, no matter how hard the punches are. You'll have to keep that in mind, considering you don't hit that hard." I narrowed my eyes. "Not for now, anyways," he corrected.

Did he actually think that I would start gaining muscle? Maybe we were making progress. "So what's the training plan?" I asked.

"You'll fight by tiring someone out. Not by throwing the hardest hits. You won't win if you do that. I already told you this one. What's the fastest way to tire someone out during a fight?" he asked.

He hadn't really explained it to me. He'd more showed it to me. "Getting up and down," I answered.

"Right."

"But how do I throw someone that's a hundred pounds heavier than me?" I asked.

"I'll teach you once you're stronger. You're too weak right now."

"Thanks."

Once more, he ignored me. Why was it that he had to constantly insult me? "And you don't use your weight. You use theirs," he said, moving off to the side slightly.

Was it even possible to use someone else's weight? I wasn't sure that I wanted to know what he meant by that. I asked anyways. "What does that mean?"

He grinned at me. "I suppose you'll find out," he said.

He was repeating the words that he had given us up on the roof yesterday. "So what do we do now that we're done with your drills or whatever you want to call them?" I asked him, knowing that I would regret it.

Eric smirked at me and I knew immediately that I should have stayed quiet. Eric grabbed me by the
arm and pulled me into the center of the ring. I tipped over my own feet as we stopped and he took
up his stance across from me. "We fight," Eric said.

I stared at Eric like he had lost his mind. We had only been going over the drills for a few hours and
he already thought that I was ready to fight? Not even another initiate. He wanted me to fight him. A
Dauntless leader. "You're serious? You want me fighting you?" I asked.

"Yes."

"You know that I'm going to lose. I prefer not to look like a fool. I think I'll go with doing some
more drills. I'd like to see what you guys have in store for day two," I said, letting him know that I
was not ready to fight.

Eric rolled his eyes and tossed me the powder that I was supposed to put on my hands. "Same shit as
today," he growled. There went that plan. "You know, Softie. You're never going to build up
strength if you don't actually fight someone. And you'll never learn anything either. Do you want to
get beat to hell during your first fight with another initiate?" he asked me.

"No."

"Good. Because those will be worth real points. You need the practice and you'll get it from me," he
said. I nodded weakly. As much as I didn't want to admit it, he was right. He might even be better
practice than Four. "Or are you just scared?"

Stepping up to him, I growled and got into a slight crouch. I knew that I would lose, but that didn't
mean that I wasn't going to try. "You wish, asshole," I sneered at him.

"I know," he shot back.

Maybe I was a little scared. But I didn't want to say that. "Alright fine. I'm ready. If it means that I
get to hit you without getting worried that you're going to kick me out of Dauntless I'm all for it," I
said. Eric actually laughed. "Let's fight."

The moment that I had said that I was ready, he moved forward to attack me. With all of his weight
thrown behind him, he barreled into me. The sudden hit sent me sprawling across the floor. Eric fell
onto me and took no time to raise his fist at me. Squealing a little, I managed to squirm out from
under him and watched as his fist went driving into the mat. He turned back to me as I crawled
away and grabbed my leg, pulling me back to him. I groaned as he managed to push my leg back,
contorting in at a painful angle. I cried out, practically begging him to stop. He only did once I
tapped him on shoulder.

Damn that hurt. I stood back up, hopping on my leg for a moment, shaking the pain out. Eric merely
watched me until I stopped. Once more, without warning, he attacked me again. This time I was
expecting it. I spun out of his way, hitting him in the chest. It did nothing as he reared back and hit
me in the stomach. I went falling onto my hands and knees, coughing up a tiny bit of blood. At least
he had gotten me to bleed. I stood back up, wiping the blood off of my hands.

Eric was watching me carefully, waiting to see if I would move again. Hoping that he wouldn't see it
coming, I darted at him. The one thing that I had noticed as we were fighting was that Eric's weight
slowed him down. He was right. I was fast. His muscular build also made him less flexible. It was
the one place that I had an advantage.

Running at him, Eric went to punch me but I dropped onto my knees, sliding past him and pulling
out his leg. He didn't fall but he did wobble slightly. Not what I had been hoping for, but it was
better than nothing. He grabbed onto my collar and pulled me up, hitting me once in the cheek before throwing me to the ground. I stared up at the ceiling, stars floating through my vision. Shit. That had been much harder than I was expecting.

Fighting to stand back up, I saw that Eric was watching me like a hawk. He looked slightly surprised that I was getting back up. He was not going to beat me down. I was going to get at least one good fight in. This time, neither of us made the first move. We both just stood and watched the other. Waiting. Analyzing. Eric was finally the first one to move though, grabbing at my feet. He pulled me to the ground and I grunted. He was about to drop onto me, but right before he could, I swung my leg around my own body and flipped over myself.

Eric looked a little shocked at my movement and, had I not been so angry, I would have been shocked too. We both pushed ourselves back to our feet and stared at the other. I launched myself over to him and delivered a punch to his gut, not making any difference. He merely turned away from me and I started after him. He turned back and grabbed my arm, which I had been planning on hitting him with.

In a moment of sheer panic, I threw my leg up. Eric grabbed my leg and pulled me up to him. I knew what he was going to do. He had mentioned it to me in our drills but hadn't actually shown it to me. He was going to slam me onto the ground, which would effectively put me out of training for a few days. My heart skipped a beat as I racked my brain of the defensive moves he had taught me. Nothing came to mind. But something did. Something that reminded me of what Florian and I had done as kids.

Using my leg that was still on the ground as a vault, I pushed myself up off of the ground. Once my leg was parallel with the ground, I swung my body around and thanked my parents for being short. Eric dropped my torso, not being able to hold my contorting body, and I was able to maneuver away from him. As my other leg came back around, my booted foot came up and connected with Eric's head. Hard. Unfortunately my landing wasn't very graceful as I hit the ground on my swinging leg first, tumbling to the side before popping back up.

Eric was across the mat from me, just staring. A small bruise was forming where I had kicked him and I stared in horror. What had I just done? Everyone in the training room was watching us, completely silent. People were waiting to see what Eric would do. So was I. Even Four was waiting with baited breath. Eric stomped up to me and my breath hitched in my throat. He was going to kill me. He grabbed me roughly across the front of my tank top and shoved me twice as hard as I had kicked him. I went flying off of the mat, hitting the concrete ground roughly, tumbling at least five times. My vision was black for a moment and every inch of my body was on fire.

Even though I couldn't really see, I could feel Eric walk up to me. I rolled over slightly and moaned, unable to do anything else. He merely grabbed me by my collar once more and shoved me back into the ring. I went tumbling over myself and hit the mat again. His grip was tight on me as he threw a hard punch to my eye. I could hear Four yell at Eric to stop, but he merely ignored him. Eric didn't hit me again, but he didn't need to. My eye was already swollen nearly shut.

He was not happy with me making him look like a fool. "Do you concede?" Eric hissed at me. I tried to speak, but nothing came out. "I'll break you, Softie. Just you wait. Mind, body, and soul, I'm going to break you. And I will take as long as I need, do anything that I need to. Watch your back, you aren't as safe as you think."

Four immediately stepped in to solve the problem. "Alright, initiates! It's six and you're free to go. Get back to the dorms and get showers in. You all need them. Get some dinner afterwards and make sure to get plenty of rest. Stretch tonight too, you'll thank me for it in the morning. Good night," he
snapped to the other initiates, letting them know that the show was over.

Eric was still towering over my as Four pushed him away, not that he really needed to. Eric went stomping away from me, walking right through the path of the initiates. It went without saying that everyone ran out of his way. Four grabbed me and lead me over to Heather, who was holding her arms out for me.

"Thank you, Four," she told him softly and he nodded.

Heather was silent as we walked, letting me regain my senses. My vision had come back and I was able to walk once more, but everything was sore and something in my arm felt broken. I was sure that it wasn't though. As long as I could move it, that was all that mattered. It wasn't broken if I could move it.

"You know, I heard that they were hosting a party at the end of the week. It's for the new initiates and we're all invited. Apparently everyone from Dauntless shows up. It's some big thing. Anyways, I was thinking as a way of celebrating our first week of training we should go. Maybe we can meet some Dauntless guys too," she said, clearly trying to distract me from my previous fight.

I smiled at her as we walked into the dorm. Most people were just getting out of the shower, leaving for dinner. "Sounds like a plan," I told her.

No one said anything to me, they just smiled politely. I appreciated the lack of comments and the nice smiles. I was sure that I looked like shit. Even Jade and Colt were silent. They didn't smile at me, but that was fine. I'd like to see the way that they looked when they were done with a fight with Eric.

"Now come on, I only have two things on my mind right now. I need to get a shower in and then some food," I said pathetically. "Oh and maybe run these clothes through a laundry cycle. I'm pretty sure I have a little bit of blood, sweat, and tears on it."

A humorless laugh escaped my throat, but Heather actually looked horrified at my suggestion. "Oh sweetheart no!" she yelled.

"What's your problem?" I asked.

"Those clothes are so boring. They're almost like Candor clothes. They were just starters so that we could get through the day. We have to go shopping after dinner," she said and I groaned.

No shopping. Not today. I just wanted to die. "Did you not just see what happened to me?" I asked her.

She rolled her eyes at me and continued to drag me along. "Come on, I know that you're tired but we can be girls! It doesn't seem like we get very many chances to do that here. It won't be long. Twenty minutes, tops," she promised.

I sighed, knowing that she wasn't going to let this go unless I promised to go out with her. Finally I nodded my consent. "Twenty minutes, tops. I'm holding you to that one. Only clothes to get me through the week. Maybe over the weekend we can go shopping more extensively. Hopefully they take it easier on us those days," I said.

She was probably trying to make me feel better, and I appreciated it. I really felt like shit after earlier. "That works for me," she chirped happily.

"But seriously, you didn't just get thrown around by Eric for five hours. Here's hoping you get to
deal with Four," I told her as I stepped into the shower. Peeling off my clothes I let the hot water run over me. It felt incredible after such a long day of sweating and bleeding. I did a quick wash of my hair and rinse off before stepping out of the shower, Heather following moments after. We went about looking over ourselves. Heather was only a little bruised up, mostly on her arms and a little on her legs. I looked like I had been through a battle. My arms were nearly black, imprints of Eric's fists on my lower arms. My legs were bruised too, cut up from sliding across the floor so many times. My lip was swollen and my eye was a disturbing mix of red and purple. My chest had a few deep bruises too and the ring around my neck was still prominent.

Dinner afterwards was a mostly silent affair. On my part anyways. Everyone was talking about how unfair it was that Four was being so tough on our first day. Eric's name wasn't mentioned once and for that I was grateful. Heather spoke mostly for me, deflecting all comments and questions onto herself. She really was being a good friend. I ate quickly and so did she, the two of us bidding the others goodbye before heading out into the Pit. We went into one of the clothing shops buried in the rock face. It was all black clothing with the occasional splattering of red, dark green, and purple. No yellow.

It didn't take long for me to end up in the dressing room, adding to my collection of potential clothing. I was squeezing into a dress at Heather's insistence. It was pretty and very, very revealing. It was black with cut outs around the waist. There were no straps and the neckline was low. It was short too, coming up to my mid thighs. I assumed that Heather was too tall to wear it. I popped out of the stall, pulling the dress farther down my legs.

"Oh my God, Alex. That is gorgeous. You have to get it," she cried.

Dauntless members were milling all over the shop. I was getting approving nods and smiles. No one seemed to be the least bit bothered by my beat to hell appearance. Apparently it was nothing abnormal in Dauntless. "It's a little over the top, isn't it?" I asked Heather.

"Of course not!"

"I mean it's nice but I think that it's little more than I'm used to showing."

And I had worn some very revealing things before. Heather scoffed at me and grabbed her clothes into a bundle, walking over to the cashier. She smiled at us both and gave the dress an approving nod. She was just one more person who didn't give my bruises a second glance. She did look a little bad for me though.

"Girl, who the hell cares? Every day we have to dress like we're going to be working out all day. Which I get it, we are," she said when I raised an eyebrow at her. "But still, you might as well dress it up a little. Come on! Please? Buy it for me?"

There was no way that I was getting out of this one. Even if I didn't, she'd probably buy it herself and stuff it into my bag when I wasn't looking. I turned around the rack right in front of the checkout desk and smirked when I saw a suggestive pair of underwear that was on sale. If I had to buy something embarrassing, so did she. "Fine, but then you have to buy that!" I said, pointing to the pair of underwear hanging next to us.

Heather turned to look at the underwear and her face dropped. The girl behind the register laughed at our antics. "Why? It isn't like anyone is ever going to see me in it. At least people will be able to see you in the dress. This is just for me," she said as she picked up the material.
"Exactly!" I yelled, laughing loudly. My lungs actually hurt a little bit and I sighed. Eric had really done a number on me today. "And you never know, there are some pretty hot guys here. Come on, you know that eventually you're gonna meet some good Dauntless guy and you'll be thanking me for this."

Heather sighed at me but nodded anyways, throwing the underwear into her pile. She checked out quickly and then it was my turn. The woman rang me up quickly and I told her my name. Apparently all of the points just went through our names. Once we became members, we would get cards that had our points loaded onto them. I watched as my point stash went down by about a fifth. I'd gotten three sets of matching underwear, I already had two. I had also gotten five work out shirts, three shirts that were for going out, two sweaters, three pairs of black jeans, two pairs of stretchy pants, two pairs of work out shorts, one pair of black shorts, a leather jacket, and the dress that Heather had picked out.

Dauntless must have been big spenders. "Oh! Look we can get piercings! Or maybe a tattoo," Heather called as we left the shop, bags in hand.

She was so excited, bouncing a little bit. She must have been waiting to get the Dauntless look for years. I didn't blame her. The Dauntless always looked the best. "What happened to twenty minutes tops?" I asked.

"We've only been shopping for ten," she told me.

She was right. I had already known my size beforehand. The dress was the only thing that I had needed to try on. "Alright, fine. But I've already gotten a piercing," I said.

Heather let out a little yell. "You do?" she asked.

"In Amity a lot of kids get ear piercings. It's the one that they don't mind. I don't want any other piercings until fighting is over. The last thing I want is someone using it against me," I told her. Eric would probably tear it out. "Tattoos I can get behind though."

Unsurprisingly, Heather brightened and I laughed at her. "Sweet! I knew you'd love shopping as soon as we get you into it. Then you go over there and I'm gonna check out piercings for a bit," she told me.

"Okay."

If she wanted an ear piercing she was more than welcome to get it. "I'll meet you at the tattoo parlor in ten minutes," I nodded at her, turning to head to the parlor. "Oh wait! Put on the dress before you go in there!" Heather called behind me.

Turning back to her I felt my hair whip me in the face. That was going to have to go soon. "Why?" I asked her, making sure to whine a little bit. I loved the theatrics of Dauntless.

She smirked at me and dug into her own bag, pulling out a black tank top and a pair of pants. "Like you said, there are some gorgeous guys here in Dauntless and we need to get you one of them," she said.

"I don't look too hot right now," I pointed out.

"You'll always look hot," she said, making me laugh. "Come on, you're going to love this." I merely glared at her. "Fine, don't put on the dress but at least change into something different."

Knowing that she wasn't going to let it go, I walked into the bathroom, dragging her with me.
"Fine."

"Thank you!"

I changed quickly, actually glad to be out of my dirtied training clothes. I dumped them into the bag and pulled out my pair of black shorts and put on a black tank top. I slipped on my training boots before turning and leaving the bathroom, calling back to Heather to let her know that I was leaving. I headed into the tattoo parlor quickly, a little self-conscious of the bruises all over me. As I walked into the store, I headed straight back where a man was laying on a flat table. He was getting a large back piece worked on.

I couldn't tell what it was. "Hey, Amity!" a loud voice called.

I turned back and smiled when I saw that it was Tori, the woman who had administered my test. I had wondered if I would ever see her here. "Hey, Tori," I said.

"Nice to see you. I’m glad to see that you decided to come to Dauntless. I heard that you were the first jumper. Nice, it takes major guts to jump first," she babbled.

"I suppose it does."

"It's Amarantha, right?"

"Alex now, actually."

She briefly glanced up at me and smiled. "I like that name. Suits you better. Amarantha wouldn't have worked out well for you in here," she said, making me laugh slightly. "You're looking good. The clothes are great."

Nodding at her, I stood off to the side, leaning against a counter. "Thanks. My friend talked me into it. I was thinking about maybe getting something small. What do you think?" I asked her with a little smile.

Tori grinned at me and I smiled back at her. Now that I wasn't so nervous, I realized that Tori was actually extremely nice. "I think it's a great idea. What better way to celebrate becoming Dauntless than by getting a tattoo? Just take a look around and let me know whatever you want to do. I can do anything up on the wall or in the books. If you're nervous do something small. The ones on the bottom row are going to be the least painful," she told me.

Turning back to the wall I glanced over everything up on the glass plates. On the top row were about a hundred different designs of skulls and fire. Not for me. I looked at the bottom row that Tori had been talking about and shook my head. It was nothing special that I would want to put on my body for the rest of my life. There were birds, feathers, infinity symbols, dream catchers, anchors, hearts, butterflies, flowers, and crosses. Not those. Looking up higher on the wall I noticed a section of what looked like wings. I had always liked birds and I used to dream that I could fly. It was still relevant. I wanted to be able to fly here in Dauntless. I wanted to soar higher than they were all expecting.

My eyes finally settled on a glass panel close to the edge of the display. It was huge and probably painful but I knew right away that I wanted it. It couldn't have been worse than fighting with Eric for five hours. It looked like an angel wing. Each feather was intricately designed. Some were tribal looking, others were floral, and some had jagged designs. There were some that swirled and others that went into sharp points. They drew the eye to each feather. The entire wing was designed to go upwards on the body. It could go on my side. The design was in black and gray, splatters behind the wing.
Turning away from the design and back to Tori, I called out, "How about this one?"

She finished a sharp edge on the tribal tattoo that she was doing and looked to where I was pointing. Her eyes went wide and she grinned brightly. "Damn girl, that's a big tattoo for your first one. But I wouldn't worry about it. I'm pretty sure that you're a tough girl. You've got this," she said.

I knew the hidden meaning behind her words. "Thanks," I said.

"Just let me finish up here and I'll get that started for you. Just grab it off of the wall for me and bring it over," she told me.

"Okay."

I grabbed the glass like asked and brought it over to her table, like she had asked.

We stood in silence as she wiped the blood off of the man's back."So how's training going? I know it's only been a day but even day one can be tough. And from the looks of it you had a rough one," she said.

I nodded, my face coloring slightly, considering I looked like I had gotten into a fight with one of the trains. "You know, so far I really love it here in Dauntless but there's one thing that I can't stand," I said. Tori smiled and motioned for me to continue. "It's this leader. I'm sure that you know him, Eric. He can just be such a dick. He spent five hours throwing me around today and all of these bruises are from him. So is the damn black eye. He's probably the worst person that I've ever met. But whatever, he's gone for the day and I don't have to deal with him."

Tori looked horrified at my words. It looked like she was about to say something but before she could, the man on her table sat straight up. He turned back to me but before I could see his face, I saw his tattoos. Big blocks that went up the neck. Well what do you know? That was just my luck. Eric sat up and I knew that my face went white. I did take some solace in the broken lip that he had.

"I had no idea you felt that way about me, initiate," he said with a soft tone. "What? You didn't recognize the tattoos?" There was a bright grin on his face.

He was actually right. I should have checked to make sure that I didn't know the person that was laying on the table. It was stupid of me just to talk freely. "I wasn't looking at them. I thought that you were just some random Dauntless," I muttered, knowing that he was going to get me back for this. "But that would never be my luck. I should have figured that it would be you on the table."

Eric laughed. It was a laugh that said that he was going to finish what he had started during training today. Glancing over to Tori I could tell that she felt terrible for not stopping me. She probably had known Eric for a while, considering how many tattoos he had. I couldn't help but to wonder if they were friends.

"Sorry. Had I known that you were going to go off about him I would have warned you ahead of time," she told me.

"Not your fault," I said.

Tori was finishing up the last bit of Eric's tattoo and I looked down. I wasn't really sure what it was. It looked like a tribal design. It did resemble something. Something that I had seen before, but something that I couldn't place. He had tons of other tattoos on him. Everything from the block patterns, to tribal designs over his arms, and a large dragon that went down his back. There was also Dauntless fire going across his shoulder.
"Your birth name is Amarantha?" Eric asked, distracting me.

"You read my file," I pointed out.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't care that much," he said.

Why did he always say things like that? A deep glare was set on my face, even though I could really only narrow one of my eyes. The one that Eric had actually left somewhat functioning. "Yes. I know, it's fucking hilarious," I snapped.

"Not as funny as you trying to fight," he said.

He was trying to get me to rise to the bait. I didn't want to talk to him about my name or my fighting. "You're right. It's as funny as that bruise on your forehead," I said.

He placed a hand on my knee, tightening the grip to the point of excruciating pain. "What was that, Amarantha?" he asked.

"Get off of me," I snarled, kicking him backwards. He laughed and leaned back on the table, releasing my knee. "I swear, if you call me by that name around everyone, I don't care if you are a leader. I'll kill you."

Of course we both knew that if it really came down to it, Eric would be able to easily kill me. "Oh yeah, like the way that you tried to kill me earlier?" he asked. He couldn't even be nice outside of training hours. "You did horribly. You couldn't even get me on the ground once." I had gotten one good kick in. "Not that it's very surprising. You're a Softie. I saw it coming from the beginning."

Before I got the chance to snap back at him, Tori spoke up. "Alright, Eric, you're done. Come back tomorrow and we'll finish it off. We'll just charge it to your account," she told him. Eric stood and I watched as he grabbed his shirt. Eric walked over to Tori's table, letting her wipe off the last of the excess ink. "Alex, come on over. Lay down and take your shirt off. I'm gonna need you on your side for the entire time. It's a pretty big piece but it shouldn't take longer than twenty minutes or so." That wasn't as long as I had thought that it would be. "Be warned, it will sting."

Moving over to where Eric was currently standing, I grabbed the hem of my tank top but refused to pull it off. Not in front of him. I stood in front of him, staring openly at his chest. His torso was huge, muscles stretching over every inch of his body. As he moved, crossing his arms over his chest, I felt my face heat up. He definitely was a good looking man, he just had a horrible personality. I wished that he was more like Four. Tough but I could tell that he was still sweet underneath. Eric was all asshole.

Still though, one night might not be too bad. I shook my head free of those thoughts and saw him looking at me with a big smirk. He knew what I was thinking. "You heard her, I'm getting it done now and you have nothing more to do here. You can go," I said, crossing my arms over my own chest.

Probably mostly because he knew that he was bothering me, Eric merely took a seat in one of the chairs that Tori had sitting to the side. I groaned, knowing that he was here strictly to bother me. "I think that I'll stay actually. I was thinking about taking up tattooing as a hobby and it's about more than just being tattooed myself. I have to watch others do it," he said.

"Of course you are," I snapped.

"So go on, I'll just sit here quietly," he said, crossing his arms over his chest and letting his legs spread slightly.
No part of me wanted to let Eric see me without a shirt on but I knew that he would never let me live it down if I skipped out on the tattoo just because he was here. So I sighed and pulled off my shirt, letting it fall onto Tori's table. I noticed that Eric's eyes diverted down to my chest and a part of me was glad. It was nice to know that the attraction wasn't just single sided. Although I was burning with embarrassment that Eric wasn't looking away from me.

With Tori's instructions, I laid down on my side and felt her stick the glass pad onto my side. I was facing Eric, and for whatever reason, we were staring at each other. Not angry or condescending. Just staring. It wasn't creepy or intimidating. It was almost comforting. Tori counted me down to the first blast of needles and I breathed out slowly. Eric nodded to me and I took in another breath. Like she had said, it hurt. It stung badly and I felt my eyes beginning to water. But after the third or fourth blast it was more of just an irritation.

That didn't keep me from jumping each time that the needles began to blast through my skin. "You don't like needles?" Eric asked.

He was now leaning onto the table that I was laying on, his hands not far from my waist. "Not particularly," I said. He began to laugh. "It's not funny."

"It is. Why?" he asked.

"If you must know, when I was three I was getting my mandatory inoculations. The doctor surprised me and I kicked him. His hand shot off to the side and knocked the needle loose in my arm. It hurt and I never wanted to get another shot. Although the doctor did have to walk around with a cane for the next few days," I said.

It wasn't just me, Eric and Tori began to laugh, too. It was nice. We almost felt like friends. Just for a moment. My eyes finally closed as I waited for it to be over. Every once in a while I would feel Tori wipe my skin clean and I smiled. This was going to look great soon. Finally she finished, warning me to wait to move.

"That's actually pretty nice. It looks good, Tori," Eric said. I opened my eyes. He was looking down at my hip and I took in a breath. I was nervous to see it. "And it suits you."

He looked straight into my eyes. I noticed that, just for a moment, a strange emotion flashed through his eyes. I couldn't help but to wonder if he felt a little bad for what he had done to me. Of course not. He had probably done this to plenty of initiates. I was nothing special. He had certainly made sure that I knew that.

"Was that a compliment I just heard from you? Even if not, I'm honored Eric. That must take a lot out of you," I teased.

"Like I said, you'll never get a compliment from me," he said.

"Seriously, just when I thought that you might actually say my name," I added with a little smile.

Eric smirked at me. We were falling back into the routine of teasing each other, rather than trying to end the other's life. "You have to earn that," he told me.

"Just tell me what to do," I said.

It took me half a second too long to realize that I shouldn't have said it like that. Eric merely stared at me, a dark look in his eyes. "I'll see you in training tomorrow, bright and early. Try not to get killed in the meantime," he said.
My head dropped onto the table. The last thing that I wanted was to go through training again tomorrow. I wanted at least a day to rest after all of this. "Oh believe me, it will be on the top of my list," I said behind Eric, listing to his soft scoff.

Finally managing to gather the courage to look down at my tattoo, I grinned. It looked exactly like it had on the glass. It started right at my rib cage and it spread out across my side. It hit the bottom of my hip and spread so that the tip of the feathers were almost in a place a little too private. But I liked it. It was like a little invitation. When the right guy came along I was sure that they'd take note. I couldn't help but to wonder if Eric had noticed.

"He's actually right, this is gorgeous, Tori. Thank you so much. I never thought that I would ever get a tattoo. But this is perfect. I'm sure that at some point I'll be back," I told her.

She smiled at me as I slipped my shirt on once she had cleaned it. "I look forward to that day. Oh and I'm glad that you decided to come to Dauntless. Just be careful. It's like I said to you after your Aptitude Test. People like you are dangerous. But on the other hand it seems like you're making some powerful friends," she told me.

I cocked my eyebrow. She couldn't have meant Heather or Cole, or any of the other initiates? "What?" I asked.

"I mean Eric," she said. "He doesn't usually take very well to initiates," she told me.

"Yeah, he doesn't take well to me either." She was definitely getting that whole story wrong. "I think you're mistaking him teasing me for actually liking me. Eric hates me," I told Tori, who merely shook her head. "He just thinks it's funny to mess with me. He nearly killed me last night and then again today. Plus he picks me out over everyone else."

Tori walked up to me and put her hand on my shoulder, giving it a squeeze. It hurt from the pull ups earlier but I said nothing to her. "Actually, that's a good thing," she told me.

"How is that good?" I asked.

She smiled, taking a seat back in her chair. "Eric has this thing. Every year since his initiation he picks out one initiate. He rags on them, makes their life a living hell and usually tries to kill them a few times," she said and I snorted. Apparently that was me. "But the thing is that those people usually end up on the top of the leader board by the end of initiation. His methods aren't nice or easy, but they are effective. Plus it's nice to see."

If nothing else, the thought of me being at the top of the leader board made me happy. "Wait. What's nice to see?" I asked, remembering her earlier words.

Tori looked like she had been caught in a lie. She shook her head and smiled at me like she was hiding a little secret from me. "Oh nothing," she said. What was it about Dauntless people and keeping secrets? "Don't worry about it. Just do me a favor. Whenever Eric comes clean to you, come tell me. I want to be the first one, alright? Eric might be a hothead but he is my friend. But I know that he won't tell me."

A million things went running through my head at her words. She had just told me that she was a friend of Eric's and the thought actually made me happy for some reason. It made Eric more human. He actually had friends. But what did she mean about him coming clean to me? What was he hiding from us? Or at least, what was he hiding from me? It couldn't have been that big of a secret if she knew it and thought that one day I would know it too.
"What do you mean, come to you first? What is Eric going to come clean about?" I asked her, hoping that she would tell me.

But again, that wasn't the kind of luck that I had. Tori merely smiled at me and shook her head. Of course she wasn't going to tell me. "Don't worry about it for now. Just get yourself through initiation and show Eric that you are a force to be reckoned with. I want things to work out for you here," she told me.

"I do, too."

"Anyways, get out of here, I'll see you around soon," she told me.

We exchanged a hug as I moved up to the front of the store and paid for my tattoo. It was big so I had expected it to take up a big chunk of my points, which it did. I would have to be careful with spending for a while. Thanking the man at the front desk, I walked outside, spotting Heather leaning against the rock face outside of the piercing shop. She looked over to me and smiled, pushing herself off and strutting towards me.

"Hey where have you been? That was way more than five minutes. I was about to go back to the dorms," she told me.

"Giving in to temptation," I said.

"Oh my God. That's gorgeous! And I thought that my ear piercing was going to be a big deal tonight," she muttered. Her hair was back and I noticed that she had a black stud in now. "I think you're the first one of us to get a tattoo. It's so Dauntless. Come on, let's go show off our new looks!"

"The stud is nice. It's a good start. We'll have to get you a tattoo soon."

"I wouldn't even know what to put on myself. So, weren't you the one that said twenty minutes tops?" she asked.

Oops. She was right about that. "Shut the hell up," I hissed at her.

We walked back to the dorms, laughing and joking the whole way. The pain had melted away and the anger from Eric had dissipated. It was just making me happy to be around people that I really liked, in a place that I loved, more determined than I had ever been. Eric had pissed me off and I had lost against him but that didn't matter. I was going to win my first fight, and all of the others after that, I would be proficient at everything that we did, and I would be Dauntless. As we walked to the dorms, I noticed that despite my injuries, I was more confident than I had ever been.
Chapter Five

It had been just over three weeks since that first day of training and it seemed like everything was different. Things were different. Everything had drastically changed over the twenty-two days that we had been in Dauntless. And I knew that I wasn't the only person. Everyone was getting used to their lives in Dauntless. It was strange waking up in the Dauntless dorms. It wasn't really like things were that different though. Mostly because we were forced to get used to our new lives.

Not that it had been easy at first. I had gotten used to the cold walls and brisk air of the Dauntless compound. I had gotten used to the lumpy pillows and the rock hard mattresses that we were all provided. I had become used to seeing Cole sleep either on the floor or in Heather's bed because there weren't enough for all of us. I had become accustomed to the ice cold showers that Dauntless provided us. I had also, somewhat begrudgingly, gotten used to the fact that everyone could be seen as bare as the day that they were born whenever they wanted to wash off.

The one benefit of living in Dauntless was that I had also become used to the starchy foods and heavy weight of liquor in my body. A little over two weeks ago myself and the rest of the Dauntless transfers had gone to the party that Heather had told us all about. It had been a ton of fun; nothing like I had ever experienced. It had also been where I had experienced my first taste of liquor. It was banned in Amity, Johanna thought that it made people rowdy. She was right.

But it was everything that I had wanted for all of my life. It was the first time that I had felt genuinely free. It was the first time that I had said whatever I had felt. It was the first time that I had shared a kiss with a man just because I felt like it, rather than because I felt like I was supposed to. It was the first time that I hadn't been put down for my rowdy behavior. It was the first time that bruises and cuts weren't things that got me questioned for hours on end. Everything was right in the world.

Everything but one thing. Eric. Ever since we had been together as he had watched me get the angel wing tattoo, he had said nothing to me. Almost nothing. Every once in a while he would bark at me that I was doing something wrong or ask where Four was during training. But never once had he talked to me with that little teasing glint in his eyes. He hadn't even said anything to me with that angry glare that made his eyes gloss over. It was infuriating. He treated me like he treated every other initiate.

Maybe it was something that I should have been grateful for. I knew that it wasn't supposed to be something that bothered me, but it did. He was supposed to yell at me and half ignore me while I teased him and tested his boundaries. But now he said nothing to me and hardly ever looked at me. I had to say that it bothered me much more than it should have.

Groaning at the thought of Eric and the lack of sleep, I glanced at the electric clock on the wall. It read only past six in the morning. Everyone else wouldn't be getting up for at least another hour. And those were just the people that wanted to shower before we went to training. Most people would be at least an hour and a half before they even thought about moving. Deciding that now would be a perfect time to shower without worrying about someone walking in on me, I silently padded into the bathroom, fighting the urge to strangle Colt on my way.

Darting back into the main room with a towel wrapped around my chest, I grabbed my dirty clothes and shoved them under my bed, grabbing a pair of black training shorts and a tight black tank top before running back to the bathroom. Stripping off my clothes and hopping into the stall nearest me, I cringed at the sudden rush of cold water.

The thing about Dauntless was that they must have spent thousands of dollars on their supply of
liquor every week, but they couldn’t spend a damn dime to heat the water. It was probably just another thing about making us tougher. Whatever. I finally began to relax but my side was still killing me from yesterday. I had been doing pull ups when Jade had 'stumbled' into me. I had already had a weak grip on the bar and her actions had caused me to fall off, slamming my hip onto the hard mat. I had forced myself to stifle my laughter when Four had deducted a few points from her. It was probably my favorite thing that he had done in the past month.

Besides my one incident on the pull up bar, most of my training was vastly different from the first day. Pull ups came easier to me, but I could still only do about four or five at a time before dropping from the bars. On the bright side, my blisters were covering my hand so badly that I now had almost no feeling in my hand whenever I slipped off of the bar. Pushups had gotten easier too, I could now do them almost effortlessly. Those was the normal pushups though, anything advanced still meant falling on my face a few times.

The leg work outs had become easier now. Squats didn't result in me falling to the floor and the kicks had become much more natural. Although the pieces of leg that were now covered in scrapes and bruises probably argued against that. Even my core was stronger. I found myself not struggling at all to sit upright in bed. The crunches were easier and sit ups took little effort. Even my run was better. I could only sprint for about ten minutes, but I kept up a good jog for the rest of the time. Until Eric would start to yell at me, that is.

Washing the shampoo out of my hair, I glanced at the red tips and smirked. Eric had grabbed me by the hair the other day when the two of us had been sparring and yanked me to the side, showing me how easy it was for someone to grab me in a fight. He had told me to cut my hair, so in spite of him, that night I had gone and dyed the last few inches of my blonde hair, red. He hadn't even looked at me.

Shaking my hair behind me, I glanced down at myself. Over the past month I had changed drastically. We all had. It wasn't like we were just spending an hour of the day at the gym a few days a week. We were spending nine hours a day in the gym every day. For myself I had lost the few layers of baby fat that I had come from Amity with. On the back of my shins and the side of my thighs I could now see muscle. The muscle in my stomach was outlined, but it was nothing like some of the boys. My arms were toned and a few little bumps of muscle stood out prominently. It made me feel strong and powerful. It made me feel like a real Dauntless.

I wasn't the only one that had changed though. Colt was now probably the biggest of us, with the exception of maybe Hunter and Dante. His change in strength had done nothing for his demeanor. He was still as nasty as he had always been, if not even worse. Every day he called me some cruel name and every day he would try to cause me some form of physical harm. Not that it really surprised me. I usually said something back that justified his later attack on me.

Jade on the other hand, did everything a little more backhanded. She would pull little pranks on me, making sure that I made myself look like a fool. Normally in front of either Four or Eric. If I ever got kicked out of Dauntless, it would be her fault. I had noticed that Hunter had also become a part of their little gang, but he was mostly silent. Just the strong and silent type. It was exactly that reason that I stayed away from him. I knew that he could crush me.

Already irritable enough, I tried to think about anything other than my three least favorite people in the compound. So instead I tried to think about my favorite people. The people that had become my fast friends here in Dauntless. The people that made losing Florian and Iris a little more bearable.

There was Heather, who reminded me exactly of Iris. She was my partner in crime, the two of us becoming a favorite among the Dauntless born. They thought that we were both natural Dauntless.
There were Cole and Buck too. In their own ways they both reminded me of Florian. But they were so different. They were both realistic about everything and they were frequently angry about something. Still, they were the best friends that I could have asked for. Dante and Jax were pretty great too, but I didn't spend as much time with them. But whenever I needed something, they were there. Even Jet, Draven, Skylar, and Raven were pretty good too. I just didn't spend that much time with any of them.

As I got out of the shower I shivered at the cold draft that was seeping off of the stone walls. I pulled my socks on and smiled at the warmth, these stone floors were sure to give me hypothermia one day. I sighed as I thought about the current rankings. It wasn't like there was much that they could rank us on, but they certainly had. There were fifteen Dauntless born and thirteen transfers. That meant that there were twenty eight of us and seven would be leaving after the first stage was over.

Obviously the first two were Dauntless born boys. Colt currently held the number three spot and Hunter was number four. Jet and Jax took the number six and seven spots. Draven was currently number ten and Dante was twelve, and Jade was right behind him in the thirteenth spot. The fact that she was so high made my blood boil. Buck, Heather, and Cole were in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth spots, respectively. I was glad that they were all safe. I was currently ranking twenty first. It was the last spot above the red line. It made me extremely nervous, but at least I was still above the line. Skylar was twenty fourth and Raven was twenty seventh. That put them both below the red line. I saw the defeat in their eyes every day.

As angry as I was, part of me was glad that I was at least not in dead last. But the file was currently right about me. Well, Eric was. He had thought that I would be the third to the worst initiate, and so far he was right. But I was at least above a few Dauntless born. Those were just the people that should have left though but were too afraid to. I knew that they were hating their lives right now.

As I put on my clothes I thought about what today was. Four apparently thought that we were trained well enough to fight each other for the first time today. Today would be our first day of fighting. It made me excited and nervous all at the same time. I was afraid that I would fail and be pushed below the line, but I was also hopeful that I would win and it would push me up a few spots. It all just depended on who I got. Anyone other than Hunter or Colt would be good. If luck were on my side it would be Jade. I could use a few good free hits on her.

Heading quietly out of the dorm, I slipped down a few halls until I popped into the dining room. As usual, no one was in there yet. It was too early and the Dauntless seemed to be fond of sleeping in. At least they liked to sleep in a little bit. There was one man sitting on one of the benches facing away from me and I sighed. Maybe I wasn't the only other early riser here in Dauntless. But it was best that I left him alone. Just because people woke up early didn't mean that they were morning people. I was living proof of that.

As I headed to the table next to him, I heard a voice softer than I had ever heard it before. "I guess some Amity traits stick with you forever, huh, Softie?" Eric called.

How the hell had he even known it was me? I turned back to him and scoffed. He was watching me as I moved to sit across the table from him. "What are you talking about?" I asked him.

He smirked at me. "Waking up at the crack of dawn," he explained.

He was right. Waking up early was a trait of Amity members, but I would never admit that to him. Instead I searched for the perfect response that I knew would bother him. "So why are you awake? Got a few Amity traits there, yourself?" I asked him.

A little smirk crossed my face as his fell. He scoffed at me and crossed his legs. So here we were,
after almost a month, finally falling back into our old routine. Like nothing had ever happened. "There is nothing about Amity that I like, Eric sneered at me.

It was easy enough to know that he was referring to me as the Amity, and I was something that he didn't like. "I don't know, I saw where you were looking that day," I said.

"Can you blame me?" he asked.

My jaw nearly dropped. Had he really just said that? Where the hell was his filter? "Excuse you?" I asked disbelievingly.

"You look at me like that and I'll look at you like that." A small blush fell over my face. I hadn't realized that he'd seen me looking at him. "It's alright, Amity. It's cute," he said.

"Oh, shut up."

He stared at me and smiled, biting into a piece of bacon on his plate. I crossed my arms over my chest, almost immediately unfolding them. When I did it, it pushed my chest up, only revealing a little more skin. "Thanks for that," Eric said.

"You're welcome," I growled under my breath. Change the subject, Alex. Things are getting weird. "You know, you are just the man that I was so looking forward to seeing today."

Eric was staring at me lowly and I knew that I had better start watching what I said. He was one of the people that was in charge of my ranking and he could very easily push me below the red line. That would make me Factionless and that was the last thing that I wanted. Not after everything that I had already done to stay. Although I was sure that he would enjoy nothing more than shoving me out of Dauntless himself.

He leaned into me and I narrowed my eyes. "I'd watch it, initiate. Today is the first of the fights. There's one person that has to sit out today too," he told me.

That wouldn't be that bad. Maybe it would be nice. I raised my eyebrow. I had almost forgotten about that. We would be fighting each other and we had an odd number. That meant that one person would have to sit out. "You want me to sit out of the fights?" I asked.

The only thing that I could think was that the loss of points could end up hurting me eventually. "I'm thinking about it. And I might decide that you don't sit out," he said.

There was no way that he could make someone fight twice, was there? That was a stupid question. It was Eric, he would do whatever the hell he thought was a good idea. He could do whatever he wanted to do. He was a leader. I leaned forward onto the table and swallowed harshly when he did the same. We were within five inches of each other. For some reason we were always so close to each other.

"So enlighten me. Who would I be fighting?" I asked him.

My voice had a husk to it that I had never heard and it shocked me. Where the hell had that come from? I liked to challenge Eric, I had done it plenty of times, but I had never heard that before. His eyebrows were raised in an amused smirk and I wanted nothing more than to lean forward and rip his piercings from his skin. Maybe then he would know what it felt like to be hit by him just once. I knew that feeling all too well.

"Me," he finally said, his voice holding the same amount of husk that mine had.
"Yeah, right," I snarled.

He looked at me once more and popped a chunk of eggs into his mouth. "Are you afraid of fighting me? Come on, little Amity. You can admit it. I won't laugh," he told me.

It was probably the wrong reaction, but a sudden spark of anger took over me. I scoffed and shoved myself back from Eric, looking for something that I could throw at him. But naturally there was nothing around. There was an orange on the table, so I reached for it. Eric moved a little faster than me and grabbed it, keeping it out of my reach. So instead I just threw my hands out to the side.

"What is it with you?" I snapped, noticing his face fall into a confused wrinkle.

"Come again?" Eric asked.

"For three weeks you've hardly said anything to me. You've just kept me at a cool distance unless it was to tell me that I was doing something wrong. Now you're back to acting like I'm the bane of your existence. Did you just get bored doing whatever it was that you were doing before?" I hissed at him.

His small smirk had fallen and now he was merely watching me like a snake, coiled and ready to strike. "I'd watch what you say to me, initiate," he hissed at me.

The same threat over and over again. "What are you going to do to me?" I snapped.

It didn't help that he wasn't calling me by my name. I was never going to get him to use my name. "I'm the person that holds your ranking in the delicate balance. It would be just terrible if I miscalculated your score and accidentally dropped you below the red line," he said.

To my displeasure, my mouth fell open as I stared at him. Could he really do something like that? Of course he can. He had Max and the other leaders of Dauntless wrapped around his fingers. Plus he himself was a leader. But would he do something like that? Maybe. I wasn't really sure. He seemed to be the type of person that would do it, but would he be willing to risk his position as a leader? Probably not.

So I went with my gut instinct. "I have no doubt in my mind that you're an awful person but even you wouldn't do that. You're cruel, but would you seriously risk my future, making me Factionless, just because we got in a little pissing contest?" I asked him, raising my eyebrows.

"Don't make bets that you won't win," Eric warned me.

My heart was thumping softly in my chest. So maybe I wasn't always the smartest person in the world, but I still couldn't believe that he would just kick me out of Dauntless. "You wouldn't," I said, unsure of myself.

Eric leaned into me and I backed off slightly. No one else was in the room and I had no doubt that if I made him too angry, he would kill me. I wouldn't have blamed him. If I was in his position I wouldn't want some smart mouthed initiate bothering me. Particularly if I was the youngest Dauntless leader and I had something to prove.

"Would you do it?" he asked me.

I cocked my head. Was he asking me if I would purposely lower my own ranking? "Lower my own ranking?" I asked stupidly.

Eric snorted at me and shook his head, stabbing at the eggs on his plate. I wasn't an Erudite - and
neither was Eric - but I wasn't that stupid. "Don't be an idiot," he snapped.

"I'm not!"

"If it meant that Colt would leave the Dauntless compound and you would never have to see him again, would you drop his points?" he asked me.

For a while I merely stared at him blankly. Would I drop his points to kick him out? Probably.
"Yes," I finally admitted.

"I thought so," Eric said.

Scoffing softly at him, I flipped my hair over my shoulder and leaned onto the table, stealing the bottle of water that Eric had next to him. Before I got the chance to take a drink, he snatched it back from me, glaring darkly. "The difference is that even though I might annoy you, Colt is downright cruel," I snarled.

"Your point being?" he asked.

Can't even be nice for two minutes. "I said something out of line a few weeks ago and I apologized. Colt will never apologize for anything that he's said or done to me. That's just the way that he is," I said, with a shrug. There was no point in being upset about it. Some people were just like that. "I don't like you Eric, but I do believe that you're a better person than that. Believe it or not."

For a while we just stared at each other. I wondered if Eric would actually say something regarding my last comment. He never did. Eric merely scoffed and went back to his food. I should have been expecting it by now. I was attempting to compliment him and he merely brushed it off.

Sighing softly, I pushed myself out of the table and headed into the kitchen. I grabbed a piece of chicken and a few strips of bacon. It was a strange breakfast, but I wasn't really fond of eggs. Amity had them all of the time and I had eventually grown sick of them. I grabbed myself a glass of water before heading back out into the dining room. Eric was still sitting there and I groaned. I had two choices. I could either sit back down beside him and be the bigger person or I could sit on the other side of the room and look like a coward.

As much as it pained me, I knew that I would have to be the bigger person here. So I walked into the dining room and took my seat back across from Eric at the table. As I began to cut my chicken, I actually managed to smile at him. He was currently digging into a piece of Dauntless cake. It was the kind of cake that I had heard so many wonderful stories about. I had yet to have it, mostly because I was never the biggest cake fan.

"There's a sight that I never thought that I would see. Eric, the ruthless Dauntless leader, eating a piece of chocolate cake," I said. Eric looked up to me, giving me a blank stare.

"What?" he snapped at me.

"Before training, too. Won't that ruin your training day?" I asked with a little laugh.

"I'm not like you. I don't need to prove myself. I'm not weak," he said.

"I'm not weak either!"

He looked up at me like I had grown a third head before taking another piece of cake. I watched him do it with a little grin. Eating cake, for whatever reason, made him seem so much more human to me. It made him seem like more than the terrifying leader that we had all grown to fear.
A small giggle escaped my mouth as I slapped my hand over my face. I hadn't meant to laugh like that. "Dauntless cake is better than anything else. Try it," he told me.

Shaking my head at him, I smiled and dropped back away from him. "I don't think that I trust you not to shove my face into it," I told him, earning a tiny smirk.

Maybe I had just given him a bad idea. I hoped that it wouldn't be something to come and bite me in the ass later on. "You can trust me," he said slowly.

"I doubt that."

"Your loss," he said.

Maybe it was my loss. The cake did look pretty good. "Besides, I'm not really much for cake," I said, noticing the Eric was giving me a shell-shocked look.

"How can you not like cake?"

"I had it once in Amity and it made me sick. After that I just stuck to apples," I said.

The corners of Eric's lips turned upwards and I rolled my eyes. I knew that a scathing comment was coming my way. "Of course you did," he mumbled.

I wasn't sure what came over me in that moment, but I had the sudden urge to continue talking. "Amity had the best. But all of our best were shipped out. We never really got to have them. We had the slightly bruised and discolored ones. But we always had to laugh and smile and pretend that it didn't bother us," I scoffed.

Without saying a word, Eric got up and left the table, taking his tray with him. I rolled my eyes after him. He could have just told me to stop talking and I would have. It didn't seem like it was bothering him and that's why I kept going. Talking about my old Faction just made me feel better. Typically because I would start to complain about it and realize that I had made the right choice by coming to Dauntless. It was something that I needed every once in a while.

To my surprise, Eric turned back around the corner and I glanced over at him. "Here," he said, pulling his hand from behind his back and handing me the object.

I glanced down at it and couldn't fight back the large smile that came over my face. So Eric did have a heart. It was one of the apples that came off of the tallest trees in the Amity patches. Kids used to try to climb the trees to get to the top and grab one of the apples. I had only ever gotten one successfully, but it hadn't been from climbing the tree. It had been from doing something that had nearly gotten me expelled from Amity. I had never seen my parents upset before that day. I looked up to Eric with a smile and took a bite of the apple.

It had been almost six years since I'd had one and it was just the way that I remembered it. "Thank you," I told him softly.

He looked back to me and shrugged, like he hadn't just done something completely uncharacteristically nice. It wasn't something that I was expecting to happen again any time soon. "Anything that it takes to shut you up," he told me.

Both of us laughed. Probably louder than we should have. It was extremely strange to have the two of us together and not trying to kill the other. It was just nice to have him speaking to me. As much as it pained me to say, I did enjoy bickering with Eric. It was something that I could never do in Amity. We couldn't do it here much either, considering that most of the other Dauntless members
stayed far away from the initiates. I would have done it with Four, and sometimes I did, but he just
didn't give the same reactions that Eric did. Four would just scowl and wait for me to resume
whatever it was that I had been doing.

We sat in silence as I continued to munch on the apple that Eric had given me. It was better than I
could remember. "You know you like listening to me talk," I teased.

He looked over at me and scowled. "I hate hearing your voice," he told me.

"So why are you still sitting here?" I shot back.

His eyes narrowed at me and I smirked, knowing that I had gotten to him. But it didn't work very
well. His eyes dipped down to my chest and I glanced down, realizing that my shirt was way too

My hands went to my tank top as I yanked the material higher. "Shut up," I mumbled.

For about forty minutes Eric and I sat together, not saying anything more to each other. In some
ways it was tense and I wanted nothing more than for him to leave. But in another strange way I
enjoyed it. It was nice to have the company of another person without having to talk with them. Not
that I didn't love my friends but they all talked as much as possible. Sometimes after a long day of
training or preparing myself for sparring I just wanted to be in silence. It was one of the Amity traits
that I had never shared with my family. Amity's were typically very chatty and loved to strike up a
conversation with anyone willing. That was nothing like me.

Finally, as the clock rang out fifteen minutes until eight, most of the Dauntless faction began to pour
into the dining hall. It was needless to say that the Dauntless wasted no time. They woke up as late as
possible so that they could shovel their food into their mouth before leaving and going to do
whatever chore it was that they needed to do. I watched as Eric stood from the table and left the hall,
leaving me by myself. Of course, I wasn't alone for very long.

Within a minute, Cole, Heather, Dante, and Jax were all around me. I couldn't help but to wonder
where Buck was but I assumed that he was probably training solo. I knew that he was nervous about
his fight today. Cole took his spot next to me and I smiled at him. "So today's the first day of
fighting. Are you guys ready?" he asked.

Everyone seemed nervous, staring down at their plates. Heather looked like she might vomit her
dinner up onto her plate. It didn't surprise me that she barely touched her food. "Ready to get it over
with," she said.

Cole looked nervous too, both he and Dante sitting with a pale pallor to their faces. "Ready to see
who I'm fighting," Dante said.

Jax was the only one that looked normal but even he looked a little frazzled. "Ready to move up in
the rankings," he said.

"Screw you guys, I'm so ready!" I laughed loudly, earning incredulous stares from my friends.

"Who knocked something loose up there?" Heather asked, patting me on the side of the head.

I laughed at her and shoved her hand away from my head. "Come on, guys. I was beat to hell by
Eric three weeks ago and I never got to take out my anger on him after that," I said.

"Because he would have killed you," Buck cut in.
That was totally fair. Eric would have killed me if I'd tried to really fight him. "Better hope that it's none of you that I get paired up with," I said, with a little wink.

Heather snorted at me and I glanced over at her. The color had faded from her face but at least she was no longer green. Poor girl. I hoped that it wasn't me to fight her. No matter what, that fight would not be pretty. I knew that despite how nervous she was, Heather wanted nothing more than to win the fight.

"Oh, please, little miss hot shit. I could stomp your ass into the ground," she told me, making us both laugh.

I didn't doubt that Heather hit harder than me, but I knew that I had more skill. It would be a pretty even fight. "Well maybe we'll see about that," I told her.

Heather scoffed and looked over at the rest of our friends. "We put a tattoo on her and she gains a little muscle and suddenly she forgets that she spent sixteen years in Amity," she told me with a friendly glare.

I grabbed the roll on Cole's plate and threw it at her. Heather had faster reflexes then I had credited her for as she managed to duck out of the way. The bread went directly back towards some friend of Four's. Zeke, I was pretty sure that his name was. I had seen him around with Eric, too. Although they didn't always look thrilled to be together. Heather quickly jumped back and the rest of us ducked down, hoping that Four would let it go.

Dante rolled his eyes at us and sat up first, taking a big swig of water. "So do you think that they're actually going to make the fights fair?" he asked us.

Would we ever have a fair fight? "What does a fair fight even mean?" I asked.

"Like have boys fight against the other boys and have the girls fight against each other?" he clarified.

Scoffing loudly, I shook my head. There was no way that the fights were going to be fair. Chances were that they would pair someone tiny and untalented with the best person in the group. "I think you forget that I was thrown around by Eric for five hours a few weeks ago. There's no way that they're going to make the fights fair," I said.

"If Eric's making them, we all know that you're going to end up fighting against Colt or Jade," Jax said.

I glanced over at him and scowled. He wasn't wrong. "Eric mentioned it a few weeks ago when he thought that I wasn't hitting hard enough. When we fight we aren't going to get someone our size that thinks the same way we do. Chances are that it's going to be someone totally different than us. It's actually a good technique," I said, earning shocked looks from around the table. "It just isn't fair."

Everyone at the table were shaking their heads at me and I sighed. "Well I agree with you," Jax said.

"Thank you."

"I don't think that these fights are going to be fair. I don't think that we're going to enjoy anything that happens today. Unless we happen to be the winner that is," he said, earning nods from everyone.

Breakfast was a mostly silent affair after that, no one knowing what to say. It would be tough to think about everything that was going to happen today. It definitely wouldn't be fun to get beaten up. Chances were that even the winners would be injured by tonight. Instead of bothering to try and talk about something pointless we all just ate in silence. Most of us were thinking about the fights that
were coming up.

As we headed into the training room I thought about my own standing. I was right at the bottom of the initiates that would be staying through the first round of training. If I lost this fight, no matter who it was, I was pretty sure that it would push me below the red line. I knew that I would have to win to put myself in a safe spot. I just hoped that Four and Eric would take it easy on me and pair me with someone that I could beat. Raven or Skylar would be preferable. As much as I did like the two girls, I knew that I would be able to win against either of them. It would get me away from the red line.

Filing into the training room, Four and Eric nodded for us to look over to the board where all of our names were written out. Each of us had been assigned one person to fight against. Well, all but one of us, but I wasn't sure who that would be yet. My eyes scanned over the list of fights as I searched for my own name.

Cole vs. Heather

Jax vs. Dante

Hunter vs. Buck

Jade vs. Raven

Draven vs. Jet

Alex vs. Colt

The fights wouldn't really be fair for anyone. Cole was definitely stronger than Heather, but she wasn't exactly a weakling. She might win the fight. The problem was that they were friends. At least I wasn't the one to have to fight her. Jax and Draven would be a pretty even fight. I didn't want to have no faith in Buck but I was pretty sure that Hunter was going to be the winner. He was a big guy and his strength matched. I still thought that Hunter should have been in the top spot. Raven was very unlucky. The girl was already weak and some nights I heard her crying in the dorm. At least it would be a quick fight. Jet and Draven would manage. Both boys were pretty good fighters and neither were particularly bloodthirsty.

It wasn't those fights that I was nervous for. It was my own. I had gotten the one thing that I was desperate to avoid. I would have much rather been fighting Skylar - who would be sitting out this week - or sit out myself. I knew that Colt was dying to get into a fight with me. Particularly after everything that we had said to each other in the past month, none of which had been polite.

All of the saliva in my throat went bone dry as I glanced across the room to find Colt. His eyes were still scanning the list and when he got to the end, I noticed that they turned up in a huge smile. Lucky Skylar. I'd much rather be the one not fighting. Colt looked over at me and grinned, probably knowing that I would have rather done anything than fight him. My friends were all staring at me, probably not sure whether they should comfort me or just leave me be. I was glad that they chose the latter.

"That is so typical," I muttered. I was about to pass out when I saw Four walk in front of me and a sudden rage shot through me. This was half his fault.

As I made my move to leave, Heather grabbed onto my arm. "What are you doing?" she hissed.

But I ignored her and ripped out of her grasp. Darting to catch up with him, I fell into step with Four, making his head turn to me. "What the hell, Four? I thought we were finally starting to get along," I snapped at him.
"I'm not friends with initiates," he told me.

Making a loud and irritable noise deep in my throat, I crossed my arms over my chest and glared at him. "You know what I meant," I snarled.

He didn't even need the smallest explanation to see where I was coming from. He was no idiot. But this was bordering on idiocy. I was going to die in this fight. "That's exactly the reason that I put you with him. If you beat him your score goes way up. You are going to be assumed to lose this fight," he told me.

What was it with him and Eric? They were such jerks. "Thanks," I said.

But I knew that already. I didn't need to hear it. "If you win that means that you'll get nearly double points. If he loses, he loses a lot of points," Four explained.

Part of me knew that it was smart on Four's part to put me with Colt. If I won, it meant that my points would go way up, along with my ranking. And in the case that I lost... well it didn't really matter. No one was expecting me to win in the first place. If I lost that fight it would be an upset on my part. I would lose a lot of points. But still, if I lost I was pretty sure that it would still push me below the red line. Or at least keep me in the same spot.

"And if he wins?" I asked Four, not really sure that I wanted the answer.

Four merely shrugged and a sharp flash of anger shot through me. He was treating this like it was no big deal. He was treating it like my future couldn't have mattered less to him. Of course, I was sure that it didn't. "Ensure that he doesn't," Four told me.

"How useful you are," I told him under my breath.

"We've already taught you enough so that you could win a fight with him."

"You've had Eric throwing me around the training room for the past three weeks."

He glared at me as I rolled my eyes. That was completely useless information. "But even if he does, your points won't take that big of a hit. You aren't expected to win this fight. Either way, I did you a favor," he told me with a shrug.

Once more I glared at Four, not that it made much of an impact on him. I probably wasn't the first initiate ever to be pissed with him because of who they had to spar with. "Thanks for that superb pep talk," I snapped.

Before he could say anything else, I turned away from Four and walked back to my friends. "What happened?" Cole asked.

"He's going to kill me. You guys know that he's going to kill me, right?" I asked desperately.

Heather walked over to me and grabbed my hand. "He's not going to kill you. Four and Eric won't let that happen. You know that they might not love you, but they'll protect you," she said.

"They'll laugh as it happens. I mean everyone else has at least somewhat of a fair fight," I said, hearing a derisive snort from Cole. "No offense Cole, but you know that when the two of you fight you'll have somewhat of a truce. You won't really be trying to severely injure each other. Only win the fight. Colt is going to kill me if he gets the chance."

Speak of the devil, I heard Colt's voice call to me from the other side of the training room. "Oh good.
The Amity," he said loudly.

It wasn't surprising that he had finally spoken to me. I knew that he was only waiting so that everyone could hear him. He wanted to make a show out of everything. It was the way that he was. And he had already known that he would be fighting me. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had rigged it.

"You ready, Softie? You're going down. If it's the last thing that I do here in Dauntless, it's going to make sure that you stay below that red line. We all know that you belong with the Factionless," he told me with a sneer.

I'd beat his head into the mat during our fight. He was a nightmare. Why the hell did he have to be sixteen this year? My blood was boiling as I stared at the former Erudite. How could one person, from a relatively friendly Faction, be so cruel? Maybe that was just the remainder of the Amity in me talking.

"Really? That big head might weigh you down out there. Wouldn't it be awfully embarrassing to lose to an Amity? What would your little groupies think of you then?" I asked him, watching as his eyes darkened.

"I'll break your neck," Colt hissed, walking up to me.

It was then that I remembered the girl that Colt had been dancing with last night at the Pit. He had looked so furious when she had left. "How about what that girl you were flirting with the other day would think? What was her name? Amber. I can be sure to go pay her a visit -"

My jibe was quickly cut off by Eric and I scowled at him. "Shut up, initiate," he hissed at me.

Colt looked grateful that Eric had gotten me to stop talking, but my anger had now been transferred from my opponent to my leader. This wasn't only Four's fault, it was Eric's too. In fact, while Four had some actually good points, Eric had probably done it just to watch me get the life knocked out of me.

We were still waiting to start the training day. Eric was staring at me, probably knowing that I was going to say something. And he was damn right that I was going to. "Just when I thought that we might be getting somewhere at breakfast, you go and do this!" I yelled.

More than a few initiates turned to look at me, but I simply brushed them all off. This was between Eric and me. "What do you want, Amity?" Eric asked, a bored tone to his voice.

"You put me up with someone twice my size and number three on the board. I'm safe where I am above the red line but a loss to him will put me below the red line. Or at least dangerously close to it," I said.

"Yes. It will," he said.

Eric looked like he could care less and I growled darkly. Even he wasn't this heartless. Was he? "I know you want me out of here but this is just cruel. If I leave Dauntless I want it to be because I really couldn't do it, not in a casket!" I hissed.

As much as I would have loved to yell that at Eric, the last thing that I wanted was for Colt to hear what I was saying. He didn't need any more ego stroking. "Don't be so dramatic," Eric said.

"You're one to talk," I muttered, remembering the way that he had thrown me from the ring for accidentally kicking him.
"Calm yourself, Amity. You're starting to sound more Candor by the minute. Listen to me. I'm going to give you some advice and you're not going to say a word. Got it?" he asked.

The offer was surprising. I knew that I was the only person that he had offered help to. I probably should have stayed silent, but that wasn't something that Amity's were known for. "Why are you helping me?" I asked, making Eric roll his eyes at me.

He was probably regretting even giving me an opening to talk. "Stop talking," Eric said.

But I ignored him and continued on my rant. "For three weeks you said nothing to me, and now we're back to speaking to each other. You were nice to me this morning, then you paired me with Colt, but now you're trying to help me," I said.

It made no sense, one minute Eric was nice to me and the next it was like he was ready to push me off of the top of the building. Which, right now, he probably was. The look on Eric's face told me that I should have indeed stayed silent.

"What did I just say about keeping quiet?" he snapped at me. I forced myself not to say anything. If he was going to be helpful, then I had better keep quiet. I needed the help right now. "Alright, now listen to me. He's slow, you're fast. Use that to your advantage." I'd seen Four get him with that during plenty of fights. "He hits hard but he doesn't think his moves through. Remember what I told you weeks ago, people tend to look at where they are going to hit before they strike. Keep that in mind. He's overconfident. He won't be thinking that you have a chance to win. Be fast, strike quickly and move again. You'll tire him out. If all else fails, work at his knee. I've noticed that he favors his left leg."

It was a dirty way to fight, aiming for an opponent's weak spot. Four and Eric had told us that much. They had told us that we wouldn't get points for doing it, but if nothing else, it was a good way to win a fight. And that was what we would get points for. It was good that he had told me that much. It seemed that Eric wanted me to win the fight, but I didn't know why. It didn't matter. He was helping me and that was all that mattered. I thought about what Tori had told me, how Eric picked one initiates life to ruin, and how this year it was me.

Did he really see that much potential that he put me with Cole for our first fight? "Alright. I don't know why you did that, but thank you. I'm going to need all of the luck that I can get during this fight," I said.

He gave me a curt not before turning and walking over to Four without saying another word. Sighing deeply, I walked back over to my friends, smiling as Buck wrapped his arm around me. I sank into his shoulder as we dropped to the ground. Of course, the moment of happiness was destined to only last for a moment.

"Heather and Cole, into the ring!" Four yelled at us.

"Don't panic. You're both going to do wonderfully," I told them.

Maybe it was a little bit of residual Amity. I gave Cole a reassuring smile and Heather a short hug before letting them go into the ring. They both looked nervous. Eric was completely unimpressed with the two initiates. "Alright. Now on my count you'll fight. Winner will be decided by Eric and I," Four said.

Both Cole and Heather nodded, standing across from each other in the ring. Heather was about Cole's height, but I had never seen her look smaller than she did in that moment. My heart was beating rapidly as I stood on the cement ground, smashed between Dante and Buck. Both boys were
watching with blank expressions, probably more consumed in winning their own fights. It was what I should be thinking about right now. I just couldn't.

"How do we know when to stop?" Cole asked, making me glance up.

Colt and Jade were watching with wide eyes, both looking happier than I had seen them in a while. It disgusted me to see how happy they were to get to fight. I was looking forward to it a little too, but because I wanted to hit Colt and prove that I was tougher than Eric thought. "Until one of you can't keep going," Eric said like it was obvious.

My eyes shot over to him and I raised an eyebrow. They expected us to just keep going until one of us was out of it? Jade laughed loudly and I noticed that Colt's dark eyes were now locked onto me, making my skin crawl. He was way too happy about being able to fight me. I glanced over to Four to see if he was going to debate with Eric about the rule, but he seemed perfectly fine with it. That actually surprised me. I had thought that Four would consider that a little harsh for us to do.

"We keep going until one of us physically can't fight the other anymore?" Heather asked.

"Yes."

"Isn't that a little cruel?" she asked him with a little bite to her words.

Eric's previously bored look turned venomous as he walked up to her on the mat and towered over her. Heather backed off of Eric slightly and I narrowed my eyes. I really didn't want Heather to get hit by Eric. I knew how badly it hurt. It seemed that I was the only one that knew how badly it hurt to be hit - actually hit - by Eric.

"So what are you going to do when you get into a real fight?" he asked her, making her blanch. "Are you just going to leave your enemy on the ground because killing him would be cruel?"

"I'd never leave them alive," Colt whispered.

"That does not mean that you are killing your opponent, Erudite," Eric said, turning his glare onto Colt.

His smirk faded quickly and I snorted under my breath. Thanks, I mouthed to Eric. It was one of the few things that I was able to thank Eric for.

He gave me a quick nod before looking back to Heather. "Now get into the ring," Eric hissed at her. As he had been backing her into the corner, she had fallen out of the ring. "Begin!"

In a hurry, Heather darted back into the ring. Immediately she raised her fists to her face and I sighed. She was holding them wrong. Her hands were too low. It wasn't only that but the way that she was standing would make it easy for Cole to get her to the ground. He knew that he would win and I was pretty sure that Heather knew it too.

"I'm so sorry about this. You know that I would never really want to hurt you," Cole told Heather.

They both clearly wanted nothing more than to get this over with. "It's okay," she called back to him.

Eric scoffed loudly from behind me and I turned back. His arms were folded over his chest and I scowled at him. Just because he was a heartless asshole didn't mean that everyone else was, too. Eric looked over to me briefly and I shook my head at him. He merely rolled his eyes at me before turning back to the ring. It looked like even Four was getting sick of waiting for them to fight.
Maybe sooner was better than later. "Get on with it initiates, or the two of you can fight me," Eric threatened.

That was all that it took for Cole to launch into motion. No one wanted to fight with Eric if they could avoid it. Thankfully Heather was faster than I had thought that she was. She darted away from Cole, throwing him back as she ran. Of course, it did almost nothing. For a while the two of them sparred back and forth, the blows doing nothing more than knocking them slightly off balance. I knew that if they didn't start fighting for real soon, it would come back to bite them. Heather threw a punch at Cole's stomach, seemingly hard. But it did almost nothing. He merely took a step back before coming at her once more.

This time he threw his arm out and I gasped lightly as his elbow connected with Heather's nose. It had caught her by surprise as she fell to the ground, clutching her nose. When she brought her hand away I noticed that there was blood coating it. Cole looked horribly guilty as he went for her once more, tackling her into the mat. She grunted, managing to give Cole a few good scratches to his face and neck. He finally seemed to get over his fear of hurting Heather as he pulled back his fist and gave her one hard hit, directly into the temple.

I watched in stunned silence as Heather's head dropped back and her body went limp. Cole jumped off of her, clearly horrified at what he had just done to his friend. The room was silent for a moment. "Winner - Cole," Four called out.

It broke the tense silence in the room. I noticed that Heather was bleeding from the wound on her head where she had fallen and also from her nose. "Oh my God, Heather!" I yelped as I darted into the ring.

She looked half-dead. I dropped onto her side and held my hand under her nose. Thankfully she was still breathing. Cole was sitting on his knees next to her, barely moving. He was just watching in stunned silence at his friend. Heather was starting to moan and move slightly but I knew that it would be a while before she was fully responsive. Still, I snapped my fingers in front of her face a few times, hoping to snap her out of it.

"I didn't mean to hurt her," Cole said softly.

Turning to Cole for a moment, I placed my hand on top of his and gave it a quick squeeze. I knew that Cole would feel bad for hurting Heather, but I hadn't thought that he would feel that bad. Maybe I had underestimated how good of friends he was with Heather. "We know that Cole but we have to make sure that she's alright," I said.

He nodded, leaning over Heather and finally giving me a helping hand. "Heather," Cole called out to her.

"Get her up," Eric called irritably.

"Give us a second. She was just knocked out," I snapped.

He looked like he might say something nasty to me, but he settled for something a little nicer. "Hurry up," he snapped.

I turned away and looked back at Heather. "Hey, look at me. Are you alright?" I tried to ask Heather. She stayed silent. I groaned and slapped her lightly on the cheek. "Heather, look at me." Four walked up to my side and I glanced up at him. "She's out but she was sort of responsive a minute ago."
He looked down at Heather and performed a few basic medical checks on her. He stood and looked over to Cole. "Bring her to medical and get yourself looked at in the meantime too," he ordered and Cole.

Everyone jumped into motion so that they could get the two of them to the medical bay. Buck helped get Heather to a standing position and I told Cole a quick goodbye, watching him half drag Heather out of the door. The room was silent for a moment before Four's voice rang out once more.

"Alright, next fighters!" he yelled. I turned my angry gaze on him and shook my head.

One of the initiates was seriously injured and they were acting like nothing had happened. I guessed that was something that was typical in Dauntless. Dropping to the ground a few feet from the edge of the mat I watched the next few fights. Apparently we weren't going to be getting a break for lunch today, seeing as we were still working when the clock ticked past twelve. I sighed, knowing that I really could have used some protein for my upcoming fight.

But it didn't really matter. I could manage, and I wanted my fight done with. I watched the next fight, Jax versus Dante, with a piqued interest. The fight was long, lasting well over an hour. It was probably the longest fight that we had watched. Jax had been the one to finally win, but Dante had put up a good fight. Dante had lost when Jax had finally pinned him and repeatedly punched him in the face, eventually swelling his eyes to the point where he could no longer see. It was definitely a brutal fight, both boys coated in blood by the end of the fight. Neither were able to look at the other as they were sent to the medical unit.

Eric and Four had seemed a little pleased by their fight. Hunter and Buck's fight was very similar. Hunter had won with brute force and I could barely watch. By the end of the fight, Buck couldn't even walk. I was horrified as I watched him try to move around afterwards. One of the trainers had been forced to bring him to the medical unit. He looked like he needed to get some serious medical attention. Thankfully, Hunter seemed to be having a hard time walking too.

Jade and Raven's fight was over as fast as it had started. A few hits and Raven was out, clearly making Jade happy. Four had brought her to the infirmary himself. She had been back a few minutes later, looking defeated but better. I assumed that she had just needed a moment to regain her strength. The last fight was between Draven and Jet. Draven had won, but not by much. They were about matched with strength and it was just sheer exhaustion that had aided Draven in the end. No one seemed impressed by their fight. They had probably thought that it would be bloody and brutal like the ones prior to it.

Eric walked into the ring and nearly shoved the two boys out of it. My heart leaped into my throat as everyone that had previously been in the medical unit came back into the room. Excluding Buck, that is. He would be in there for a while. We probably wouldn't see him again until dinner. Heather looked much better and I smiled at her. It probably came out pained, as I was paranoid over my fight with Colt.

"Feeling better?" I asked her.

There was a small black eye underneath her right eye. "A little sore but I'll be alright. Cole keeps apologizing. It's almost funny. Maybe I'll use sympathy to get him to get me my stuff," she said.

We both laughed as I gave her a gentle shove. "You're terrible," I said.

Eric's voice made us turn away from each other. "That's pathetic. Neither of you two need to go to the medical unit. Just sit there and take a minute to get your breath back. Last fight! First jumper and last jumper, into the ring!" he called.
Colt wasted no time hopping into the ring. I walked slightly slower, afraid that if I walked any faster my legs would give out and I would fall flat on my face. Maybe that would excuse me from the fight. No, I could do this. I had to do this. Eric gave me a gentle nudge into the ring as I apparently wasn't walking fast enough.

Colt was still smiling at me. "Ah, the little Amity. I'm about to show you that first jumper doesn't mean shit," he told me.

"We'll see," I said, driving my feet into the mat.

He looked very pleased as he came to take another step closer to me. I rolled my eyes at him. "Don't worry. I won't go for the face. I gotta have something pretty to look at, right?" he asked me, with a devious glint in his eyes.

Unfortunately I had to admit I was a little glad to hear that. Not that I thought that he would keep his word. We stared at each other, waiting for Eric or Four to call a start to the fight. The moment that they would, I knew that Colt would attack me. He was that type. So instead of putting my arms up, I got ready to run. Colt merely laughed.

"Begin," Eric called.

Just like I had anticipated, Colt came running at me. I ducked under his swing and grabbed his arm, pulling it back. He hissed loudly before taking his other arm and grabbing my hair. For a moment I was pissed that Eric had been right. I needed to cut my hair. Colt yanked on it harder than I had thought he was capable of and pulled me down. I hit the mat roughly and squealed a little when Colt came diving at me.

More out of panic than anything else, I threw my foot up, watching as my boot connected with his eye. It wasn't very hard but I saw his head snap back. Before he could gather himself, I swung my other leg back up, hitting him roughly in the jaw, before flipping myself over and jumping back to a standing position. Colt was clearly not happy that I had even managed to get one hit on him as he came charging at me once more.

I tried to duck under him once more but he knew where I was going with it. He grabbed my throat and I gasped. I had not been expecting that. His grip immediately tightened and I cried out. Shit, he was holding me just as tightly as Eric had. I struggled to get out of his grip but he wasn't letting up. There was only one thing that I could think to do. I took my free hand and swiped out at Colt's face. My nails grabbed onto the skin on Colt's face and I grimaced as I heard him scream loudly.

He dropped me immediately and stars flooded my vision. Before I could get my senses back together a heavy weight hit me on the back of the head and I dropped to the ground. Colt was pinning me down into the mat, muffling me. I was screaming loudly for him to get off of me, that I couldn't breathe, but he didn't let up. Oxygen was lacking in my system and my protests had less effort put into them. I remembered what Eric had told me about Colt's knee and I reached back. His knee was thankfully next to my head and I took the opportunity to grab it.

It seemed that Colt knew what I was doing as the moment that my hand went to his knee he threw a hard punch at my head. It hurt like hell and sent stars through my vision but it was all that I needed. His grip on me had let up and I forced his body off of me. My hand was still on his knee and as I stood, I kept my grip. Before he could push me off of him, I grabbed his knee and yanked as hard as I could. The scream that he let out was ear piercing and I dropped to the ground out of exhaustion.

As my vision came back I saw that Colt's knee was completely out of place and across his face were three, long, scratch marks. They were bleeding down his face and my eyes widened. I had done that.
Colt recognized my moment of weakness, taking it to grab my leg and pull me onto my back. He grabbed me by the roots of my hair and shoved my head onto the mat. I cried out as he took a few good hits at my eyes and cheeks. I could feel the skin splitting and my eye swelling shut but I refused to give up. I need these points.

Reaching up, I grabbed Colt's throat and began to constrict my hands. But it did nothing to him. He just hit me a few more times. I knew that there was no way that I was getting him off of me any time soon and I was quickly fading. So I did the one thing that I didn't want to do. Not even to Colt. I dug my nails into his neck, crying out as blood began to pool at the tips of my fingers. Colt immediately let go of my neck and I kicked him away, hitting him in the ribs. He didn't let me go easily though, as he fell he pushed his foot back. It hit me in the stomach and I bent over, coughing up blood.

More had come up than I had thought should have, and that concerned me. He had to have done some serious damage. I could feel blood coating my hair and most of the rest of my body. One of us had to end this. We were really going to kill each other if we didn't. Colt was struggling to get to his feet but I knew that he was struggling to see. Weakly, I crawled over to him and drove my elbow into his face. He groaned at the pain and grabbed my thigh muscle, twisting it painfully. Tears were slipping out of my eyes at the blinding pain, but I refused to give up. I threw my fist into his face, earning another hit to the stomach, and groaned. I spit up more blood onto Colt, not making him happy in the slightest. He kicked his foot roughly backwards, hitting me in the back. I cried out once more and managed to crawl on top of him.

Knowing that they wouldn't be very strong, but he wasn't very strong at the moment, I threw my fists repeatedly into his face. "What was that about first jumper doesn't mean shit? You aren't as tough as you think you are, Erudite," I sneered at Colt.

He hadn't passed out but he was clearly unable to keep going. It was in that moment that I let out all of my anger. At the same time as I was hitting Colt, he was pulling on every limb, tearing hair from my scalp, and a few times he slapped me. But I kept going. A few hits for Four, for ever putting me with him. For Eric, just for being himself. For my friends, who had all already gotten beaten to hell. For him and his awful friends for making the best decision that I had ever made a pain in the ass. For Amity, for making me keep in all of this anger. For my parents, for never making me feel good enough. For Iris and Florian, who were probably enjoying perfect lives in Candor. For Jeanine Matthews, for making me, and every other Divergent have to hide.

My hits were barely doing anything anymore and I knew it. But Colt was past seriously fighting. I did let up on a hit for a moment and I knew that I deserved it when his fist came roughly at my face. It hurt and I groaned, blood filling my mouth once more. I immediately threw one back at him.

His head snapped back against the mat. "Enough," I heard Eric snarl from behind me.

For whatever reason, I ignored him. I hit Colt across the face again, intent on breaking his nose. Instead of letting me continue, like I had thought that he would, Eric grabbed me by the collar and pulled me off of Colt. His hands were around my waist as he threw me backwards.

"You've won, don't make me deduct points for unnecessary fighting." Eric turned back to Jade and Hunter, who both looked absolutely horrified. "Take him to the infirmary." They both nodded, grabbing Colt. "You should go too," Eric told me.

He walked back over to me and pressed a hand underneath my chin, forcing me to look into the light. "Get off of me," I said, pushing away from him.

My balance had not returned yet. I immediately fell to the ground. Pain was shooting through every crevice of my body but I refused to look weak. I had won. In some stupid twist of fate, I had won a
fight against Colt. "Go to the infirmary," Eric ordered.

Not when I was celebrating my win. Not that it was a superior win, I hadn't won by much. It was half-blinding him that had helped me win. "Screw you, I won. I won!" I yelled from the ground.

It was pretty obvious that I was half delirious and Eric seemed to realize that. He motioned to Cole and Buck to come get me, Dante, Jax, and Heather following. "Alex that was awesome!" Cole called to me and I smiled.

"Everything hurts," I said, leaning onto him.

They grimaced at me. I was sure that I didn't look too pretty at the moment. "I can't believe that you really won that fight," Cole said, making everyone laugh.

"Thanks," I said, spitting out some blood.

It looked like Eric was about to yell at me to clean up the mat, but I was sure that it nothing that strange. It must have happened all the time. "I mean I knew that you were tough but I would have thought that anyone going up against Colt would have lost. You're definitely not in danger of falling below the red line," he told me.

The thought made me smile. "That's all that I wanted," I said.

Everyone helped me pull myself off of the ground but I immediately fell once more. At least, I would have fallen if I hadn't had Jax next to me. "Whoa, come on girl. We need to get you to the infirmary, Eric's right. You took some big hits out there," Cole told me.

The walk to the infirmary and everything that happened to me afterwards was pretty much a blur. Jax had carried me most of the way, that much I knew. He had tried to shield me from the prying eyes of the Dauntless members but I didn't care. I remembered telling most of the people that we saw on the way to the infirmary that I had won my fight. I remember a lot of them laughing and congratulating me.

Now that I was here in the Dauntless medical unit, I was feeling all of the pain from my fight. The nurse had said that I had a minor fracture in one of my ribs and a few dislocations. They had fixed those when I was under heavy sedation and I was glad for it. Even under sedation it had hurt like a bitch. Now I was looking at myself in the mirror across from my bed. The blood that had literally been coating me when I had come in was now washed off. Some was still in my hair and under my nails. The nurse had given me some type of anti-swelling pill that had actually made the swelling on my ribs and all around my face go down drastically. I knew that some makeup would take care of the rest.

My friends had been kicked out while the doctors were getting me relatively back to normal and I hadn't seen them since. I assumed that they were getting ready for the party. Not that I could blame them. Apparently Buck had been released from the medical unit, against advisement. Colt was still here but they thought that he could leave in a few hours. The Dauntless medics were simple, only helping as much as they thought was necessary. They thought that we were tough enough to deal with the pain. It was a very Dauntless way of thinking.

I hopped up from my bed and stood under the shower that they had in each of the little rooms. I made sure to wash all of the blood off of me and I grimaced as I realized how much blood there really was. For nearly five minutes the water ran red. Once it was done, I made sure to wash my body off, groaning every time that I put a little pressure on my wounds. It would take a few days before I was no longer sore. I jumped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around my body. I
sighed at the feeling of being clean. Water was beading on my body as I walked back into the main room.

My clothes were around here somewhere. "Not bad, initiate. There might be a little more Dauntless in you than I thought," I heard a voice call from the doorway.

Jumping slightly, I glanced up to see who was in the room. I probably should have yelled at Eric to get out of my room but I didn't care. Instead I just turned back to him and smiled proudly. I had won the fight and, in some way, he had seemed a little proud that I had. Eric looked over my body for a moment and whether it was to check for visible wounds, of which there were plenty, or just to look at me, I was happy. It was nice to get a little appreciation. Even if it was from Eric.

So I smiled and walked towards him, leaning against the bed-frame. "Wow. A compliment from Eric. You know that actually means a lot to me. And thanks about that tip about the knee," I said.

"You would have noticed it," he said.

But I shook my head at him. I wouldn't have noticed. "You know, I don't think that I would have won if you hadn't have told me about that," I said honestly. That was the reason that he couldn't really get upright during the last half of the fight. I owed my win to Eric. "But anyways, I appreciate it."

He nodded at me and helped me limp pathetically over to my bed. He let me fall gently onto the bed and I shifted carefully, making sure not to show him anything vital. "I wouldn't bet on that, initiate," he told me.

I raised my head at him. "Why's that?" I asked.

"I think you had a pretty good chance at that fight from the beginning," he told me.

My heart skipped a beat as I smiled at him. "Thanks, Eric," I said and he nodded.

For once the two of us were actually being civil to each other. There was no teasing tone, we weren't being secretly assholes to each other, and we were almost like friends. He was telling me that he had always had faith in me and I was thanking him for all of the help that he had given me. Neither one of us wanted to kill each other, which probably wouldn't have been very hard for him to do right about now. For a moment we sat in silence before a thought came to mind.

"Are you coming to the party later?" I asked him.

Eric laughed loudly and I cocked my head at him. I hadn't thought that anything that I had just said was funny. "You just nearly got your head kicked off of your neck and you're worried about going to some party later?" he asked.

Well that was rather embarrassing. I blushed as I brushed my wet hair off of my forehead. So maybe that was a little silly. I had nearly died in a fight a few hours prior and here I was concerned with whether or not my leader was going to a stupid party. I had to get my priorities in order.

"It's a party. I want to go to the party," I said brightly.

"Never been to a party before?"

"I've been. But I've been to Amity parties before. And those aren't much. I've only been to one Dauntless party, but I hear that this one is a lot more fun," I admitted.
"What the hell is an Amity party even like?"

"Think polar opposite of a Dauntless party." Eric raised his pierced brow, probably still unsure of what I meant. "No drinking, no dancing the way that you all do, and no going home with people that you don't know. No fighting, either," I explained.

We both stayed silent for a moment before he snorted and shook his head at me. "That's the least entertaining party I've ever heard of," he told me.

"So I'll be hoping that this one is more entertaining," I said.

His eyes narrowed at me and I nearly faltered under his terse stare. "I'm sure you'll find something entertaining to do," he said, making me blush slightly. "You sound more like a transfer than I've ever heard."

Fighting back a smile, I rolled my eyes at him. "Whatever, I want to have fun. Can't focus on the pain right now," I said.

He nodded at me, looking almost like he respected my choice. I was just pretty sure that he respected that I wasn't going to let the pain get to me. It was probably one of his own personal philosophies. I would have to make it one of mine too. I glanced at the table next to me and grabbed the pain medication that the nurse had left.

"I'll just take a few more of these if it means that I get to go later," I said, popping the cap off. Once more surprising me with how fast he was, Eric leaned over and grabbed the bottle from me. My mouth dropped open and I glared at him. "Give that back."

"Are you going to be drinking at the party?" he asked me.

"What are you, my father? Yes, I'm going to be drinking," I snapped.

It took me a moment too long to realize that he was right. If I was going to be drinking, that meant that I couldn't have any pain pills. I'd just use the liquor to numb the pain. "No, I don't think any more of these is a good idea for you. Make sure that she rests here and doesn't leave until she's ready," Eric told a nurse that came in. She nodded and went to reading my chart.

He gently pushed me back against the pillows. "You're not the boss of me," I muttered under my breath.

"Actually, I am."

Why did he have to be right all of the time? There would be a day that he was finally wrong about something and I'd throw a party. "Do you need anything else or are you just here to stare at my chest?" I asked, tugging at the towel.

He smirked and leaned over me. If he wanted to, he could have looked right down my towel. But he didn't. He kept his gaze locked with mine. "Watch it, Amity. Being on too many of those guarantees a one way trip down the Chasm," he told me, making me pale slightly.

After what I had done to Colt, I was sure that he would want nothing more than to toss me down the Chasm. "Good thing I won't be taking them," I said, pushing the pills to the side.

"Enjoy that party later though," he told me with a little glint in his eyes.

Giving a last order to the nurse to keep me in my bed, Eric left the infirmary, taking the pain pills
with him. I grumbled out a few curses before dropping back into the pillows. They were much softer here than in the dorms. A few hours later, I groaned at the shift of weight on the bed as Heather leaned over me. Had she really forgotten what had just happened to me a few hours ago? Apparently she didn't care. She looked thrilled about something.

"Wake up! It's time for the party!" she shouted gleefully.

I was excited for the party, but I was also in pain. All of the stiffness from my fight with Colt was coming on. "Give me a second. I feel like I got hit by a bus," I muttered.

"Well, it's almost time but it's starting in like an hour and that means that you have to get ready. Come on, get out of bed," she told me excitedly. I nodded at her and pushed myself up. I was still only in the towel and I noticed that Buck was looking away from me. I slowly crawled out of bed, grabbing Buck by the arm to help me across the room. "You won your fight, you should not be moving this slow."

Snapping my head back to her, I knew that she immediately realized that she had made a mistake by saying that. Her face paled and I scoffed at her. I loved Heather, but sometimes she didn't think. "In case you haven't noticed, Heather, Cole took it easy on you. Colt went full out with me and even though I won, I'm about as beat up as you were," I snapped at her.

Heather looked like she felt terrible. "Sorry," she muttered. I waved her off. I didn't want to fight tonight.

"But whatever, from what I hear this is the first real Dauntless party. With real Dauntless men," I winked at her.

Just behind us, Buck groaned under his breath. I laughed at the look on his face. Heather was nodding at me and I noticed her eyes darken a few shades. What could we say? Hormonal teenagers. And there were some seriously hot guys here. I had come to really enjoying watching them work out without their shirts on.

"I just get hot thinking about them. Why can't more of them work out with their shirts off? I mean, is it really that hard?" she asked, making me laugh. "And it makes less laundry for them to do. Shower time! Come on!"

Without giving me a chance to react, Heather grabbed me by the arm and dragged me off towards the dorms. Waving her off and letting her know that I had already showered, I walked into the bathroom but headed to the mirrors. There were plenty of other cosmetics laid out for the others girls and I grinned. I was really going to go overboard this time. I deserved it for what I had done earlier. I had just won my first fight against Colt.

I'd made sure to use cover-up first, trying to cover all of the bruises that Colt had left on me. For the most part I had blended my makeup over them but the discoloration was still there slightly. There was a dark ring of eyeliner across my eyes and I had a deep blue eye shadow on. It actually made the black eye look better. I added a little last minute swipe of red lipstick before I let my towel fall off and pulled my black dress on. My wing tattoo stood out of the side and I smiled. Pulling a pair of borrowed heels from Heather on and curling my hair quickly, I turned to my current partner in crime, both of us smirking.

We looked pretty similar but instead of wearing a dress, Heather had on a pair of black leather pants and a black vest. I'd never seen the two of us look so Dauntless. I was wobbling slightly - as I had never been the steadiest walker in heels - and grabbed onto Heather, keeping myself upright.
"You look perfect," Heather told me, making me grin at her.

"So do you," I told her.

While we had been getting ready, so did everyone else. Buck, Dante, and Cole were standing around us, all looking like they had never seen us before. Perfect. That was the reaction that I was going for. Although they looked like they wished that we were wearing just a little bit more.

"And I told you that the dress would look perfect on you. The tattoo shows off perfectly with the little slits. And it leaves just enough to the imagination," she said.

I turned to Heather and narrowed my eyes. This dress was showing off almost everything. It hit me at the top of my thighs, dipped low in the back, and only barely covered my chest. It was very Dauntless, but I still had some Amity in me. "Are we both looking at the same dress?" I asked Heather, who was currently admiring herself in the mirror. "Heather, this leaves almost nothing to the imagination."

Heather turned back to me with a wicked grin. "That's the point!" she yelled at me, making both of us burst out in a fit of laughter.

The boys all were shaking their heads and I smiled. They were more like our fathers than our friends sometimes. And both Heather and I knew that the minute that we were out at the party, they would be looking to pick up girls that looked exactly like the two of us did. Maybe even worse.

"You two are disgusting," Buck told us.

"We both looked at him. He scoffed and motioned for us to head out to the party. "How are we disgusting?" I asked.

"You know, you're only going to attract the wrong types of guys with those outfits," he said seriously.

Laughing a little, I held my hands up in surrender when Buck turned to me with an angry stare. My legs burned with exhaustion as I walked and my back twinged in pain but I pushed it off. I was going to enjoy this night, damn it. I was going to enjoy my first real victory here in Dauntless.

"Okay, thanks, Dad. You know, I'll keep that in mind when I go out tonight. You can talk to the nice boy that takes me out and threaten him just a little. I'll be sure that he has me home at a reasonable hour and we will make sure that he keeps his hands at a respectable distance," I told him, making Heather laugh loudly beside me.

To my surprise, Dante laughed with us and slung his arm over Buck. "They're right, Buck. I mean, come on, you can't say that you aren't going to be looking for a Dauntless woman tonight?" he asked Buck, voicing my thoughts from earlier in the night. I smirked as Buck's face fell and he knew that he had no argument remaining. He was just doing the typical male double standard thing. "Well... But..."

Buck tried to counter, but there was nothing to counter with. "Yeah, that's what I thought. You can join me over by the bar," Dante said, pulling Buck with him.

Smiling at my friends, I walked with them over to the bar that was on the outside of the party. Already I could tell that it wasn't like the other ones that we had gone to. Most people were normally talking and laughing while music played loudly, but this was different. This time everyone was dancing, grinding their bodies against one another. Alcohol was everywhere and it seemed like
inhibitions were being lowered in every part of the room. People that looked like they hardly knew each other were connected at the mouths and fights were breaking out all over the Pit.

It was everything that I had ever imagined and it made me nervous. "I think that we'll all join you over there," I shouted over the blare of the music. "I might need a little liquid luck before going out there tonight. I mean, Amity never had any types of parties like this and so far the Dauntless ones have been pretty demure."

My comment earned nods from everyone with me. As I took my spot up at the bar, a familiar figure shoved me out of the way, nearly making me topple over in my seat. "I'd be careful there, Amity," Colt hissed at me.

"Get away from me," I snapped.

I noticed that the scars that I had left on him were sticking out, bright red and painful looking. His face was swollen too, one of his eyes nearly shut. It made me proud. "Some bad boy might think that he could take advantage of a sweet, drunk, little Amity. Especially if someone just happened to be giving them a little push towards her," he hissed.

The thought of something like that happening made my skin crawl and I hated it. I didn't ever want anything like that happening to me, or anyone. No one deserved to have someone else push themselves onto them. No matter what the reason was.

"Do you want a little repeat of earlier, Erudite?" I sneered at Colt, leaning forward slightly.

A sharp pain shot through my ribs but I refused to let him see the pain. He didn't deserve to see me in any state of weakness. To my shock, Jade stuck her arm out in front of Colt and pushed him back. She was glaring at me, clearly not happy that I had won my fight. "Leave her, she isn't worth it. You'll get her back when it's her time. Watch your back Amity," she hissed at me.

With that, Jade, Hunter, and Colt disappeared into the crowd and I grabbed a drink from the bartender. The man standing behind the bar gave me a little wink as he passed it over and I downed it. I wasn't sure what it was, but it burned like hell going home. My friends looked concerned for me but I shook them off. I wanted everyone to have fun tonight, not worry about Colt and I's hatred for each other.

"Whatever, guys. I'm not gonna let Colt's little pissing match with me get in my way. You guys ready to get out there?" I asked, jumped out from the side of the bar and heading to the bar in the center of the room.

Heather nodded at me and I grabbed her by the arm. "Let's do it," she chirped.

"Come on, let's go show the Dauntless girls that they have new competition," I told her.

As it turned out, it didn't seem that we were much competition for the Dauntless girls. It was a little disheartening. I had thought that this would be a fantastic night. It was only Heather and I at the bar, her having just returning from a failed dance. At least she had gotten an offer. No one had come to talk with me yet. As disheartening as that was.

Jet and Raven were currently dancing together, and Colt and his minions were somewhere in the crowd. Cole and Jax had found two Dauntless twins that they were currently working on and Dante was talking with some Dauntless born girl. Draven was currently dancing with Skylar, the two too shy to dance with anyone else. It was nice to see. Buck had started talking to some Dauntless girl that worked in the hair salon and I hadn't seen the two of them in almost an hour.
I ordered myself another drink and downed it quickly. I had no idea what my count was. I had lost it a long time ago. I was about to suggest that Heather and I leave but before I could a figure seated itself next to me. "My, my. You might want to slow it down there, sweetheart," a male's voice called.

I looked over at him and almost smiled. He was grinning at me and I smiled back. Maybe my luck was changing. "I think I can handle myself," I said.

"Or at least let me buy you one. Whiskey over here, two," he said. The bartender slid them over and we both cheered to the other before downing the drink. The room was already spinning slightly and I knew that the shot wasn't going to help. "My name is Damien. Do I get the pleasure of knowing yours?"

For a while I just looked over Damien, not really sure if I was seeing him completely. I knew that alcohol could make things look and seem a lot different than they really were. He had bright blonde hair that stuck up on the top of his head. His eyes were so blue that they were almost silver and his face curved at all of the right angles. He was slimmer than Eric, probably more towards Four's size and I smirked. My luck was definitely changing for the night.

"Alex," I told him simply.

His eyes brightened and he smirked at me. "Alex?" he asked me.

"Last time I checked," I said.

"I'm pretty sure I've heard about you," he told me.

How the hell had a Dauntless member heard about me? "I have a reputation?" I asked.

There was no way that this was really happening. Real members actually knew what my name was. That was incredible. "First jumper this year, right?" he asked me and I nodded.

"That's me," I chirped.

He smiled at me, turning his chair into me and placing a hand on my knee. "And the only initiate to get a hit in on Eric. Very impressive. A little suicidal too," he told me.

"I paid for it," I said.

"Knowing Eric, I don't doubt that. I also heard that you won your first fight today."

"It wasn't easy, but I did."

"Sounds like you were a natural born Dauntless," he told me.

Well that was nice to hear. Knowing that this might be my only chance to turn this night around, I leaned into him and smirked darkly. "I think you might be following me," I told him, earning a laugh. "I'd like to think that, but I can't take credit for everything. I only jumped first because I'm originally from Amity. I had to show them that I really did belong here. Kicking Eric was an accident. I thought he was going to kill me. But the fight I'll take full credit for."

Damien laughed at me and I smiled. Iris would be so proud of me if she could see me right now. She had always told me that I was a miserable flirt. "Well Amity lost quite the star. I'm glad that you chose Dauntless though. It suits you better," he told me.

"Is that so?" I asked him.
He didn't know me but I wasn't going to correct him. He was probably a little older than Four and Eric and that made me ecstatic. A real Dauntless member was sitting here and talking to me. And a hot one at that. He was definitely a looker. He was more like the kind of guys that I'd been attracted to back in Amity.

"Now what do you say we have a celebratory dance? Just one, I promise," he told me.

Part of me wanted to dance with Damien - at least the drunk part did - but the tiny sober part of me told me that it was probably a bad idea. I didn't want Damien to get the wrong idea of me. But that didn't mean that I couldn't just have one dance. I turned back to Heather and saw that she was watching us with a bright smirk.

She had clearly been eavesdropping on the entire conversation. "Do you mind?" I asked her.

Heather laughed at me and shook her head. I had figured that she wouldn't, but I guess it was the Amity in me that had thought to ask. Even drunk I still had some Amity tendencies. "Sweetie, I'll find myself a guy. And I promise that if you don't him up on the dance offer, I will," she told me and I laughed. "Get out there before I force you. And that won't look very Dauntless."

He really was attractive and one dance wouldn't kill me. It would actually probably be rather fun. As I turned back to Damien and jumped off of the stool, so did Heather. She marched off into the crowd and I smiled at her. Good for her. My attention snapped back to Damien at a small cough and I smiled at him.

Slowly I took one step into him. "One dance," I said softly.

He grinned at me and stood from the bar stool, placing a hand on my waist. He was probably about Eric's height and that made me a little nervous. In the heels I was taller, but still nothing compared to the blonde haired Dauntless member. He seemed to like it though. Damien extended his hand to me and I grabbed it, letting him lead me towards the edge of the circle of dancers. We were still surrounded on every side though.

The two of us moved into a close dance, pressed up against each other. "Do Amity's dance much?" he asked me, having to lean in so that I could hear him.

I smirked at him and shrugged my shoulders, hoping that I was looking sly and not stupid. That was the last thing that I wanted after finally getting a Dauntless guy to come talk to me. "I wouldn't know, I'm not Amity," I told him.

It seemed to go over well as I turned my back to him and danced my heart out. Just like everyone else that was dancing around us, our bodies ground together. He was a good dancer and knew how to control himself. A trait I assumed came from being Dauntless. A few times we had come close to kissing but I had managed to restrain myself. My head was spinning with the liquor that I had previously drank and I felt myself getting a little dizzy. I would have to stop soon. With the song slowing down that had previously been blasting, I let my hips stop gyrating and I turned back to face Damien.

His hair was slightly mussed from dancing - as I'd been running my hands through it earlier - and his clothes were a little rumpled from us dancing against each other. He was smirking at me and I sighed at him. I didn't want the night to end but I knew that I had to leave now. It was already too late.

"You know I had fun but it is getting late and I still have training in the morning. Thanks for this though Damien. I needed to wind down a little," I told him.
Damien grabbed my hand and I turned back to face him. My heart was racing slightly and I knew that it wasn't from the haze of alcohol. The look on Damien's face said nothing good and I knew that I had to get out of here. "You're sure?" he asked.

All of a sudden I found myself getting nervous. It was no longer about training. I had to leave. "I'm sure. It's already too late. I've got training tomorrow," I said.

It wasn't like he could really do anything. We were in a big crowd of people. I just had to get away from him. "I'm sure that I could help you wind down even more. You know, my apartment isn't far from here. I'd have you back before curfew. And how many of your friends could say that they've been with a real Dauntless?" he asked me.

A blush raised to my face and I shook my head. It actually did sound like a good deal but it wasn't something that I could do. Not right now. Not while I was heavily intoxicated and he was too. I would have to be sober if I ever decided to do that. Plus it was banned for initiates to have relations with Dauntless members. I would hate to be kicked out of Dauntless just because of something that stupid. I yanked my hand back from Damien and smiled at him.

Don't make enemies with someone stronger and better trained. "As appealing as that does sound, I think I'll have to take a rain check on that. Thanks though," I said.

I tried to turn back but Damien's grip on my hand tightened. "Just a few minutes. I can make it fast," he said.

Who wants a fast night? "Seriously Damien, I'm sorry but I have to go. It really wouldn't be smart to stay out any longer. And my friends are probably worried about me." He still didn't release me. "Damien, let go." He didn't let go of me. He merely began to pull me away from the crowd. "Hey, get off!"

My heart was beating erratically at the knowledge of what was happening. What the hell could I do? I tried to remember anything to do to get away from him, but I couldn't. Everything was out of my head. Before Damien could get any further I noticed a figure come up from behind him and yank him away from me. I stumbled slightly as the man pushed me behind himself. My hero. I would have to thank him later.

My vision was a little blurred and I couldn't tell who it was. "I thought you knew the rules here, Damien. It's against Dauntless code for any full Dauntless member to have any relations with an initiate to ensure that rankings are fair," I heard Eric state. Eric? Thank God. "There's also just plain inconsideration. I think she wants to be left alone. You have one of two choices. Leave and I'll let this incident go, or we can take this up elsewhere."

It was the first time that I had really seen any emotion other than lust on Damien's face. He backed away from Eric and shook his head. It seemed that it wasn't just the initiates. It was the members too. Everyone here seemed to be afraid of Eric. For once, I was actually grateful that he was an asshole.

"Sorry, Eric. Alex. I'll see you around," Damien said before storming off.

"No, you won't," I muttered after him.

Once I was sure that Damien was gone and I was safe, I relaxed slightly. I was glad that he was gone but I was also angry that Eric hadn't let me take care of that myself. I knew how to defend myself, as I had proven earlier. Damien had only caught me off guard. I would have been able to defend myself and get out of that situation with no problem. I could have managed to figure out how to get away from him.
But I knew my manners. I turned back to Eric. "Thank you for that," I said.

He nodded at me. "You're welcome."

Pride began to leak out of me. "But I could have handled that you know?" I asked Eric, who scoffed at me. "I mean, come on, I just won my first fight," I said proudly.

It hadn't been by much but I was pleased with myself. And even more so through my drunken stupor. He shook his head at me, leading me to the edge of the dancers. His hand was on my shoulder as he shoved me ahead of him. I was glad to be out of the center of the ring of dancers but once more I felt endangered as Eric leaned in, towering over me. He had been drinking too. I smelled it on his breath. We were at the edge of a bar and I sighed. I needed just one last drink.

As he stopped short, I nearly toppled to the ground. "I would be cautious to let that go to your head. I've seen what happens when people let it go to their heads. It never ends well," he told me.

"I'll keep that in mind."

I grabbed for the drink off of the counter and held it in my hand. "And I think that you're done with that," Eric said, snatching it from me.

"What the hell?" I snarled.

"How many have you had?" he asked me.

In all honesty I had no idea how many I'd had. I thought that it was probably over ten but I wasn't really sure where that number ended. Probably not at a safe one. I knew that I had drank way too much tonight. The morning was going to be terrible for me. It was my fault but I didn't care. I just wanted to unwind. And now Eric was making that impossible.

"Not enough if I'll still be able to remember this night in the morning. One more please?" I asked the bartender behind me. "Of anything you've got," I called as he walked over to the bottles.

Eric glared at the bartender who immediately shrugged off my order. "She'll take nothing," he snapped.

And with that, the bartender began to close the bar. I glared at Eric before noticing that his drinking was like my own. A lot. His eyes were wandering over me and he had the same look in his eyes that Damien did. Only, I knew that Eric wouldn't do anything. He had more self-control than that. He took in a deep breath and came back to look me in the eyes. I placed my hands on my hips and tugged the dress down a little bit.

The neckline of the dress dipped even lower as Eric wet his lips. "I think that you should get back to the dorms instead of taking another drink," he told me, the words a struggle on his lips. "You still have training in the morning and just because you're hungover doesn't mean that I'm going to take it easy on you," he told me darkly. I heard the hidden meaning in it.

The one thing that I'd learned about drinking, especially in excess, was that it lowered your inhibitions. That seemed to be the case right about now as I took a step towards Eric, my hips gently grazing his. Even in the dark lighting of the Pit, I could see his light eyes go almost black. And even through my drunken haze I felt my core heat up.

"I'd never want you to take it easy on me. I want to prove myself," I purred at him.

We both knew what I meant with my words. They were easy to see past. I had thought that he would
shrug them off but for whatever reason we both looked past my words, to the hidden meaning behind them. Eric's eyes trailed over my body and I noticed that he seemed to be having an internal battle with himself over. And for just a split second, I wished that he would lose it.

There had been something about Damien that had been so cruel and animalistic. Eric had it too, but it worked on him. He was the type that could do the domineering act and make it look right. Like it was the only part that he would ever need to play. I was leaning back on the bar as Eric’s hands fell on either side of me. His hips were almost pressed against mine. His self-control was failing with every passing second. So was mine.

"Go back to the dorms, initiate," he told me, the resolve in his voice barely there. "Before you get yourself into something that you'll regret later."

Knowing that it really was something that I would regret later, I found myself not able to stop talking. "Isn't that something about being a part of Dauntless? Making mistakes and having regrets. Maybe I want to have a regret," I told Eric.

He let his hands ghost over my hips, keeping them less than an inch from touching me. My legs burned with the anticipation of his touch. "You don't want this regret," he said.

But the words were a struggle on his lips. He didn't want to say it. "Maybe I just want to have a celebration. Come on Eric, one little dance. Show me that even a ruthless Dauntless leader knows how to have a little fun," I purred at him.

Eric’s naturally blue eyes had darkened to the point that they were now almost black. Even the few times that Florian and I had teased each other, going back and forth until we finally caved, he had never looked at me like this. The way that Eric was. He had never made the fire in my stomach rage the way that it was now.

"You're playing with fire, Amity," Eric told me.

I leaned into him, having to fight to keep my balance. I was sure that I was going to fall at any given moment, but to my credit I was actually keeping my balance pretty well. The tips of his fingers were on my waist. "I'm not afraid to get burned, Dauntless," I bit back my response.

Eric's eyebrow popped up and I wanted nothing more than for him to pull me out onto the dance floor like Damien had. I wanted him to show me that there was more to him than just the stone cold Dauntless leader. But he didn't look like he was going to move. He was battling with himself.

"Come on, one dance won't kill you," I told him.

Just as I thought that Eric might actually cave and let me take a dance with him, Four had to come alone and ruin the entire thing. "Eric? Alex?" he called to us. Eric jumped back from me and I stumbled into the wood of the bar. "What are you two doing?"

He was eyeing Eric suspiciously and me, too. Of course, when he looked at me he merely narrowed his eyes. Why was it always me that was getting in trouble for everything? Of course he could probably see the way that I was swaying back and forth. It was obvious enough to anyone with eyes that I needed to lay down.

"Alex, I think you've had a little bit too much to drink," Four told me.

Evidently I was the only person that didn't know how much was too much. I rolled my eyes at the obvious comment and nearly laughed. I hiccuped once and Eric rolled his eyes. He probably thought that I was just some stupid girl that didn't know how much was too much. There went the Eric that I
was working so hard at and here came back the same Eric that I had gotten so used to. Damn it.

Eric's voice cut through my irritable demeanor. "Four, I'm actually glad to see you," he said, making Four glare at him. "She's definitely had too much to drink. I need to see Max but can you get her back to the dorms?" Four nodded, wrapping an arm around my waist. "And make sure that she stays there. She doesn't need to be seeing, or speaking, to anyone else tonight," he said, giving me a pointed look as Four turned me around and led me from the Pit.

There was definitely no reason for me to be speaking to anyone else tonight. I couldn't imagine what stupid thing I would say to someone. I'd made enough of an idiot out of myself tonight. We were walking across the Chasm when I glanced up at Four and cocked my head at him. He stared at me like he was expecting me to say something stupid and I took it as a sign to say whatever it was that came to mind.

"Do you think that I'll regret anything that I said tonight?" I asked Four.

That wasn't as stupid as I had been expecting. I had thought that I would say something about the pretty blue lanterns that lined the walkway back to the dorms. It didn't seem to be as stupid of a question as Four had thought either as he led me into the room and sighed. He dropped me down onto the bed and I giggled as I began to bounce.

"I don't know Alex, but I know that you're going to regret drinking this much. I get it though, I drank that much the first night that I spent here in Dauntless too," he said. I was glad that it wasn't just me that had gone a little overboard. Well, a lot overboard. "Be glad that we're just running drills tomorrow and not fighting. I guarantee that you'd get knocked on your ass with the hangover that you'll have in the morning. Now get to bed."

There was a small smile on his face and, for a moment, I thought that we might be slowly working towards friends. I liked Four. He was a nice guy and they were rare to find in Dauntless. He pushed me into the bed and took off my heels, tossing them onto the floor. Everything else I would take care of in the morning. The blankets were barely over me when I turned back to Four and smiled. He was heading towards the door.

"Hey," I said, making him turn back. "Thanks, Four. I probably won't remember anything in the morning, but I'll try to remember this at least."

He nodded at me. "Don't worry about it. Get to bed," Four said.

The lights went out a moment later and just before I heard the doors close I chirped out a small, "Goodnight."

Although I quickly realized that there was no point in me saying that. I wasn't sure who the comment was really even made for since Four was now gone. But I supposed that it really didn't matter. A moment later the world descended into darkness, and I was left without a memory of the night.
Despite the fact that it was pitch black in the dorm room that the Dauntless transfers were all laying in, I knew that it was already near six in the morning. It seemed that during the last few days I had been waking up around six every morning. It wasn't like I even wanted to. I would have much rather stayed asleep until right before eight, like most of the other initiates. I was exhausted every day and today was even worse.

Just as I'd been expecting, I felt terrible after my night out. That's how it went. It was always fun to be out at the time, but the morning was miserable. My head was pounding, my throat was dry, and my eyes felt like they were glued shut. That wasn't even everything that was wrong with me. My stomach was rolling around in my abdomen and I was sure that at any given moment I would empty my stomach's contents onto the floor. It wouldn't be much.

Sighing deeply, I knew that I had to get up and do something. Otherwise I would have wanted to lay here for the rest of the day. I managed to stand up, but I didn't stay that way for long. I leaned over for a minute, putting my hand over my mouth and praying that I wouldn't toss my dinner from last night on the ground. And all of the drinks from the night before. As the feeling passed, I straightened back up again and ducked down to grab my clothes. In the bag that I had tucked under my bed I pulled out my toothbrush, toothpaste, a fresh pair of underwear, a black tank top, and a pair of black work out shorts. I stood back up and got ready to head into the bathroom when another wave of nausea passed over me.

Without bothering to wait and see if the wave would pass, I darted through the bathroom, banging my leg on the corner of Colt's bed. I was pretty sure that I woke him up as I heard him shuffle slightly, but I didn't care. The only thing that I wanted was to get over the toilet. My leg was throbbing from the impact and I groaned as I dropped over the toilet that was the closest to the wall. My head was hanging over it as the contents from what felt like the entire time that I had been in Dauntless came pouring out into the toilet. A few tears fell onto my face from the burning sensation. I stayed bent over the toilet for a few more minutes before brushing my hair off of my face and wiping my mouth.

Some vomit was in my hair and on my clothes and I groaned. I would have to be sure to throw my clothes into the wash as soon as it was laundry day. Weakly I stood from the ground. I felt better now that I had gotten rid of the alcohol from the night before but my head was still throbbing. I assumed that it would be the one thing that I wouldn't be able to get rid of. Well, that and whatever I had said last night. I didn't remember the entirety of last night but I did remember some of it. I remembered hitting on Eric, which made me cringe to think about. I also remembered Damien, who I never wanted to see again.

The whole situation was a nightmare and I wished that I could take it all back. I knew that it would start with me saying I was sorry to Eric for whatever I had said the night before. As much as I wanted to avoid him for the rest of my life, we had just found ourselves in a good place and I knew that it meant that no matter how much I wanted to avoid it, I had to talk to him. We were back to being sort of friends and that meant that I had to swallow my pride and make sure that Eric knew that I felt bad for saying whatever I had said to him. It wasn't his fault that I had drank too much and said some stupid things.

Taking a deep breath, I threw my clothes over the shower rack and stepped in. The water was freezing and it shocked every nerve ending in my body. I quickly washed out the vomit that was in my hair and made sure to wash over myself. I definitely didn't smell that fantastic. I smelled like a
mix of someone that came from the sewer and the bar. I knew that I would end up in the shower again with sweat all over me by the end of the day but that didn't matter.

A shower was not in the question. I wanted to at least smell like I hadn't come from the bottom of a beer barrel when I went to go find Eric. I knew that like every other morning he was going to be in the dining hall. He was as early of a riser as I was. Washing the last soap from my body and hair I smiled as I stepped out of the shower and pulled on my clothes. They were clinging to me with my wet hair and I sighed. I didn't want to dry it off as it felt nice against my feverish head.

Standing over the sink I brushed my teeth quickly and grinned at the feeling of clean teeth once more. I wasn't sure how much longer I could have dealt with liquor breath and vomit staining my teeth. Pushing all of my clothes under the bed I walked out of the dorm room and headed into the hallway. Everything was lit with the eerie blue lanterns that hung around the Dauntless compound and I sighed. I wanted nothing more than to run the other direction and go back to bed but I knew that I had to do this. I had to be the adult. I walked into the dining room and saw that Eric was sitting in the far corner.

Walking over into the kitchen area I grabbed a plain meal. One orange along with a bottle of water. I wasn't sure how much I would have been able to stomach. I yawned and walked out into the dining room again. I wanted to hope that we weren't going to be fighting today so that the lack of protein wouldn't hurt me. I had to hope that I would be fine with the one orange. As I walked over to Eric's table, I seated myself in front of him and watched as his head turned up to look at me.

There were bruises under my eyes but he seemed unfazed. "Still an early riser I see," he told me.

There was a small smirk on his face and I rolled my eyes. I knew that this wouldn't go well. "So are you," I said softly.

He looked me over and grinned when he realized that I wasn't feeling well from my prior night of drinking. "And maybe too heavy of a drinker?" he asked with a large smirk.

Not wanting to hear anything more than that I held my hand up and Eric's eyebrows raised. The piercing made my eye follow and I knew that he was struggling not to laugh. "Shut up. Please. Let me just get this out of the way because I don't want this... air to be around us," I said awkwardly.

He merely smirked and rolled his eyes. I knew that he probably was enjoying my awkward state but I wasn't. "Air?" he asked.

"Shut up."

"You didn't want much air last night, if I remember correctly," he said.

If only I could remember everything that we had said to each other last night. "I don't really remember anything that happened last night, but I do remember a few things. First I wanted to thank you for keeping Damien away from me," I said.

It was a big deal that he had stepped forward and helped me out. He could have let anything happen. Eric sobered, nodding at me. "You're welcome," he said lowly.

"I could have handled myself but still, I appreciate it." He rolled his eyes at me. "And I had clearly drank too much. I remember acting a little... out of line. I'm sorry," I said.

Once more he nodded at me. Before long his smirk came back and I rolled my eyes. I should have known that he wasn't going to be able to keep his mouth shut for too long. "A little out of line?" he asked.
I hadn't been that out of line. Had I? I must have done a few more things than I remembered. I just remembered asking him to dance. "It wasn't that bad," I muttered under my breath.

But it had been that embarrassing. And that was more embarrassing than anything else. "It's fine, initiate," he said.

I raised my eyebrows. Had he just said that it was fine? "Fine?" I repeated.

"You aren't the first kid I've seen drink too much and get in over their heads," he said, making me narrow my eyes.

Did he just call me a kid? Cocking my head at him, I shook my head. "Kid?" I asked Eric, who merely dug into his eggs and nodded at me. "Eric, I'm just four years younger than you. Not that big of a difference," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. Clearly he didn't care about whatever is was that I wanted to say. "You act like a child," Eric said, making me scowl. "But I do know that you aren't one."

"Explain," I prompted.

His eyes darted down to my chest and I blushed softly. Why did I not own any higher-cut shirts? "Please. Don't change on my account," he said, watching me closely.

"Shut up. And it doesn't matter. You're going to call me names until one of us dies." Eric nodded his confirmation at me. "What do you mean that I was getting in over my head?" I asked Eric after a few beats.

There was no way that I was getting in over my head. I could have handled myself. He looked up at me and I wondered if he actually did remember what had happened last night. He seemed to be sober enough the night before to know what he was talking about, but he had drank enough to not be totally in his right mind. He had been so close to dancing with me, and probably a few other things that would have made this morning ten times worse.

"I heard you say it to Damien. Dauntless members aren't allowed to have any relations with initiates," he told me.

We had already been over this. I nodded at him. He was right about that. I did remember saying that. "I know that. It's why I said it," I snapped at him.

He was such a pain in the ass. But he did remember everything. Maybe he had been more sober than I had given him credit for. "That includes leaders. Actually it's a bigger deal for leaders," he said, smirking slightly.

My eyes widened as I thought about what he said. Had he really just said that he thought that I had feelings for him? There was no damn way that I could ever have feelings for him. "Wait a minute, are you saying that you think that I have feelings for you?" I asked.

Eric sat there, completely still. "I'm not saying anything," he said.

But the little smirk that on his face told me that he really meant yes. "Don't flatter yourself. I just had a little too much to drink and went looking for solace in the person that was the closest to me. That just happened to be you," I told him with the little shake of my head.

There was no way that I would ever have feelings for him. Eric's face turned from a teasing smirk into one of pure amusement. It immediately told me that I had said something wrong. I should have
just stayed silent. Eric leaned forward towards me as I slunk back into my chair.

"I don't actually recall saying that you had feelings for me. I just recall saying something about relations," Eric said.

My face quickly drained of color. He was right. He had only said something about the two of us being together. That didn't have to be in a romantic light. I had essentially just accidentally told him that I had feelings for him. Which was not true at all. He was just an asshole that knew how to twist my words. He was so damn annoying, literally all of the time. Either when he was speaking to me or just standing in the nearby area.

"That can mean strictly physical," Eric said, making me blush.

I wanted to slap myself. Why did Eric make me like this? "I think that you misunderstand me. I do not have feelings for you. No matter what you might think," I snapped.

But it didn't seem that he liked my answer. Or believe it. "I have to say, Amity, I'm honored that you think so highly of me," he teased.

Once more I scoffed loudly. As much as I did like the banter that Eric and I normally enjoyed, I did not like him thinking that I had any feelings for him. Eric wasn't even a friend. He was just a... thing. It didn't matter. He certainly wasn't a guy that I had feelings for.

"Get over yourself, you asshole," I snapped at Eric, who merely smirked at me. "I don't think of you as anything other than a leader and a pain in my ass."

It looked like he didn't believe me in the slightest, but I didn't care. It was the truth. He just annoyed me. The banter could be fun, but he still sucked. Eric smirked at me and leaned in, making my heart race a little. Was it because he was so close to me? Close enough that he could have leaned in and kissed me. I brushed off the thought, instead imagining that it was only the cold air that was blowing through the compound.

"You're sure that you don't even have the slightest feelings for me?" Eric asked me.

"Of course I don't," I snapped loudly.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

He merely laughed and leaned into me once more. "I seem to recall a conversation last night. You were telling me that you wanted a regret. With me. You weren't afraid to get burned," he said and I felt my face heat up.

Had I really said that I wanted a regret last night? And with Eric? I was never drinking again if that was what I said when intoxicated. "I did not say that," I snarled.

Unsurprisingly, Eric laughed at me and shook his head. "You did, Amity. I wonder... sober, are you still that brave?" he asked. No. "They say that what you say when you're drunk reveals what you really want. Is that true?"

Scoffing loudly, I shoved Eric back away from me, but it did nothing. He just smirked and dropped back in his seat himself. "Please. I don't want anything from you. Never will. Especially anything like that," I told him.
"I don't believe you," Eric said.

Once more I rolled my eyes. He was such an ass. About everything. "I don't care," I snapped.

None of this made any sense to me. Why did people think that I wanted Eric? I didn't! And I never would. "I think that you do care," Eric said, leaning into me.

Forcing myself to not back away from him, I snarled. "Really?" I asked, raising an eyebrow. "I don't want you. But I think that you might want me."

His head snapped up towards me. "Excuse you?" he barked.

"I seem to recall that you weren't going to stop anything. You didn't say anything to me. You never said no. I don't think you were going to either. I think that you might like me more than you think," I said cockily.

Eric scoffed at me, looking exactly the same way that I had. "I hate you," he snarled, not really sounding like he meant it.

"I told you, they all fall for me eventually," I added, smiling brightly.

He tilted back the drink that was in his hand and drained it. I sniffed the air and realized that whatever he was drinking was alcoholic. How could he still be drinking? Especially after last night. "Fall for you? I'd much rather see you fall from the roof again. Without the net this time," he said and I gulped quietly.

It reminded me of when I had first gotten here and he had told me that he was going to throw me off of the roof. "You don't mean that," I said softly.

He merely smiled at me, not saying anything more on the topic. "I was the only reason that you didn't do something that you regret," he said.

"And I appreciate that," I interjected.

"I think that you might want something. They all do," he said, making me scoff. I couldn't believe that he would have some girl that wanted him. Poor girl. She had no clue what she was getting into. "Maybe you are just afraid that you'll get burned."

He really was a damn moron. "I'm not afraid of getting burned by you," I told him with a sneer. "I thought that I made that clear."

"I don't believe a damn thing that you say."

I wasn't going to be one of Eric's stupid conquests. "I think you're all bark and no bite. You like to think that you're worse than you actually are," I told him with a little smirk.

He had a smirk on his face as well and it made my skin crawl. I really hoped that he didn't want to hit me to prove that he was tough. I had just been messing with him. I knew that he could kill me without much of an effort. I was getting stronger but I was nowhere near Eric's level.

"Oh and the day that I come to you for that, you know that the world must be ending," I added with a little scoff.

There was no doubt in my mind that Eric was probably a great person to take out frustration on. He was probably a great person to forget your troubles with. But that didn't mean that I would ever come
to him. He was not worth my integrity. "Is that so?" he asked me.

"Yes."

"I don't think so."

"I don't care," I snapped."

"I think you're going to come to me eventually."

My jaw nearly dropped. He really was an idiot. He thought that I was going to go and sleep with him. "You really are an idiot. I won't ever come to you," I snapped.

He merely shook his head, obviously not believing me. "Tell you what. I believe it so much that I'm going to make a bet on it," he told me, making me raise an eyebrow.

Eric was the type of person that would probably do plenty of things, but the one thing that I would have never thought that he would do was make a bet on it. Especially over whether or not I really had feelings for him. Mostly because there was no way that I would ever have feelings for him. Not now and not in a million years.

I realized too late that I had been quiet for too long. "You'd really make a bet because you believe that I'm going to come to you and either confess some feelings - that aren't there - or you think I'm going to cave and sleep with you?" I asked him.

"Yes," Eric said, nodding at me.

My smirk widened. I would sure as hell win that bet. And I loved to be the winner. "Alright fine. I'll take that bet. Name the terms," I told him confidently.

Clearly Eric had known that I would take the bet as he smirked at me and began rattling off the terms of the bet. "Before training ends, I bet that you'll come to me," he said, making me scoff. I somehow believed that I would be able to make it another six and a half months without throwing myself onto Eric. This would be an easy win for me. "You'll kiss me and probably try something else too."

"Yeah, right," I hissed.

He would like that. "But now for the punishment," he said.

This was what I was waiting for. "Perfect," I purred.

"If I win, you have to get a tattoo. Of whatever I want. Wherever I want," he told me.

My heart jumped into my throat and my arms began to shake slightly. Was he really saying that I had to put a tattoo wherever he wanted on my body? Of whatever he wanted? What was I saying? I was the one that was going to win this bet. Maybe I'd make him get a butterfly on his cheek or something.

"You're kidding me, right?" I asked him with a little laugh. "You think that I'm going to trust you to put something god knows where on my body for the rest of my life?"

The moment that it had come out of my mouth, I realized that I shouldn't have said it. Eric's smirk widened and I realized that, unfortunately, he had caught my slip of the tongue, too. "So you're already admitting defeat?" Eric asked, making my heart drop.

"No!" I barked much louder than I'd meant to.
There was no way that I would ever sleep with him. Damn it, I was going to win this stupid thing.

His lips turned upwards in amusement. "If you're so determined that you have no feelings for me and aren't the tiniest bit attracted to me, this should be no problem for you. Take the bet," he told me with a low purr to his voice.

The dark tone in his voice made my core warm slightly but I forced myself to shake it off. I did not like Eric. At all. He might have been a nice-looking guy, but I wanted nothing to do with him. I hated him more than anything. Well, almost anything. Amity was up there too. I knew that I was going to be able to win this stupid bet.


"We'll see," he said.

"I have absolutely no feelings for you and you know it. One drunk conversation means nothing," I told him.

"I'm sure," he said quickly.

I knew that he didn't believe it though. "But you know that this means that if you lose and I don't come after you, I get to put a tattoo on you wherever I want. Right?" I asked him.

"I know the deal. I made it."

"Good. Oh and you can't just try and tempt me into it. Like you have been doing," I told him. Eric's brows knitted and he shook his head at me.

These past few weeks and I knew that Eric had been trying to push me towards him. He just wanted to see how much I could take. The answer was a hell of a lot more than what he was thrown at me. "What was that Amity? Like I have been doing?"

"You heard me."

"I haven't been doing anything to you other than intimidate you. Of course, you're more than welcome to take it whatever way you want," he told me and I scoffed. That was such a damn lie. Suddenly there was a shift in his demeanor. "Get ready for training. Gonna be doing something different today."

It made me curious, and made me forget about the bet. I raised a brow. "Different?" I asked.

"Give your bodies a few days of rest," he said.

"I like the sound of that," I said, making the both of us laugh.

No bruises or black eyes for a few days sounded nice. And he had been through this before. He must have known what I was thinking. "I'll start thinking of designs that I like for you. Maybe my name? Right on the ass," he told me as he stood.

I scoffed and shook my head. If that was the way that he was going to play it, so would I. "Alright. Alex right across your ass sounds nice to me, too."

If he was bothered by my comment, he didn't show it. He merely smiled. He turned to leave, but stopped just a few feet from the doors. "Oh, by the way. You might want to look at the rankings when you get into the training room," Eric said before walking off.
Sighing softly, I dropped into my seat and felt another wave of nausea come over me. I was thrilled that we weren't doing anything physical today or I probably would have thrown up all over one of the trainers. Or maybe one of my friends. Or maybe Eric. I was pretty sure that he really would kill me if I threw up all over him. He'd probably tear my head off and eat it for dinner. The thought made my skin crawl. I thought that bantering with him was fun but the last thing that I wanted was to get him seriously angry at me. I had done that once and I had sown the repercussions. Those bruises around my neck had lasted me a great few weeks.

Part of me wondered what Eric had been talking about when he had told me to look at the rankings today. I knew that I must have gone up in rankings considering that I had won the fight between Colt and me. But that didn't mean that my ranking had gone up that drastically. I had probably moved up a few spots. If nothing else it would be good enough to keep me away from the red line.

My heart skipped a beat when I thought that he meant that maybe one of my friends had fallen below the red line. It was definitely a plausible assumption. A few of my friends had lost their fights. But there was one that I was more worried about than the other. Heather was the one that I was the most worried about. She lost to Cole, who already was known to be one of the weaker male transfer initiates. I didn't know what I would do if I lost Heather.

Just like Iris had been back in Amity, Heather was quickly becoming my best friend here in Dauntless. I knew that I was the exact same way for her. She had never talked much about her friends back in Candor, the same way that I was about my friends in Amity, but I knew that she had left someone. She had mentioned once that her best friend from Candor had stayed there and a man that she had once had feelings for had defected into Erudite. Those were the only things that I really knew about her personal life back in Candor.

It went both ways. She knew even less about me. She just knew that I had two close friends. That was it. But that was because those were our old lives. Here in Dauntless, we were here for each other. That was all that mattered. After a long day of training we would hop into the showers with Skylar and Raven and sing to the heavens. Sometimes even the boys would join us from the main room. It was like one big family. I just couldn't imagine that in a few months some of us would be gone. It broke my heart.

This whole thing was such a pain in the ass. Colt, Jade, and Hunter, all seemed to be bent on killing me these past few weeks. Numerous times Jade had tripped me during training, probably hoping that I would fall headfirst onto something to break my skull open. I was pretty sure that they were trying to poison my food too. A few times my stomach had felt like it was going to tear open and I knew that no one else was having the same problems.

It drove me nuts knowing that they were doing all of these things to me and no one else saw it. Heather sometimes sided with me but most times she just thought that I was being overly dramatic. It sucked that no one believed me. But that didn't mean anything. I was going to make sure that one day I would catch them in the act.

My thought began to take over my mind and I sighed. For once I wanted to go to training just so that I could get out all of my emotions. I wanted to be angry with everyone. I was angry with everyone. With my parents for making me feel like I was wrong for leaving. For Iris, for everything coming so easy to her. For Florian, for making me feel like I was wrong to go anywhere that I wasn't. At all of my friends, for knowing where they belonged. For Jeanine Matthews, for making me have to hide who I really was. For Eric, for making me question everything about myself. This wasn't fair. All of this wasn't fair. I wanted to be Dauntless more than anything, but everyone made it so hard.

The doors to the dining room opened and I turned back. My friends were coming in and I waved to
them as they walked to get their food. Heather and Buck both looked like they were about ready to kill themselves. Colt looked about ready to fall over and die. Dante and Jax both looked a little queasy as well, but they looked alright. Jet and Hunter seemed alright, but they weren’t looking one hundred percent either. Jade and Colt both looked sick to their stomachs and I smirked. Good.

Heather dropped down next to me. "These are gonna be a long next seven months," I said. She was a little green and I frowned at her. Maybe she had drank more than I had thought that she had.

Her eyes were hazy as well and I remembered that the entire time that I had been talking with Damien, Eric, and Four, she had still been at the bar, drinking. She had drank probably a lot more than I had. "What, because of training?" she asked me.

"Damn straight," I said.

"Hey don’t worry about it. You won your fight and you’re good with everything we’ve done so far. You’re in a good spot," she said.

Smiling, I nodded at her, laying my head down on the table. "I suppose I’ve done alright," I muttered against the wood.

"Or was that not what you were talking about?" she asked. I hummed at her, lifting my head slightly. "I saw Eric leaving as we came in," she said with a curious glance.

Heather, like everyone else in the Dauntless compound, seemed to think that there was something going on between Eric and me. I was going to end up dying before I could prove to them that Eric was nothing more than a thorn in my side. "It's nothing with Eric. He's just being an idiot, like usual," I snapped.

"I saw you two talking last night," Heather said, adopting an almost accusing tone.

"He was getting some guy that was getting a little too handsy away from me," I said.

Her face fell. She looked shocked that Eric had actually done something like that. "Wow. That was nice of him," she muttered.

"Yeah. I was thanking him for it right then. And I was just thinking about training," I changed the subject as Cole, Dante, Buck, and Jax took their seats around Heather and me. "I mean if they're doing this to us in the first few weeks, what are we going to be doing in two months?" I asked Heather, feeling a little sick to my stomach.

This time I knew that it wasn't the alcohol from the night before. We might end up doing things that could really get us killed. Peeling off the last piece of my orange, I popped it into my mouth and washed down the sugar-filled fruit with my water. My head was still spinning a little bit and I felt sick. It had gotten better since I had emptied my stomach this morning, but I was still nervous and it made me feel like I had just woken up again.

"I wouldn't worry too much about that Alex," Cole said, making me look up and smile weakly at him. "No matter what it is, it seems to me like you're a natural born Dauntless."

I smiled at him. That was surprisingly nice to hear. "Thanks for that, Cole," I said happily.

"Whatever we're doing today I'm sure that you'll rock at it too," he continued.

Cole was one of the nicest people that I had ever met. Whatever girl he would end up with, she was lucky. Maybe there was a chance that I could push Heather and Cole together. I loved them both like
I had known them forever, not just a month. But that was what made it so great. They had known each other forever. I had seen it during their fight yesterday. They loved each other and wanted nothing more than to avoid the fight. I was pretty sure that they had feelings for each other. Even if they didn't want to admit it themselves. Maybe that was what people thought about Eric and me. Maybe that was why they were so determined that we had feelings for each other. I supposed that I could see why.

Smiling as Dante handed me a tiny piece of bacon, I popped it into my mouth and turned when I heard Colt's annoying voice carrying over the table. "I'm not so sure about that Amity. I underestimated you yesterday," he told me and I smirked.

Of course he had underestimated me. That was something that a lot of people had done. "That much is obvious," I said quickly.

A few of the people at the table laughed loudly. "That was my fault. I'll be sure not to do that again. You can be sure of that. Next time that you're alone, you had damn well better watch your back," he said, making my skin began to crawl.

Had he just threatened to hurt me if he could catch me alone? Or maybe kill me? That sounded a little cruel, even for Colt. "You wouldn't dare do something like that," I snapped.

"Thinks so?" he snapped back at me. "That was a fluke that you won. You need to see that it's the truth. You aren't a Dauntless. You're weak."

Growling deeply at him, I leaned into Colt, despite the fact that he was across the table. I wanted nothing more than to throw Buck's knife into Colt's hand. "Is that so? Is that why I won the fight yesterday? Is that why you're walking with a limp?" I asked, having noticed it on his way to the table.

It wasn't bad, but it was just bad enough for me to notice it. "That's not from you, Amity," Colt said.

But I noticed that there was a slight tenseness in the way that he spoke. "Is that why you have two, fat, black eyes?" I knew that I had them too, but at least a win had come from mine. Embarrassment was the only thing that came from his. "Is that why you struck out with that Dauntless girl last night?" I asked with a smile, knowing that he had missed taking a brunette back to her apartment last night. "Maybe you aren't as tough as you thought."

Colt looked like he was going to jump over the table and ring my neck but nothing seemed to be lucky for Colt today. "That's enough," Four snapped. Everyone turned back to see him. I saw that he was right behind me with his arms crossed, looking angrily over us. "One thing here in Dauntless is that you will learn when to accept that an opponent may be more talented than you are yourself. Losses are not flukes. They are meant to show us what our strengths are and what our weaknesses are. If you can't accept that you will not always be the best, you are not meant to be Dauntless," he said, directing the comment to Colt. He was looking down at the floor with an angry snarl on his face. "On the roof. Now."

Everyone knew that Four would leave us down in the dining room without hesitation so we panicked. No one wanted to be the person that had been left behind. I jumped out from behind the table, with Heather and Buck following close behind. Jax was walking with Raven and Jet and I smiled. I knew that Raven and Jet were close to each other. Dante was standing next to me as I began to ascend the stairs. Those were a lot of damn stairs - more than I had been expecting - and my legs were killing me. Not to mention that looking up the stairwell was making me sick.

"What the hell do you think that they're putting us up on the roof for? What are we doing up there
that we can't just go to the training room for?" Dante asked me.

"Something that's too dangerous to do inside," I commented.

As we walked up the stairs I felt the burning in my legs from the fight with Colt yesterday and from the weeks of training before that. "What would that be?" he asked.

"I have no idea," I said as I pressed down on my ankle. A little twinge of pain shot through me. I felt like maybe I had rolled my ankles, too, but I didn't want to think that I had been that drunk last night. That would be mortifying.

"Probably something terrible," Buck put in.

"Maybe Eric is finally making good on his promise to throw me off of the roof," I told the boys, both of whom laughed lightly and shook his head. "I wouldn't be too surprised."

Although, that probably wasn't true. He wanted me to be there to lose the bet and have to tattoo his name on my ass. He wouldn't kill me unless he really had to. In front of me I could see Buck slowing down and I watched as Dante left my side to advance on Four. Buck came to stand next to me and I smiled at him. He was quickly becoming one of my best friends along with Heather and Cole.

"As much as I'm sure that Eric really doesn't like you I'm pretty sure that he wouldn't risk his leadership position over some initiate," he told me and I scoffed. For whatever reason, that kind of hurt. "Hey that's a good thing. It means that he can't kill you."

We walked onto the roof and I smiled at the sight. Four was already there and was standing in front of a table of guns. They all seemed to be pistols and I smirked brightly. I was so excited for this. Since we had gotten here I had wanted nothing more than to fire a gun. In Amity I saw men and women from Dauntless carrying guns at the borders to the fence that surrounded the City. They always looked so dangerous but like they were so much fun. I just wished that I wasn't hungover for the first day. There were thirteen guns on the table, one for each of us. There were also targets set up about ten feet apart across the large gun course and I smirked. I would be able to prove myself again out here.

Four motioned for us to come a little closer and we all nodded. I took a few steps forward on the outside of the group of initiates, with Heather standing next to me. I was waiting for Four to say something but before he did, a loud bang sounded at my side. I jumped out of my skin and shrieked at the startling noise. My ears were ringing, blocking out any sound, and my head was pounding. What the fuck was that? I turned back and saw that Eric was holding a gun at his side which was smoking. I watched him walk forward, his eyes locked onto the bulls-eye he had just made. Damn him.

"No but he can deafen me," I snarled to myself.

Heather looked a little shaken as well. She probably thought that he was going to shoot her. I wouldn't have been surprised. "You okay?" she asked me.

"Fine. God, he's such a dick," I told Heather, who nodded weakly at me. Poor Heather.

Shaking the haze from my head, I watched as Eric walked over to the table where Four was also standing. Please don't let this asshole be here all day. "Initiates, listen up. Today Four and I will be assisting you in learning how to properly shoot a gun," he said. Well there goes that hope. Of course he was going to be with us all day. "For now you will be working with short arms. Pistols. In a few days you will be working with long arms. Rifles and shotguns. I suggest that you pay attention."
These are real, they are loaded, and they will kill you."

Eric glanced over at me and smirked when he saw that I was pissed at his little stunt of firing a gun next to me. I would make sure to get him back for that. Maybe I'd shoot him in the foot. "Alright, I'll be showing you how to properly assemble and disassemble a gun before you fire it," Four said. That made sense. We had to make sure that we knew every part of the gun before we could ever properly use it. Dauntless was a lot more like Erudite than I had originally expected. "Eric and I will walk around while you are working with them to ensure that it doesn't fly apart when you fire it after lunch."

Of course Eric was going to end up being the one to pick me apart. I wasn't fool enough to think that he would let Four be the one to correct me. Looking back at the table I noticed that the guns weren't actually put together. It seemed like they were pulled apart slightly. They probably wanted us to put them back together and take them apart until we could do it in our sleep.

"We're spending all day just learning about how to take apart the damn gun? Why aren't we allowed to fire it now?" I overheard Jade hiss to Hunter and Colt. It figured that she would be the one complaining about this. "This is a damn waste of time."

Behind her, I noticed that Eric was standing over her, his arms crossed over his chest. She turned back to him and I noticed the fear settle into her eyes. "What was that initiate?" Eric snarled at her. Jade remained quiet. It was a good choice. "If you don't think that you need to spend time learning how to take apart the gun, I welcome you to try and figure it out for yourself." She looked like he'd just asked her to eat her own hand. "Come on. Put the gun together and fire it. Let me see if you really can skip this stage of initiation."

She still looked on at him in shock before nodding at him. I knew as well as she did that if she said no to Eric, it would not go well for her. Even worse than if she tried to assemble the gun and she screwed up on it. Jade and Eric walked up to the table where the gun was sitting and I watched with wide eyes as she picked up one of the guns. She looked completely caught off guard and I was certain that she didn't have a clue what she was doing. None of us had ever handled a gun. Especially not any Amity or Abnegation. We tended to stay as far away from guns as possible.

She pulled the magazine out of the gun and I nodded at her. The first part had gone well. I knew that the top part of the gun was called the slide and it was already taken apart from the gun. That part was going to be easy for her too. So far she hadn't had any real problems. Once she had the slide off, she went to settle it on the table but instead it went clattering to the floor with the barrel. Eric picked the slide and barrel up and held it in his hands, watching Jade with narrowed eyes. He nodded at her to continue and I knew that she was stuck. She had no idea what to do now. She grabbed the spring that was on the table that Eric had handed her and she took the slide.

Her hands were working with the gun and I knew that she had no idea where the barrel went in. She tried to jam it into one section of the slide and Eric snarled. I knew that she was about to regret ever coming to Dauntless. "You put the spring in there and I promise that you won't enjoy what happens when you pull the trigger," he told her, snatching the slide from her hands.

She took a step back and bumped into the table, her hand laying on it. Eric smirked at her and drove the slide, with the sharp edges of the spring up, downwards onto her hand. She screamed in pain as her knees buckled and I winced at her. I hated her more than anything but I knew that it must have hurt. Everyone was watching with wide eyes.

"Get back in line," Eric snapped at her.

Jade was cradling her hand in her arm and when she came into the line of initiates I noticed that she
was nearly in tears. I could imagine that it had hurt more than anything else. Hunter grabbed Jade and I sighed as he held her close to him. He clearly cared for her. She was currently trying to wiggle her fingers to make sure that they weren't broken.

"Oh my God. I hate Jade but I can't believe that he did that to her. She'll have to go to the infirmary with her hand like that," I said.

"Do you think anything is broken?" Heather asked me.

"I don't think so."

I watched as Four walked up to Jade and sent her off to the infirmary to have someone take care of her hand. Eric was fuming and I looked over at him briefly. But one quick glance in my direction and I turned away from him. I did not want to have to deal with him right now. Not while he had pent up anger like that. I knew that Eric had the potential to be a good man, but it was at times like this when I wondered if he was even human.

"Eric is right," Four said, surprising me. "This part of initiation may seem like it's no big deal but it is very important that you know how to put a gun together in Dauntless." He didn't look pleased with Eric but he did look like he understood why he had done it. "If you find yourself a member here, you will have a gun on you any time that you leave the compound. If you take up a job at the fence, you will have a gun on you at all times. Now, pay attention. I'm only doing this once."

Everyone fanned out and watched as Four grabbed a gun that was completely assembled. He hit a button on the side of the gun and I watched as the magazine dropped out of the gun. He racked back the slide next and I nodded. He was checking to see if a bullet was in the barrel. The slide was now locked back and I nodded when he pressed down a switch on the side of the slide. It looked tough to do and I knew that it would be a problem for me. My hands weren't that strong. Hopefully I would be able to manage it with some practice.

Four then made strange maneuver where he pulled the button down and then pulled the slide forward. It came off of the frame of the gun and I nodded. So far it made sense. He put the frame down on the table and grabbed the barrel out of the slide. He then put the two pieces on the table and turned back to us informing us that the gun was now completely taken apart. At least, as far as we would need to know for now. He then went to reassemble the gun, which was essentially the same process in reverse. The slide still looked difficult to lock back in place and I knew that it would be the hardest part for me to do.

Four dismissed us to go to our own tables and I nodded. We all walked over to our stations and I moved to the one the farthest down. There was a gun on my table and I picked it up. No one was on my left and Heather was to my right. Following Four's instruction, I dropped the magazine out of the gun and nodded. It was empty for now. I wasn't shocked that they weren't giving us loaded ones yet. There was a box of bullets on the side of table though but I pushed it out of my mind. I wasn't using those until after lunch. I had to learn how to take the gun apart first. I grabbed the back of the slide and pulled it back. It hardly moved though and I hissed at the gun. That was definitely harder than I had thought that it was going to be. I grabbed it once more and pulled it back again. It moved this time but still wasn't far enough.

Grumbling to myself, I noticed that a few other people were still having trouble getting the slide off of the gun. Mostly the girls. I pulled it back again and let out a few loud curses at the gun as the slide came back and my finger was caught between the openings at the top of the gun. I pulled my finger back and hissed at the pain. My finger was bleeding slightly and my fingers were on fire. Behind me I heard Eric laughing and I turned back with an angry glare.
He moved up to me. "Your hands are too weak initiate," he told me, making me scoff.

"Thanks, Eric. I know that," I snapped.

"You can't grab the slide and rack it back fully until they're stronger," he continued. I rolled my eyes at him. A habit that I knew would be almost impossible to ever break.

Dropping the gun onto the table, it clattered loudly and slipped across the table. Eric scowled at me. I knew that he was furious with me for treating the gun like that. Not that I cared. He was here bothering me again. Was it possible for him to leave me alone for more than an hour? Probably not. I leaned onto the table and sneered at him. Not that he looked even the slightest bit intimidated by me. I knew that he would never be the least bit afraid of me. Not the way that he could make me terrified of him with just a few words.

"Alright then, why don't you give me a suggestion on how I can strengthen my hands?" I asked him, raising my eyebrows.

I realized too late that what I had said could be taken in more ways than one. I had meant it innocently. I had merely been asking what I could do to make my hands a little stronger so that I could figure out how to rack back this damn slide without any effort. Eric was looking at me with dark eyes but when Heather snorted, he turned on her with angry eyes. It was only for a moment though before looking back at me and getting closer to me. I stepped back into the table and felt the heat radiate off of his body.

My heart was thumping loudly in my chest. "Get back to work and be careful," he told me and I nodded stupidly. Why the hell was I always so strange around Eric? "Keep your hands on top of the slide and away from the port and maybe you won't get bit anymore."

"Thanks," I mumbled.

Eric stared at me for a moment more before nodding and walking off. Once he left it felt like the weight had lifted off of my shoulder and I sighed. I didn't know what it was about Eric but he made me feel like I was going to either be sick or die whenever I saw him. Heather was still giggling off to my side and I turned to her. She had the gun in her hands but I knew that she wasn't working with it anymore.

"I swear I didn't mean it like that. I really meant it innocently. It's your fault!" I yelled at her, only making her laugh louder.

"You're such an idiot," Heather told me.

"Shut up!" I barked. Eric and Four both turned to glare at us and I jumped, making sure to grab my gun and begin to work with it once more. "If you hadn't have laughed he would have maybe given me a normal answer instead of getting all weird and walking away," I muttered softly.

Glaring at Heather, I turned to her and debated on throwing the gun at her. Since it was heavy I knew that it would hurt. And I didn't want to put any bullets in it. I just wanted to smack her around a little bit, not kill her. "You do realize that if anyone else had said something like that and I would have laughed, Eric would have just gotten on me and probably would have hit me?" she asked.

"What are you talking about?" I asked her.

She looked at me like I'd lost my mind. Maybe I had. "He only got all weird because it was you. What's going on with the two of you?" she asked me.
I scoffed loudly and wanted nothing more than to throw myself off of the roof. I was sick of people thinking that there was something going on between Eric and me. There was nothing going on between the two of us and there never would be. I was going to be the one that was going to win this bet, damn it.

"What's going on with the two of us? Nothing, Heather," I snapped at her.

"Liar," she quipped.

"He either wants to see me dead or suffer. Nothing would ever go on between Eric and me," I told her and she rolled her eyes. Evidently she didn't believe me. Not that it surprised me. "He's my pain in the ass leader and I'm his pathetic initiate."

"You're not pathetic," she said.

It bothered me that I was somewhat upset that it was the relationship between Eric and me. I was the initiate that he wanted dead more than anything else and he was the leader that was determined to see me out of Dauntless. "I appreciate that, but I mean nothing to him and vice versa," I said.

"Please, Alex," Heather scoffed at me and I turned back to look at her. "No one else talks to Eric the way that you do. In fact, most people never even talk to Eric unless it's to ask him a question. Do you know how many times I've spoken to Eric?" she asked me.

I shook my head. I couldn't recall her actually ever speak to Eric. Only once, to ask him a question. "I don't really remember you ever speaking to him," I finally conceded.

She nodded at me. "Twice. To ask about fighting moves. I have never once spoken to him just for the sake of conversation," she said, making me nod. "He'd probably kill me if I did," she said and I snorted. That was probably true.

Leaning onto the table, I sat the gun down and sighed. As much as I loved Heather, she could be major pain in the ass. I knew that it was just the way that she was. Being born and raised in Candor, I understood it. They weren't the type to ever let anything go. Not that I was extremely surprised. It seemed to be the one Candor part of her that was never going to die.

"So what are you suggesting? That Eric talks to me because he likes me?" I asked softly. I didn't want anyone else to hear us. "And vice versa?" I asked hesitantly.

Heather nodded at me and I sighed. Did she really think that? And if Heather thought that, I was pretty sure that everyone else felt the same way. That was a bad thing. "Yeah. I do think that," she said.

People couldn't think that I had feelings for the Dauntless leader. "No way," I muttered.

"I'm not stupid Alex and neither is anyone else. People can see that Eric favors you over the other initiates," she told me and I scoffed. That was such shit. Eric hated me. He wanted to see me Factionless.

"He favors watching me hurt myself," I said.

The corners of her lips quirked up in somewhat of a smile. "I know he can be an ass to you but he's the same way to everyone else. The only reason that you get the brunt of it is because you're the only one that dares challenge him," she said and I sighed.

Was that really the reason that Eric put up with me? Was that why he talked to me more than any of
the other initiates? Just because he thought that it was funny that I liked to talk back to him. That was just the way that I wanted to be. After being silent for all of my life and having to act like I was Amity, it was relieving to be in Dauntless. I could say anything and do anything that I wanted here.

But that wasn't really the whole story. I knew that I couldn't say or do anything to Eric while I was here. He would kill me before letting me walk all over him. He was the top dog over here and I knew that. But for some reason I kept challenging him. Not that it did anything more than stress me out over the way that Eric acted around me.

Frustrated with the fact that Eric was in my mind so much I grabbed the slide on the gun and racked it back completely. Eric turned to me for a moment and nodded at me. I nodded back at him and went back to the gun. I was disassembling it like I was supposed to and it made me happy to see. There was at least one other thing that we were doing here in Dauntless that I knew how to do. That was a good thing. It meant that my ranking was safe for a little while longer. There was no way that I would ever be willing to live Factionless. That meant that I needed to fight harder than I ever had to for anything in Amity.

Back and forth for hours I made sure that I knew how to take apart a gun with my eyes closed. Four had even come over to make sure that I knew how to take certain firing pins out and he had taught me to take apart a magazine. Apparently I was excelling in taking the gun apart and back together again. He actually seemed pretty proud of me and that meant the world to me. It meant that I was actually doing well about being here in Dauntless.

It was just past noon when Four spoke up. "Alright initiates. You can stop," Four said and I sighed. I needed a break. I was sick of standing. "Get to lunch and come back through the training room before heading up here afterwards. Your new rankings have been posted." I grinned. I was dying to know what my new ranking was. "Alex, wait up for a minute. I need to speak with you," Four said as I headed to the stairs.

Heather, Dante, Jax, Cole, Buck, and Heather were all standing, watching the silent exchange between Four and me. I turned back to him with a cocked eyebrow and he nodded at me. Whatever he had to tell me, it wasn't something that he wanted to say in front of all of my friends. I didn't like that at all.

"You guys go ahead. I'll be down there in a few minutes," I said and my friends nodded.

Cole didn't look impressed but he nodded anyways. "We'll save you a seat," he called towards me.

"Thanks," I shouted back. They all went downstairs and I watched as Eric left the roof as well, leaving only Four and me there. "What's up Four?" I asked, once I was sure that the door was closed and no one was listening.

Four stood staring at me for a moment and I felt my nerves begin to creep up. I liked Four just fine but he still scared me. Not like Eric did but there was no doubt that Four could kill me if he wanted to. "I overhead you and Heather speaking earlier," Four said and I gulped.

I opened my mouth to defend myself but Four cut me off just as I said, "I -"

"No, don't say anything. I've overheard conversations like that before and I don't care. Or I wouldn't care if it wasn't for the context," he said and I cocked my head at him. What did that mean? "I'm sure that you're aware of the rule that Dauntless members cannot have relations with initiates. That rule applies even more to leaders."

I nodded nervously. "I understand," I said carefully.
"But Eric has never been one to not get what he wants just because of rules," Four said, making me feel sick.

This time I knew that it wasn't from the alcohol from the night before. I held up my hand though and forced myself to keep talking. "Four, let me stop you right there. This isn't about Eric and me. There is no Eric and me. Never will be. Not even if - when - I become a Dauntless member," I said, making sure to correct myself. I would be Dauntless and then I would never have to have Eric looking over my shoulder all of the time. "My friends are just under some stupid impression that I like him. Which is not true. Thank you for your concern but I think I'll be going now. I'm hungry and I only have an hour you know."

Without giving him a chance to say anything more, I turned away from him. I made it to the door before Four called back to me. "Alex. Get back here," he said and I groaned. I knew that this was not a conversation that I was going to be able to get out of. I turned back to him slowly. "I'm not telling you this because I think that something is forming there." That was at least a good thing to hear. "I'm telling you this because whether or not Eric has true feelings for you, or the other way around, he definitely is fond of you." That was true in some way or another. "He likes that there is an Amity transfer and she isn't just going to sit on her ass. He likes that you fight back against him. No one has ever done that."

"No one had ever been stupid enough to do that," I put in.

The corners of Four's lips tilted upwards. "That's true," he said.

Shaking my head, I sighed and leaned onto the table that Four was also leaning on. He was staring at me with his piercing blue eyes and I sighed. "So I'm lost. I get that I stood up against Eric when no one else has. I figure that most people are too afraid to do it. But they don't have the same things to prove that I do. They are all from Erudite and Candor. Even Abnegation!" I yelled, fed up with this. They treated me like I was never going to be a Dauntless member just because of where I came from. "I understand," Four said. I narrowed my eyes at him. He was a perfect Dauntless. How could he understand?

"An Amity has never made it in Dauntless. I have to be the first one. I have so much to prove and that means that I can't let little boys like Eric steamroll over me," I said softly.

Four shook his head at me and came to stand next to me. He threw his arm over my shoulder and I smiled at him. I liked Four. He was a good man and I enjoyed his company. I could tell that if I made it here in Dauntless, he would become a good friend of mine. I wanted to be friends with him now but I knew that he couldn't get subjective.

"Believe it or not, Alex, I think that you're already proved yourself. You won a fight against the highest ranked transfer. You've been pretty good with the guns so far and I'm sure that you can still prove that you have more to show us," he told me and I smiled. That was probably something that I needed to hear. Especially now. "I just want you to be careful."

It was getting a little too serious for me though. I knew that I had to do something to take it down a peg or two. "You know, if I didn't know any better I'd almost be willing to say that you like me Four," I told him with a teasing smile.

Four's face wavered for a moment and I knew that he wanted to smile at me. But he was the leader. That was the man that he always would be. I knew that and so did he. "I don't think so," Four snapped at me.
But he did like me. I knew that. "Maybe you aren't as tough as everyone thinks that you are. Maybe there really is a sweetheart buried under that mean macho facade," I said, poking his stomach. Shit that was hard. Even I still had a tiny layer of fat on me.

Four shook his head at me and I smiled. He knew that he liked me. He just wasn't going to let me see anyone other than the leader. Not right now. "Get to lunch initiate," Four told me and I laughed.

There was the leader that I was so fond of. "Alright," I conceded.

I turned back and walked to head over to the door to take me back to the dining room. I was starving. I had hardly eaten today, other than an orange. "I do like you Alex, that's why I'm looking out for you. I want you to be careful. One way or another, dancing with Eric will get you hurt in the end," Four said and I nodded. I knew that he meant last night. "Come on."

The silent walk down to the dining room was nice. It was like we were the oldest of friends. It was like I wasn't fighting for a spot in a place that probably didn't even want me. It was like there wasn't some psychopathic leader that wanted me to die, or maybe jump his bones, at any moment. It was like I wasn't going to beat out my friends and make them end up Factionless. It was like my family didn't hate me. Four walked us down the hallway and I sighed as we came into the dining room. All of my friends were already sitting in their seats at the table and I saw that there was still an empty seat between Dante and Heather.

Four motioned for me to head over to the table and I nodded at him. We said a silent goodbye and I smiled at my friends as I came over to their table. They all turned back to me and smiled, moving so that I could sit. "Hey there you are!" Dante called to me and I smiled at him. He was always so chipper. "Come on, we already got you something to eat."

It was a hamburger and a few slices of fruit. Perfect for the hangover. A mix of health food and greasy. "Thanks guys," I said.

I'd barely gotten my first bite of the burger when the berating started. "Hurry up, we all want to go see the rankings. I'm sure that you want to see them more than anyone else," Dante moaned at me, and I turned to glare at him.

My mouth was stuffed with a piece of my burger and I had half a mind to spit it out at him. I lied. He was such a pain in my ass. But he was right. I did want to see the rankings. I was dying to see if I was now above where Colt was ranked. Hell, I was dying to see if I had pushed him below the red line. Probably not, but that would have been lovely.

I managed to swallow the burger. "But of course my darlings!" I yelled with a little laugh. "I can't wait to see the look on Colt's face when he sees that his ranking has dropped. And especially because his ranking dropped from an Amity!"

Everyone started to laugh at the comment. This was what I had wanted from Dauntless. A home. Swallowing my last bit of burger I leaned back and smiled. Normally I was the last one done at the table but today I was ready to get the hell back to the training room. I was dying with anticipation to know whether or not I had moved up drastically.

"You better hope that he never wants to fight you again. If you guys ever get into another fight you know that he's going to go full out on you. He's going to make sure that by the end of the fight you aren't even going to remember who you are," Buck said to me. I turned to glare at him and shook my head.

As much as I did enjoy Buck's serious outlook on life, sometimes it was a little much. He was
typically a big joker with a heart of gold but when it came to initiation, he was dead serious. He was probably the most serious of us about it. Besides me, maybe. But I supposed that it was a good thing.

"Wow, you are such a bright and shiny person," I told Buck, who shrugged his shoulders at me and went back to his meal.

"I'm just realistic about what's coming," he said.

"You know if Colt ever wants to get in a fight with me again, I'm going to make sure that it's the last thing that he remembers," I sneered to myself, making sure that he couldn't overhear me.

The last thing that I wanted was to get into an uncontrolled fight and have points taken off of my rank. They had already warned us that it would happen if we fought before we were members. Sighing, I slipped into my seat and waited for my friends to finish eating. Heather and Cole were the only two that were still eating and I knew that my leg consistently bouncing was irritating the both of them.

"Well damn girl. I think Dauntless was definitely the right pick for you," Cole said to me and I smirked. He was right.

"Damn straight," I chirped happily.

Everyone laughed again. "I get it though. Colt is an ass and he needs to be knocked down a few pegs. Well a few more pegs after you nearly beat his face in," he told me and I laughed. He was right about that much, I had done a number on Colt's face. "Which, by the way, I wish someone would have recorded!"

That much I could agree with him on. I wished that I would have been able to savor the look on Colt's face when he had awoken to find out that he had been beaten by the Amity. That would have been something for me to savor for the rest of my life. Maybe I could have even sent the video to Eric, just to prove that I was capable of being Dauntless.

"Oh please, then I would have to watch the embarrassment of myself losing to you!" Heather yelled to Cole and I smiled at the pair. "You had better hope that we never get back in a fight. I will not lose to you twice! In fact, whoever I fight next, I'm going to make sure that they know that Heather is not a loser!"

Smiling at my friend, I laid a hand on her shoulder and pulled her close to me. "Heather, we all know that you really are a loser," I told her with a teasing smile, which she returned before shoving me. We both knew that we were tough enough to make it into Dauntless, we just had to make sure that the leaders agreed with us. "You're such an ass," she snapped.

"Oh please I'm only kidding. Sweetheart you know that you're going to do wonderfully with this. You are Dauntless. Whoever you fight next is going to regret ever coming here!" I yelled with a little laugh.

My body stiffened when I noticed that a figure was behind me and I turned back slowly. I was not in the mood to hear Eric knock me down about how I really wasn't that Dauntless and how everyone could easily beat me. When I turned back though, I was happy to see that it was Jax. He was a friend of mine here but we didn't talk much. He was pretty serious about training and I understood that. He really wasn't the best conversationalist. He made a great practice partner though. So I gave him a slightly friendly smile, nervous at the even look on his face.

"Hey, are you guys ready?" Jax asked and I nodded, launching myself off of the bench.
"Absolutely!" I chirped.

"As much as I love sitting here and listening to you all gloat over how Dauntless you are, I'd like to actually see which one of us are really in the running to be Dauntless," Jax said and I smiled.

"Come on!" I yelled, dragging Jax with me.

Only a moment after I had taken my spot next to Jax, Heather and Cole came to join us. Heather took a spot next to Jax and threw her arm over his shoulder, which he quickly threw off. He wasn't much for touching. It was rather funny. I was curious to see which of the girls in Dauntless that he would end up with.

"Come on Jax, we all know that you can be a little grumpy but it's so much fun to talk about how Dauntless we really are. I mean damn, we spend so many years in our home Factions and when we finally get to the Faction we want to be in we want to do everything that we can to be a real Dauntless member. And that means gloating about winning a fight and being overly confident," Heather told him.

She was right about that. It was fun to be an actual Dauntless member after so many years of pretending to be an Amity. It made me wonder if people that were in Amity ever gloated during their initiation about how well they were doing. Probably not. I assumed that Erudite was the only other Faction that gloated about how well they were doing during their initiation.

"And that also means looking more like a Dauntless. Tonight we should all go and get something done," Cole said and I turned to him. "Heather, Alex, you two already look a little Dauntless but none of the rest of us look anything like a real Dauntless member. So tonight, I propose we all go and do something to get rid of the last bits of our old Factions!"

The thought was actually a good one. Besides Heather and myself, no one had done anything else to look anything different from the way that they had come in. I had dyed the tips of my hair red, although the dye was almost gone, and I had gotten the wing tattoo. Heather just had her ear piercing. I wasn't sure if I wanted another tattoo yet and I knew that I didn't want another piercing. Not while we were still going to be fighting each other.

"So what do you think that you're going to do to make us look even more Dauntless?" Heather asked Cole.

Deciding that I would butt in, I stepped between the two. "Well I'm still against getting any more piercings until after the physical part of initiation is over," I said and Heather nodded. She knew that it was best to not get any more piercings until no one could use them against us. "I'm not sure if any other tattoos stick out to me yet so maybe I should go do something to my hair? I mean, it still looks pretty Amity. Maybe I could cut it or something?" I asked her.

I really wasn't sure what I would want to do to make myself look more Dauntless. I wanted to keep at least some of the blonde in it and I still liked my long hair. Maybe I would get it layered or something. That wouldn't be anything too drastic, but it would look a little more edgy. Heather seemed to agree with me as she grabbed a strand of my hair and began to twirl it through her fingers.

"Just don't dye it. You make a pretty blonde," she told me and I grinned at her.

"Thanks. You should darken your hair a little," I told her.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Maybe almost black. I think it'd look nice on you."
"I'll think about it. You ready to see our rankings?" she asked me as we walked through the doors.

"You know it," I said, nodding at her as I grabbed her hand, dragging her to the board.

Like the last time that I had seen the rankings, two Dauntless boys were in first and second place. I was sure that they were two people that I would never want to fight against. After them was Hunter. That didn't come as a shock. He was amazing. I was glad to see that after him was a Dauntless boy. Colt had definitely been knocked down. I glanced over the fifth spot place and laughed loudly. There it was. Alex. I was in fifth place! I had moved up a shocking nineteen spots because of that one fight! And I had to thank both Eric and Four for it. I knew that I had to keep reading though, I had to see where everyone else stood.

Draven and Jax were after me and a Dauntless boy was after them. In ninth and tenth place were Colt and Dante and I groaned. He hadn't been knocked down as far as I had thought. But I was still above him. There was a Dauntless girl after them and Jet was after her. There was another Dauntless girl followed by Cole, Jade, and Buck. After two more Dauntless members, I saw that Heather was in the eighteenth spot. Her loss had done some serious damage to her ranking. But she could bring it up. There were six Dauntless members after that followed by Skylar and Raven, both below the red line.

Glancing over at the two girls I saw that they had defeated looks in their eyes. I felt for them. It had to be awful to see your name highlighted in red like that. It was no shock that they were set to be leaving Dauntless in a few months. They were both terrible fighters and they weren't very good with the exercises either. It seemed like they weren't good with guns either. Both had needed to be walked through taking the gun apart. I felt bad for Heather, too. She was only a few spots above the red line. But I knew that she wasn't going to drop below it. She was better than that. Cole and Buck were low too and I hated it. I knew that they were both so much better than the spots that they had fallen into.

A gasp sounded from my side and I turned over to see that Heather was running up to me, a huge smile falling over her face. So she had seen the rankings. "Oh my God, number five! That's awesome Alex!" Heather yelled as she pulled me into a tight hug.

"I can't believe it!" I cried excitedly. I smiled at her, glad that her ranking hadn't gotten to her too much.

"Now there's no way that Colt or Eric or anyone can call you out. That's so fantastic. Just wait until the next fight, which you know that you'll win, you might end up being number one!" she yelped at me and I laughed.

At least during the physical competition, I knew that I wasn't going to be number one. I was determined but also realistic. "I don't think so. Maybe during Stage Two or Three," I said honestly.

The rest of my friends were still standing in front of the rankings and I smiled at them. They didn't look like they were too upset by the rankings. It did seem like Colt was furious though and that made me giggle with glee. He had that one coming. "Hey Heather, come here!" Cole called and I smiled.

They were so crushing on each other. Too bad they had been forced to beat each other's face in. Behind me I could feel a presence and I turned back to see that Eric was standing behind me with his arms crossed over his chest. He was looking at the rankings and smirking at me. He had known what my ranking was this morning. I knew that he was proud of me and that meant the world to me. For whatever reason that was. It wasn't like I had feelings for him. It definitely wasn't that.

"Not bad Amity. Number five spot is pretty impressive. Especially for someone like you," he told me and I scoffed.
He could only be nice for a few words. Then he had to go back to normal. "Someone like me?" I asked.

"Weak," Eric said.

"Seriously?"

He merely smirked at me. "Now, how about you try for that number one spot?" Eric asked me.

I smirked back at him and laughed a little. Number one would be a lovely thing to hear next to my name. Although Colt might actually try to kill me if he saw that I was number one and he wasn't. "Number one. It has a nice ring to it. I think I'll go for that. You know, I'll be sure to wag my big fat number one spot in your face once it's mine," I told Eric, who merely scoffed at me and shook his head.

"Best of luck with it," Eric snapped.

"But still, you better know that I will never let you forget it once I become number one," I told him with an arrogant smirk.

I wanted him to know that I was never going to let him live it down once I became a full Dauntless member. He nodded at me and came to stand a little closer to me. If there was one thing that I had noticed about Eric it was that he didn't mind standing as close as possible to me. He probably wanted to see me squirm and it made me angry that he did make me squirm.

"I hope that you do," he told me and I scoffed. Had he really just told me that he wanted me to succeed? He always made it seem like he wanted to see me fail and become Factionless. "Come on now initiate. I don't want to see you fail. I want to see you do well here in Dauntless," he told me and I smiled. That was the sweetest thing that he had ever said to me. "Of course, I'm not sure if you have it in you," Eric said as we walked up the stairs and made it onto the roof.

And we were back to our normal Eric. I scoffed at Eric and crossed my arms as we walked onto the rooftop. "Thanks for that. You were almost being nice," I said.

"Now get in line," Eric told me and I rolled my eyes.

He was officially back. There was the horrible leader that I knew. He smirked at me before turning around and heading to the table where Four was standing with loaded guns. So we would finally be firing them. My body was flitting with excitement. I was dying to get to fire the gun for the first time.

"Alright, initiates get over here!" Four yelled and we all nodded, coming closer to the table where he was standing. "I'm going to show you how to fire once and you're going to do it after me. Understand?" Everyone nodded, not that he was really looking for confirmation. "Now pay attention!"

My eyes were locked onto him as Four moved into position and grabbed the gun in his hand. He stood with his feet about shoulder width apart and his head was straight. He was standing with a little hunch to his back and I nodded. I would probably have to force myself to stand like that. He brought the gun up to his eyes and I nodded. His arms were out straight and I noticed that his finger was against the frame. I waited and watched as his fingers moved onto the trigger and he pulled back the take up. It was only a moment later that he pulled the trigger back and the gun made a loud bang.

Jumping, I sighed and shook my head. If that was how I reacted to hearing a gun being fired, how the hell was I going to do when I actually took to firing it? Four showed us with three more bullets, all hitting the center of the target and I gasped. He was incredible. Of course he had been in
Dauntless for at least four years. That was a lot of time to get to be an excellent marksman. He nodded at us to leave back to our stations and I nodded. I took my spot back at the end of the line and I smiled. My loaded gun was sitting on the table and I nearly laughed. It was fantastic that I was finally getting to do this. Cole was at the table next to me and I nodded. This was my next chance to show off.

Picking up the gun, I tried my hardest to follow exactly the way that Four had been demonstrated earlier. I had to make sure that I did exactly as he did if I even wanted a chance to hit the target. It was circular and was about three feet wide. I cocked the hammer on the gun and made sure to take the safety off. That was the only way that the gun would fire in the first place. I made sure that my feet were at shoulder width apart and I put the gun up to my face with my arms extended out. A gun fired a few spots down from me and I jumped. Colt and Heather had both already fired their guns. Heather had hit way off of the target and Colt had hit a few rings from the center. Jade fired next and hit the edge of the target and I smirked.

Leaning forward slightly, I took my hand and placed my finger onto the trigger. I heard a gun go off a few down from me and I jumped as Jax's bullet went one off from the center. Hunter followed suit and I growled. They were excellent at this right off of the bat and that was horrible. It meant that they both were going to keep going up in rankings and that would just push me down. I pulled back the take up and watched the target through the sights. I made sure that I was right over the center before pulling the trigger and firing. The guns recoil was a little more than I had been expecting and my arms jumped up. I put the gun down to my side and smiled. It was only three rings off from the center.

It wasn't too bad for the first shot that I had ever fired. My ears were ringing and my lungs were filled with gunpowder but I couldn't have cared less. This was the most fun that I had had in a long time. An hour later I had fired at least fifty shots and I groaned. Most of my shots were on the target, and plenty of them were close to the center, but none of them had actually hit the center. It seemed that only two people had hit the center yet. Jax and Hunter. But they had been naturals from the beginning. I was just glad that I wasn't Skylar. She hadn't even hit the closest rings yet. She would be Factionless and she knew it. I was pretty sure that she was close to giving up.

Cole fired off another shot and I turned to see that his went four rings off of the center. He groaned and dropped the gun. He was also yet to hit the center. It seemed that through most of this he was one of the worst people. I felt for him. Firing the guns was hard, especially dealing with the recoils. And it killed your hands and arms. I was dying to put my gun down but I was also having a ton of fun getting to take my anger out. I was having a thrilling time pretending that the target was Eric.

"Hey, that was pretty good. I mean, at least you're hitting the target. I'm pathetic at this. I can hardly hit the stupid wooden panel," Cole said to me and I sighed.

Popping off one more shot I noticed that the bullet went one ring off of the center and I groaned. Was it really this hard to make a shot on the center or were they doing something to the guns to make it harder? Or maybe we all really just sucked that badly. Still, we'd only been at it a little over an hour.

"Hey we've only been doing this for half an hour. You'll get it. Just keep working at it," I told him and he nodded.

He didn't look like he believed me but he smiled at me anyways. "Thanks, Alex," he said.

But I had noticed one of his mistakes. "Oh and make sure that you're aiming above the target. You're anticipating the shot pretty bad," I tried to help him and he nodded at me. "Don't worry about it. You've got this."
"So do you. You'll hit that center ring," he said.

So he had noticed that I was irritated with missing the center by just a touch. Placing myself back into the position to fire, I gathered my breath and let it out. I had to get just a little better. I wanted to be with Jax and Hunter as one of the people that were able to hit the center on most shots. I fired off one more shot and groaned when it hit three rings out of the center. Damn it. Most of my shots were going in the second or third ring off. It wasn't bad but it wasn't good enough.

"You aren't hitting the center of the target," I heard Eric say from behind me, and I turned back to him with a scowl.

As helpful as he was sometimes it drove me crazy when he said things like that. I knew that I wasn't hitting the center of the target and he was only telling me that to see if he could get to me. I knew that he could hit it every time and I wouldn't have been shocked if he would have rubbed it in my face.

"Oh, thank you Eric, I never could have guessed that," I told him as I placed the gun down and turned with my hands on my hips.

He was such an ass. "Go ahead," Eric said, motioning to the target.

Turning away from him, I brought the gun back up and got ready to fire at the target, imagining that it was Eric's big fat head on the target. "With pleasure," I growled.

Barely able to raise the gun, Eric stepped forward. "Stop," he told me before I could fire and I rolled my eyes.

"What now?" I snapped.

"Here. Stop standing with one foot forward. It throws your aim off because your hips aren't in alignment with each other," he told me. I nodded and tensed up as his hand grabbed my thigh and pulled it back into alignment with my other one. My heart raced as he put one hand on my hip and pushed it into a straight line. My heart was racing and I rolled my eyes at myself. What was wrong with me? "Also you aren't keeping your arms tense enough. They have to be straight enough to not mess up your aim but it also can't be so tight that you aren't even moving." He placed his hands on my arms and pushed my arms straight. "Hunch forward and keep your head down. You're looking over the sights. And pull the trigger, don't squeeze it. Feet shoulder length apart." He kicked my feet apart. "Close one eye, keep the dominant eye open. Take in a breath and hold it. Good. Now squeeze the trigger. Breathe out."

He didn't say anything more as the world quieted down around us. I couldn't hear the other gunshots and no one's voices were audible anymore. I merely did what it was that Eric told me to do. Even his voice was quiet. I simply allowed him to show me exactly what I was supposed to be doing. I took up the take up. Eric's finger was on the trigger with mine as he pulled the trigger with my finger. The trigger finally snapped and I smiled when the gun went off.

We stood together even for a few moments after the shot went off. "Good shot," he told me.

I put the gun down and looked at the target. The center ring had a huge hole in it and I smiled. I had done it. There was one hole right in the middle of the target. With Eric's help, of course, but I had hit the center ring. I turned back to Eric with a grin and forced it down when I saw that Eric was watching me with a smirk.

"Wow. Uh, thanks. I mean I was doing pretty well on my own but I guess you helped me at least a little bit so thank you," I told Eric softly. He had actually helped me for once. Nothing bad.
"You're welcome," Eric said, almost smiling.

"But you know, I could have done that on my own," I gloated.

Eric scoffed and shook his head. I glared at him and crossed my arms. "Fine. Then fire the gun on your own. Get the same shot that I just did," he told me and I raised my eyebrows.

Was he really telling me that he wanted me to make that shot? There was no way that I could do that. Of course, I would never tell him that. "Seriously?" I asked.

He nodded at me. "Go ahead. Was the only reason that you did so well because I was touching you, making sure that you were in line. Is that what made you so confident?" he asked me and I blushed, shaking my head.

There was no way that he was the only reason that I had made the shot. "Don't be an ass," I snapped, shoving him out of the way.

I brought the gun up to my eyes and repeated all of his actions, breathing out slowly and taking the shot. I automatically knew that I wasn't quite as steady as I had been with Eric around me. My arms shook with the recoil and I glanced up. The hole was just over the center ring and I smirked. Not quite what I had done with Eric's help, but damn close.

"Not bad. Seems like you only need my help to make you shoot correctly," Eric told me, and I dropped the gun.

That was just the way that Eric was. He could be nice only for a few minutes before he had to make me angry again. It was the way that we were. First we were teasing each other and the next we wanted to kill each other. Of course he seemed to be able to make me angry a lot easier than I was able to make him angry.

"To make me mad, you asshole!" I hissed at him, glad that the bangs of the gun were covering up our conversation. "No I don't enjoy you touching me. In fact, I want you away from me for good. I never, ever, will want you," I hissed at him.

For a moment I saw a flash of emotion go through his eyes, but it was gone before I could place it. "Is that so?" he asked.

No. "Yes. That bet that we made? You can be damn sure that I'll win it. I never, ever, will want you," I growled at Eric.

I had been so sure that Eric would say something back to me or maybe he would shoot me but he said nothing. Instead he turned away from me and walked off, heading to deal with another initiate. I heard him yelling at people all day after that instead of helping them nicely. Well as nicely as Eric could. He was screaming at everyone who wasn't hitting bulls-eyes and that was exactly why I made sure that I was hitting the center every time.

Over the past few hours I had blown out the entire center of the target and I had made new targets. I was using each corner of the target and had briefly switched to the rubber human-shaped targets that Four had allowed myself and a few others to use. I had made sure to hit that target higher and lower, and on both sides. It was almost time for dinner and now I was making sure to hit every shot that I made.

From the back of the roof I heard Four yell to us that it was dinner time and I sighed. I was so happy that I could finally leave here and not have to listen to Eric yell at anyone else because of me anymore. I did feel bad that I'd gotten Buck raked over the coals at least three times for missed shots.
I dropped the gun on the table and walked away, brushing past Eric quickly. Heather caught my arm and sighed at me.

She was still steaming from Eric embarrassing her about a pathetically missed shot. "You guys ready to go?" she asked as we walked up to Cole and Buck.

They both nodded and walked ahead of us while Heather kept me at her side. "You know it," Buck said, shooting a nasty look back at Eric.

I turned to grin at her, and she sighed. "Hey what was that about during the gun training? I heard you and Eric talking and you both looked furious," Heather asked me and I sighed at her.

That was nothing that I wanted to talk about right now. I shook my head at her and grabbed her hand, pulling her down the staircase even faster. I just wanted to get to dinner and wash the day away. I wanted to put Eric out of my mind for the next few days. That was what I needed right now.

"Oh, it was nothing. Eric was just being an ass, like usual. Come on, dinner time and I'm starving," I told her and she nodded. "I need sustenance! Something more than gunpowder and lead!"

Heather laughed as we made our way into the dining room, walking over to our friends, who already had our plates laid out. Heather and I were so easy to read. We both always ate burgers and had some fruit and potatoes with us. The boys always knew that we were going to eat that. I smiled as I sat down and listened to my friends chat back and forth. They were talking and laughing and I easily joined in.

For whatever reason I really wasn't in the mood for talking but it was still nice to hear that they were all happy. Cole was currently seeing how fast he could chow down on his burger and Dante and Buck were placing bets. The meat that went flying everywhere was absolutely horrifying. We laughed and talked for about an hour, talking about who was the best with guns and who was more likely to shoot themselves in the foot.

It was just after seven when my friends all stood and got ready to head up into the shopping area of the Pit. They were all heading into the shops when I grabbed Heather by the wrist and pulled her back. Shopping sounded like fun but I wasn't sure that I was in the mood for it. I was pretty sure that I would rather just go to the Pit and get a few drinks in me before heading off to bed. It seemed like an appropriate ending for the day.

"You know, I'm not really in the mood to do anything too Dauntless tonight. I think I'm just gonna head to the Pit and hang around for a little while," I told her and she nodded, looking a little sad.

"Come find me when you're done?"

"Yeah. We'll see you soon. You owe me a girls day sometime soon," she snapped.

"Definitely."

I said a quick goodbye and smiled at my friends before departing from them and heading into the Pit. I walked straight to the bar and took a seat in the same place that I had been in the night before. The bartender gave me a quick smile before handing me off the same drink that I had been taking the night before. I smiled at him and tilted the drink back, sighing at the burning taste. I just had to keep an eye on how many I was drinking. Three at the most. That was my limit.

"Hey Alex," I heard a deep voice call from behind me.

Turning around in the bar stool I noticed a head of dark blonde hair and an apologetic smile. I stared at the man in front of me and searched for words. Of course, the only thing that came out was a
stupid stutter. He had been the last person that I had been expecting to be here. And talking to me, at
that.

"Oh, Damien," I said softly. He was staring at me with a bashful smile and I sighed inwardly. Why
was he here? "Uh hey, how's it going?" I asked him awkwardly, remembering the events from the
night before.

But I didn't want to stick around to hear his answer. Maybe he wasn't a bad guy, but I wasn't in the
mood to find out. Silently I slipped off of the bar stool and went to head off deeper into the Pit. After
today, I didn't want anything to make me even more upset. Damien stood in front of me though and
motioned me back into the seat. He looked sorry and I sighed.

"Look, I wanted to apologize to you for last night," he said and I sighed.

At least he was saying that he was sorry, but that didn't make anything any better. He had been out
of line. "I figured that was why you were here," I said.

"I had already had too much to drink and I should have backed off when you told me to. That was
my fault. I just - I wanted a chance to make things right," he told me and I shook my head.

Part of me genuinely believed that Damien was a nice guy but I wasn't sure if I could forgive him.
He had tried to take advantage of me when I had drank too much. But on the other hand he did look
actually sorry for last night. I sighed and shook my head at him.

"Look Damien, I understand that you drank too much. I did that too. But that doesn't excuse what
you did," I told him and he nodded.

At least he wasn't trying to argue with me or start a scene. I wouldn't have known how to get out of
that one. "I know," he said.

"I don't want to sound prudish or anything like that but that isn't really something that I can forgive,"
I told him with a little shrug.

I could tell that Damien actually did understand where I was coming from but he obviously didn't
like what I was saying. "I understand, Alex. But please, just let me at least try to make it up to you.
Can we talk?" he asked me.

Should I? I cocked my head at him. After last night I wasn't sure if he knew what just talking really
meant. "I don't know..."

Damien caught my hesitance. "Just talking. Nothing else. And you're free to leave whenever you
want. Just give me the benefit of the doubt. Five minutes? Please," he begged me and I sighed.

There really wasn't any harm in letting him talk to me for a few minutes out here. This was the
busiest section of the Pit, and unlike last night, it seemed like everyone that was walking around were
mostly sober. People would notice if I wanted out of the conversation. And maybe it would do me
well to hear him out.

"Two minutes," I agreed and Damien nodded happily at me. It wasn't five minutes, but it was
something. "Better use them wisely," I warned with a little smirk and Damien laughed lowly.

Just because he had done something that I didn't like didn't mean that I had to condemn the man and
make him feel like he was some awful piece of trash in society. I could at least hear him out. He took
a seat next to me in the bar and leaned all the way back, keeping as much distance between the two
of us as he could.
"Look I know that you feel like you would be stupid to ever believe anything that comes out of my mouth but I want you to know that I recognized that what I did was stupid. The minute that you left with Eric and I went back to my apartment I felt so stupid. A beautiful girl like you deserves something so much better than me. It was a terrible thing that I did to you and I'm so sorry," he told me and I nodded. It would take more than a sorry to make that up to me. "Look, I know that you would have every right to deny me, but I'll be at Defying on Monday." What the hell was Defying? "Damn hard to get reservations there right now." So it was a restaurant. "I'll be there at six, while everyone else is at dinner. You won't have to worry about anyone seeing you or asking questions. Feel free to join me. The reservation is for two."

There was a bashful smile on his face. I found that I liked it much more than the way that he had been smiling at me last night. It almost made my heart flutter. I guessed that I did have a penchant for dangerous men. But he was asking me about Monday. It was Tuesday right now so that gave me six days to think about what I wanted to do. Whether or not I wanted to show up. I could always just show up as a friend, willing to try and forgive a mistake.

"I take it Defying is a restaurant, probably buried back in the depths of the Pit?" I asked him and he nodded.

"Yes. It's about as far back as you can get," he said.

I sighed and shook my head. I wasn't sure if it was worth it. "I don't know, Damien. It's like Eric said yesterday. Initiates aren't allowed to get into relations with Dauntless members." Damien nodded sadly. "But... I do like free dinners. I'll think about it," I told him with a little smile.

He laughed at me and shook his head. Damien dropped the drink that he had been holding on the counter and pushed it away from himself. That bode well for him. "Thank you, Alex. And it isn't a relation. I just want a chance to be friends," he told me and I nodded.

"I think that's a good start. Just being friends," I said.

He nodded at me. "I hope that I'll see you on Monday. And if not I'll never come bothering you again. Just... think about it before saying no," he said nervously and I nodded. "Good luck with training."

"Thank you," I said, watching as he turned back and headed back to where I assumed his apartment was.

Leaning back on the bar I sighed and shook my head. Should I go to the dinner with Damien? I had time to choose but it was killing me that I wasn't sure whether or not I wanted to. I wanted to have the chance to get to be friends with Damien but I wasn't sure if I could forgive him for last night. A man cleared their throat behind me and I turned back to tell Damien that I wasn't sure if I was going to go with him to dinner when I realized that it was Eric. I crossed my arms over my chest and stared angrily at him.

He looked like he was up to no good and I wasn't fond of that look. "I hope you know that I overheard that conversation," Eric told me and I gulped.

That was nothing that I wanted to hear. Damien could get in a ton of trouble. "It's a public area. I knew that someone could overhear," I said, trying to sound like I wasn't nervous.

"What Damien said is true. Relationships between Dauntless members and initiates are not allowed. You know that and so does he. Go there and I'll be sure that you're both out of Dauntless," Eric told me.
The threat made me sick to my stomach. Had he really just threatened to throw me out of Dauntless because I was thinking about going to dinner with Damien? I understood that he had seen and saved me last night from Damien but that didn't mean that he had a right to butt in right now.

"Oh come on, that's just ridiculous. And it's an empty threat," I said and Eric shook his head.

"It's not," Eric said.

I knew that he had meant it but I had to say something. Or I could have said something to really bug him. And I was going to be sure to say just that. "Are you jealous, Eric? Because that's what it sounds like," I told him with a little smirk.

He scoffed at me and shook his head. I had figured that he really wasn't jealous, he just wanted to make sure that he could make me even angrier. "Don't stroke yourself, Amity. I pity the poor man that ends up with you," he told me and I scoffed.

That poor man was going to have an interesting life. I was fun and Eric knew that. I knew that every time we talked with each other we had a ton of fun. "Thanks for that," I sneered.

"But I'm serious about what I said. Don't get into it with him. That's not something that you want to explore. I promise you that," he said and I shook my head at him.

He only wanted to see that I was miserable. Besides, he had made it so clear that he couldn't have cared less about me. I wasn't sure why he cared so much that I was thinking about going to dinner with Damien. It was just a damn dinner and he hated me. Maybe he really was looking for a reason to make me Factionless.

"And why not? What is it about Damien that's so bad?" I asked, knowing that Eric had the perfect answer to that. The exact reason that we had awkwardly experienced our little run in last night.

"Don't be an idiot. It doesn't suit you," Eric said.

But I ignored the little dig. "I mean, so bad that Eric actually has to show that he might care about a poor little Amity," I told him with a little smirk.

I was going to make sure that I could push Eric as far as possible. I wanted to see if I could break the tough Dauntless leader. But I should have known that it was going to backfire on me. Eric took a step closer to me and I sucked in a breath. Usually it made me nervous when Eric came close to me, but this was even worse. I wasn't sure if I was afraid of him or I wanted him to come closer, but either way it bothered me.

"I do not care about the poor little Amity," he told me and I rolled my eyes. For whatever reason, that had actually kind of hurt. Not that I would let him see that. "I care about the system. Seeing him is against the rules here in Dauntless." He was right about that. "And you saw what he did to you last night. You put a few drinks in him and you don't think that he won't do that again?" I nearly froze.

Was that true? If he had another few drinks like he had last night would he pull the same stunt? I didn't want to think that he would. But either way I wasn't going to let Eric run my life for me. Whether or not I chose to go to dinner with Damien, it didn't matter. I just wanted to make sure that the choice was my own.

"I don't recall the Dauntless handbook saying anything about not being allowed to have friends that are full Dauntless members," I said and Eric scoffed at me. No matter what I wanted to do on Monday night I wanted to give Damien another chance to at least be a good person. "I'm not going to date him. I'm not stupid. I want to be here in Dauntless and I won't be doing anything to
jeopardize that."

As he looked at me I wasn't really sure if he actually believed me or not. I didn't think that he really believed me but I didn't care. He was just a pain in my ass and I shouldn't have cared in the slightest about what he thought of me. "I'm sure about that. Do yourself a favor and stay away from him," Eric said and I cocked my head.

He had to at least give me a good reason. "Give me a good reason," I said softly.

For a moment Eric hesitated. But then he narrowed his eyes and spoke. "I've known Damien for a few years now and you aren't the first girl that I've ever heard him give that speech to. You go and start hanging around here, I promise that you're going to get hurt," he said.

A lump formed in my throat. For whatever reason, I actually believed that Eric was trying to help me. He might have been a royal dick but he wasn't the type of man to watch someone be hurt. Not like that anyways. I shook my head at Eric and grabbed a drink off of the bar. I realized that it was Damien's and I downed it. I already knew that he was drinking a neat scotch. That was what he had been drinking last night, too. I supposed it was his drink of choice.

"That's sweet Eric but I meant what I said before. During training," I told him when I saw that he wasn't following me. I downed the drink and smirked at him. I hated that he didn't think that I could take care of myself. "I will never have feelings for you, if that's what this is all about. And that sure as hell seems to be exactly what it seems like. I mean can't you go find someone else to bother?"

He growled deep in his throat and for a moment I thought that he was going to take his beer and pour it onto my head. That would have created quite the disaster. I would have loved to see the way that Eric's drink on my head would have gone. He leaned into me and I forced myself to stay still.

"Like I just said, initiate, I would never care about you. That makes two of us," he said and I rolled my eyes. There was that little twinge of hurt again. "I'll never have feelings for you."

"Can you have feelings for someone?" I shot back.

I hated that my voice gave a weak waver. He picked up on it. "Is that disappointment that I see in your eyes?" he asked me with an amused smirk. I stopped short. I had to make sure that he didn't think that I cared at all about what he thought of me. "I can't say that I blame you. You would want a real man, and that isn't someone like Damien."

Did Eric really think that I would ever want to find out if he was a real man? Maybe physically that was actually true but there was no way that I would have ever wanted to be in a relationship with him. I hated him more than anything. He was an ass and deserved to be alone forever. Sure as hell not with me.

"I'm sure that he's more of a man then you are," I told Eric and he scoffed.

Maybe that wasn't actually true, but I had no idea. And I would never want to find out. "You so sure about that?" Eric asked.

"I am. Not that I would figure that out for real. There's only one of you that I'd ever like to really get to know," I told Eric with a little smirk. That wasn't actually true. There was no way that I trusted Damien to take him to bed. Not right now and not for a damn long time. "Now move, I'm going to bed before it gets too late."

Both of us jumped up from our chairs, practically pressed up against each other. I moved past Eric a little bit and stumbled slightly as I ran into him. He was steadier on his feet than I had thought that he
would be. Not that it should have really surprised me. With my back to him, I heard him speaking behind me. One of his hands was wrapped around my arm as the other was almost pressed on my waist.

"Watch what you're doing here, Amity," he told me. I rolled my eyes as I continued walking. I didn't want to have to deal with Eric for another minute. But he grabbed onto my arm and stopped me once more. "I have my eyes on you. And watch what you're saying too. I still have power to throw you out of here on a dime."

The two of us were locking eyes. "Understood," I said, pulling away from his intense gaze.

I knew that he had every power in the world to throw me out of here but right now there was nothing that he could do to me. I was doing nothing wrong. But I would be damn sure that I was going to bother Eric as much as possible. I knew what I was going to do on Monday. I was going to go to dinner with Damien. If nothing else, to try and get a rise out of Eric. I wanted to see just how far I could push the Dauntless leader. Heather had told me that he let me get away with more than anyone else she knew. I wondered just how far that really was.

As I walked into the dorm, I was met immediately with a furious-looking Heather. "Where have you been?" she asked.

I stood and stared stupidly at Heather, shocked from my devious plotting against Eric. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"I thought you were going to be down in the Pit but when I came looking for you, you weren't there," she told me.

A little twinge of hurt shot through me and I sighed. She was right. I was supposed to meet them downstairs and I never did. I had gotten so caught up in between Eric and Damien that I had never bothered to check in with my friends. That was what stupid boys did. They made you forget the important things.

Reaching out, I grabbed Heather's hand gently. "I'm sorry about that. I ran into someone that I know down in the Pit. And you know, it was actually nice," I told Heather, who cocked her eyebrows at me.

She was clearly dying to know what I was talking about. "Who'd you run into?" she asked.

"No one. But I - uh - I have a date. On Monday," I told Heather, whose jaw dropped.

The two of us merely stared at each other for a moment. But she quickly managed to recover from the shock of the news. She began to rattle off all sorts of questions about the date but I merely smirked and walked into the bathrooms for a silent shower. I had plotting to do.
Chapter Seven

Like most mornings I woke up earlier than everyone else. But, unfortunately, today it was a little later than it normally was. That was probably a good thing. That meant that I might miss my morning rendezvous with Eric. They had become a strange habit lately. Every morning I woke up and showered before heading out to the dining room where Eric would be the sole inhabitant. No one else in Dauntless wanted to be awake that early.

Some mornings we would sit in silence and eat and then other days we would snap at each other for nearly an hour. There were even the rare days where we would actually be able to talk with each other like we were friends. Of course, that usually only lasted so long before we started to yell at each other. But still, they were the mornings that we both enjoyed. Otherwise one of us would have stopped going.

Yawning deeply, I sighed and shook my head. I wanted to go back to bed today. It had been a long week and I wasn't sure how fond I was to get to work and train today. I wasn't sure what we were doing today. We might be training with the guns some more but I was starting to get tired of that. My arms were always aching and my ears were constantly ringing. I stood weakly and grabbed the first clothes that I found. I grabbed a pair of black leggings and a loose fitting black shirt that fell off of one of my shoulders. With my clothes in hand I turned back and walked into the showers, squinting my eyes at the blinding light.

As I turned the water on and let the cold seep into my bones, I sighed. The cold in here was one of the few things I couldn't stand. It made me curious whether or not Eric had warm water in his showers. He had snapped at me the other night for all of my complaining about the cold water. If he had hot water I was thinking about running into his apartment and using his shower. I was dying to be somewhere without ice cold water. Of course, I would hate to see what would happen if he caught me in there.

What would happen? I actually really wasn't sure what would happen if he ever caught me in the shower. Would he scream and run away? Probably not. Would he yell at me? That was almost a certainty. Was there a chance that he might do something else? Like join me? That was actually a high possibility. I liked looking at Eric and I liked flirting with him, but I would never lose that bet. There was no way that I would ever admit that I wanted him. Because I didn't. Physically maybe, but never as a significant other. He didn't know how to be one.

I was pretty sure that Four felt the exact same way that most people did about Eric. He hated him. At first I had thought that it might just be a friendly rivalry but now that we had been here in training for six weeks I saw that it was really a true hatred. Six weeks had shown me that Four wasn't the big baddie that everyone thought that he was either. He could be a real jerk and sometimes he made me angrier than Eric, but I knew that he was really a good guy. He wasn't just a plain dick like Eric was, Four was just a jerk because that was the way that Dauntless had made him.

The only thing about Four was that I just hoped that he didn't fire off a blank round at me again. He had done it yesterday to scare the hell out of me after I had kept missing the target. My arms had been exhausted so I had just stopped paying attention to my shots. I had seen the punishment coming, I had just thought that it would be from Eric. He had seemed shocked that it was coming from Four, too.

In six weeks I had also met some of the best people that now knew the most about me. For those of my friends back in Amity, I had hidden a lot about myself from them. Even though we all snapped at each other whenever we were tired and ate our meals together, usually not without a fight, they were
still the best people that I had met. Heather was now the one that I considered my best friend. I told her everything about me and she was the one that listened to me endlessly complain about Eric.

Buck and Dante were both good for joking around and I had quickly found that they were good help in my continuing campaign against Eric. Jax and Jet were quiet but they were good to be with on days that I didn't want to be around my other, louder, friends. Pretty much everyone was fun to be around except for Hunter, Colt, and Jade. I was just waiting for the day that I could blame a faulty gun on a bullet between their eyes. I hated them. But that didn't mean that they made me like Dauntless any less. It was my home.

Six weeks later, though, I also missed the people that had meant the most to me for almost all of my life. As much as I loved not being around the nauseating peace of Amity every day, there were times that I missed my two best friends. Florian and Iris were both in Candor right now, probably loving their lives. I missed them so much but I knew that they were better off wherever they were. Iris had wanted to be in Candor practically since the day that she was born. Florian had always seemed like he would be good for Amity but I was glad that he had left. I was glad that he had gone at least with Iris. He needed a friend.

And as much as I loved him, I was glad that he hadn't come with me. I didn't want to be the one to tell him that I'd never had the feelings for him that he had had for me. I loved him so much, but he wasn't the type of guy that I wanted to be in a relationship with. We had always been better off as friends. I wasn't sure who was the kind of person that I wanted to be with. All I knew was that I was trying to push down the little voice in my head that was whispering Eric.

The only other thing that I missed from Amity was my parents. I wished that I could come back to Amity for a day just to tell them that it wasn't anything that they had done. I loved them so much and they were the people that had made me the way that I was. That was something that I would always be grateful for. They were the people that I had to thank for everything that they had done for me. I just hated that they thought that I had left without having a care in the world over what they would think.

But that wasn't the truth. It had killed me for weeks before the Choosing Ceremony having to pretend that I was going to be Amity for the rest of my life. I just wanted them to know that I was sorry. I wanted them to visit just for a day so that I could tell them that I was sorry. I was hoping that they would come to Visiting Day, but I knew better. There was no way that they were going to set anywhere near the place that their daughter had betrayed them for. The thought broke my heart.

But they weren't the things that I could be focusing on. Right now I had to focus on my training. It was going well and I couldn't do anything to lose the traction that I had gained. In the past week since we had started gun training my rank hadn't moved but I would rather it remain where it is rather than watch it fall. I was actually rather impressed with myself. And I could tell that all of my friends were just about as impressed with me as I was.

An Amity member had never made it into Dauntless before and I was on track to be the first. But I knew that it could change easily. Especially if Eric continued on his threats to kick me out of Dauntless for anything he could. I wouldn't be surprised if he kept little notes about me to eventually bring to Max to get me kicked out.

That didn't matter though. Right now I was doing damn well. For four days we had been practicing with the pistols and I knew that I was at least halfway decent with them. I wasn't nearly the best but I wasn't the worst by any means either. I normally hit around the second and third ring out from the center. But I also had plenty of hits in the first and second rings too. I was really actually very good with the pistols. I normally was able to blow out the entire center of the target. Of course, that would
normally take me at least an hour. But still, I was pretty good for someone who had never picked up a gun before a week ago. Plus the compliments that I had gotten from Four and scowls I had gotten from Eric had made my hard work with it.

Just three days ago we had started with the rifles. They were probably my favorite things to shoot with. My only problem was that they were extremely heavy and hurt my shoulders from the kickback. I was really good with them though. Nearly every shot was a bulls-eye or in the ring directly outside of the center. But it was pretty hard to not be accurate with a rifle. The sights made it extremely easy to find where you wanted to shoot and the long barrel made the bullet more accurate. There was no denying that we were all better with the rifles. But I liked to think that I was the best. Probably because I didn't rush my shots and I actually took the time to think about where I was firing. It was why I almost always ended up with the most leftover bullets. It was also why Eric always yelled at me that I was too slow for a real defensive situation.

But that didn't matter, because for the most part I was actually better than most of my friends with gun training. Heather was pretty miserable with a pistol. She always hit the rings but she rarely had center shots. I was pretty sure that it was because she always stood so rigid. She hated leaning forward a little bit but that was the way that you needed to stand. She was much better with a rifle though. She was pretty good with it. Most of my friends were actually extremely good with the rifles.

They were all over the place when it came to the pistols though. Raven and Skylar weren't good with them at all. I could tell that the weapons were too heavy for them. I felt terrible but I knew that neither one was likely to make it into Dauntless. Colt was incredibly good with a gun but he wasn't the best. It was actually Hunter. He didn't even seem to have to try to aim or anything. All he did was raise the gun and pull the trigger and it went through the center hole. It always did. I tried to keep up with him but I knew that I couldn't. Until the mental portion of training I knew that it would be almost impossible for me to take over his spot at the top of the transfer initiates. But I was determined to be number one.

Yawning again, I washed out the grease in my hair and made sure that I was actually going to look appropriate for my date, or whatever it was called, tonight. I had found myself actually reasonably excited for what was to come. We were going out to some fancy restaurant tonight - Defying, if I remembered correctly - during normal dinner hours where we were going to be able to try and talk with each other like friends.

For now, at least. I had decided to give him a try. And for more than just to make Eric mad. I really wanted a chance to be friends with Damien. Maybe a little something more. But I knew that I had to be careful until the end of training. Eric was on me all the time, watching my every move. He was much worse now that he knew that I was speaking to Damien again. I had to make my relationship with Damien look like we were just friends for right now. I knew that it was probably more though, considering that the date was still hours away and my stomach was already fluttering with nerves.

I turned the water off and stepped out of the shower, putting a towel around myself. They were bright white and I groaned. Just for once I actually wanted everything to be black. I was exhausted. As I walked out into the living room, clothes in hand, I saw through the darkness that Eric was standing at the front of the room, his hands just hovering above the light switch. He stared at me and I was grateful that he hadn't switched the light on yet. I noticed that his eyes were trailing down my body. His eyes were dark and I blushed deeply. Why the hell didn't I put my clothes on in there?

His eyes were locked onto me and I coughed, hoping to get his eyes away from me. They were making something uncomfortable stir in my stomach. Even with my cough he only let his eyes trail slowly back up my body as he turned away from me. He was clearly looking as my grip faltered slightly at my chest. His eyes flashed in amusement before he turned away. He flipped the switch on
blindingly and I rolled my eyes. He couldn't have even given a tiny bit of a warning. He was still looking at me and I realized now that his eyes were on my legs. The towel sat almost a little too high on them and I blushed once more.

I was like a damn school girl. "Get up. You're going on a trip today," Eric said, without bothering to look away from me.

No one else moved at first. They all merely laid there, slowly rolling in their beds. "Can you look away?" I asked Eric softly, as chatter arose around us.

It was so that no one could hear the two of us. "Don't like me looking at you?" he asked.

"Privacy, Eric."

"You're an initiate. I'm a leader. I'm free to do what I want. Go on, Stiff," he said.

It was the term that we used for Abnegation kids. Asshole. I knew that there was nothing that I could do. He wasn't going to look away from me. So instead of blushing and walking away from him, I walked closer to where he was standing. Right by my bed. I didn't drop the towel but I did drop my clothes onto my bed, taking out my underwear. I pulled it on under the towel and coughed stupidly when I realized that I had probably just flashed him something. He was watching me closely as I pulled the bra on as well. I turned away from him and dropped the towel, knowing that he could see almost all of me. I placed my bra on before turning back to him.

He watched every line of my body as I pulled on my clothes. I was so glad that no one had bothered to wake up quickly or else I would have some serious explaining to do. It was nice that no one was watching the two of us. And, on some level, it was also nice that I knew that he was physically attracted to me.

As everyone continued to wake up, I walked over to Eric and stood in front of him, crossing my arms over his chest. "Where are we going today? I thought that we were still training?" I asked. Grabbing a brush off of the table and pulling it through my hair, I waited for Eric to answer my question. His eyes were still dark when he finally began to answer my question. "You are still in training but we're giving you the day off," he said.

I raised an eyebrow. That was the kind of answer that I liked to hear. I loved the idea of getting the day off, even if it meant that we were waking up nearly an hour earlier than we normally would. My arms were going to fall off after one more day with rifles. But suddenly I realized that they weren't that nice. They weren't going to give us the day off. They were going to make us do something even worse.

"To do?" I asked.

"Feed the Factionless," he snapped.

I merely stared at him. "Now who's the Stiff?" I shot back.

Eric stepped up to me, practically standing right up against me. "Today you get to come and see where most of you will be working once initiation is over. If you make it through initiation, that is," Eric said, looking me in the eyes.

I wanted to ask where that was, but I knew that I was already pushing him too much. "Okay," I said.

He stared at me for a few moments before glancing off towards everyone else. "Two minutes. Get to
the trains," Eric snapped, before walking out of the room.

With nothing left to do, I headed out of the dorm and followed Eric to the train. Cole, who had been the fastest to get ready, was right behind me. We made it to the train station quickly and I waited, sitting on the ground. The schedule said that it would still be a few minutes before the train passed through. Eric was standing next to me and I had half a mind to punch out his knee. I wanted to watch him fall, but I also didn't want to watch him hit me in the face. Which was what I was sure was going to happen to me if I did anything to him.

Within his two minute limit, everyone else appeared. But to my shock we also got Four, Lauren, and all of the Dauntless born initiates. Four came to stand on my other side and I grinned when Heather gently prodded him to get to sit next to me. Although I was sure that it wasn't because she wanted to see me. She just wanted a place to sleep.

Just as I had expected, she laid on my shoulder and closed her eyes. It was only about two more minutes before a loud whistle came off from the other side of the Dauntless compound and I sighed. That was our way out of here. And I knew that I still wasn't that great with getting onto the train. I'd only done it once before. We all stood and as the train approached and let the Dauntless born and Lauren get onto the train first. We were all jumping into one of the larger connector cars.

Four went next, and then Hunter. After him went Colt, Jade, and Heather. I ran after her and grabbed the railing on the outside of the car. I was pulling myself inside when Eric evidently decided that I wasn't moving fast enough. He shoved me and I fell into the car, nearly face-planting into the wall on the far side of the car. I hit the wall before turning back and glaring at Eric. I went to yell at him but he glared at me in return. I sighed and let my mouth close. I couldn't say anything to him.

So instead I sat down and sighed and pretended like he hadn't hurt me in the slightest. The shove had actually been a little painful. I sat down on the ground in between Heather and Four and risked letting my head fall on his shoulders. I half expected him to hit me but he didn't. He merely let me lay on him. His head fell on top of my own and after a minute I could tell that he was back asleep. Eric was sitting on the other side of the cart and was snarling at me. I smirked in response. He knew that there was nothing in between Four and me. That was probably what made him the angriest.

I was about half asleep when the train began to slow a little and Four shot up, nearly hitting my head. "Sorry about that," Four told me, gently pushing back my head.

"You're fine," I said softly.

Without saying anything more, he stood and walked to the edge of the train. He yelled for the Dauntless born to get off first, followed by Eric with the transfers. He would be last. I followed Heather and Buck to the edge of the train before jumping off after them, Four landing just behind me at my feet. He grabbed my arm as I started to wobble and I thanked him. As he released me I glanced up and saw that we were at the Fence. My heart began to pound as I realized how close we were to my home. My old home. Amity was less than a mile from the Fence. But it had always looked smaller from Amity. Less ominous too. It made my skin crawl looking at the Fence from only a few feet away from the base.

Four motioned for us to follow him over to the stairs and I rolled my eyes. I guess this was our way of just a little bit of physical exercise. The Fence was well over fifty stories high. It seemed even higher now that we were standing right at the base of it. We climbed the stairs and I began to pant as Four began to speak like nothing was wrong. All of the transfers, and even the Dauntless born were staring at him like he was insane.

"As Dauntless, we fight to protect every life inside the fence, without fail. That's why we train you
the way we do. To teach you not to give up. And to find out who has what it takes," he said. We were already over halfway up the Fence and nearly everyone was panting. Everyone except Four and Eric. Even Lauren looked a little frazzled. "Even though it's been quiet out there for years that could change at any moment. So we have to be ready for everything."

Our large ground finally hit the landing and I leaned over slightly. Footsteps pounded as we all walked over to the railings of the Fence. I noticed a few people hanging back. Obviously they were the ones that weren't overly fond of heights. I could see the Amity farms out in the distance and something uncomfortable began to twist in my stomach. I sighed and dropped onto the Fence weakly as Cole took a spot next to me.

"Whoo!" he yelled as he leaned over the edge.

Four glared at Cole, who stepped back and gave a bashful grin. "Zip it, initiate. If we throw you over the edge of the fence I promise you that you will not live to see the end of training," Four warned and I watched as the color drained from Cole's already pale face. "Now keep your mouth shut and listen." All chatter stopped. Not that many people were talking. Everyone was already exhausted from the climb. "Alright, we're going to divide you into teams. You'll take a look around each section of the fence with your leader. Your ranking depends who you will go with."

"If you're in ranking between one and ten, go with Eric."

"If you're between rankings eleven and twenty you'll be with me."

"If you're twenty one or lower you'll be going with Lauren. Go!"

Sighing as I turned back to Heather, I was a little depressed that I wasn't going to be with her. On the bright side, Dante, Draven, and Jax would be with me. But that meant that I would also have to deal with Colt and Hunter. "That so figures that I'd have to go out there with Eric. I mean, even when we have a day off I still have to deal with his arrogant, stubborn, and narcissistic - What?" I asked.

Heather's face went pale and she looked like she was about to vomit. She wasn't afraid of heights, was she? No, that face was for something much worse. She looked afraid. "Just..." she trailed off.

"He's right behind me isn't he?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

Confirming my suspicion, I heard Eric's low rumble that was somewhere in between a laugh and a snarl. "He is," Eric hissed at me and I sighed. That meant that Eric now had one more thing to use against me.

"I was just kidding," I told Eric weakly.

He nodded at me. "Come on initiate. Before I decided that I should take my arrogant, stubborn, narcissistic ass and throw you over the fence," he said, making me scoff. I knew that Eric didn't like me, but for whatever reason I really didn't think that he was going to actually hurt me.

Maybe that was stupid. "You would not really kill me," I said.

Eric seemed to read my thoughts as he shook his head. "It's happened before and it will happen again," he told me with a little grin before he turned and walked away.

The rest of the group that would be going with him was following and I went to walk after him. Heather grabbed me before I could though and I turned to look back at her. "Do me a favor and try to not get yourself killed before the end of the day," she told me.

"I'm not going to get myself killed," I said quickly.

She really did think that I was going to do something dumb. So stupid that I was going to actually get
myself killed. "I need you here. And that means alive. Not in a casket!" she called after me as I turned away from her and headed away from her.

We both laughed and flipped her off as I followed Eric up a second flight of stairs. We made it up the new flight and I knew that I was turning a little green as I looked out and saw just how high up we really were. It made me a little sick to know that a fall from this high up would actually kill me. It wasn't that I was afraid of heights, but I wasn't fond of being this high up with someone that wasn't overly fond of me and could easily overpower me.

"Take a look initiates," Eric said. I turned back to look as he looked out over the Fence. He looked completely bored and I figured that he was. He probably thought that this was beneath him. "This Fence has been here for as long as anyone can remember. After the war. Our Dauntless soldiers protect our people from what is beyond the Fence."

As far as I thought, everyone had already known that. We actually learned the same thing in Amity history lessons. Considering that we were so close to it. As we looked out I noticed that the Amity farmers were out there at the moment. I had figured that they would be. It was the right time of day for it. I watched as the farmers moved around and I sighed. That was almost me out there. I was glad that I was up here. It was harder, the people were worse, and the atmosphere was cold. But that didn't matter. Despite the fact that I didn't have my family and old friends here, I was happier than could be.

As I looked out at the fields, I glanced back to Eric. He was standing right behind me. "Wishing that was you?" he asked.

"Of course not," I snapped. "I always hated Amity."

"Looking for your family then?" he asked me.

"No." The two of us glanced over at each other and I knew that a sad look crossed over my face. "Would you blame me if I was? I asked snappily.

"We're your family. Not them. Faction before blood," Eric snarled.

He was right. I had to get over myself. They would always be my parents, but Dauntless was my family now. But I didn't like the tenseness of the conversation, so I smiled. "Considering you my family? That's comforting," I said.

To my surprise, we both laughed. "And Roberts?" he asked.

I knew that he meant Damien. "Got the green-eyed monster?" I asked. He merely rolled his eyes at me as I leaned against the bar. We were silent for a little while. "What's out there?"

He was still standing behind me from the previous conversation. His heavy footsteps fell behind me and I watched as he walked up to me. His chest was nearly pressed up against my back and I was sure that there was less than an atom of space between us. It felt like we were almost a couple. No. Absolutely not. We had to be friends first, and even that was tough.

"Monsters," he hissed into my ear.

Laughing softly, I shoved him back, grateful that no one was watching us. "Stop," I said.

Quickly I glanced around to see what everyone else was doing. They were all looking over the farms and talking with each other about their rankings. He laughed at me and shook his head and I sighed. I turned around and saw that he was still standing right behind me, watching the farms over my head.
He could have placed his chin right on my head.

"Amity farms," he answered me and I scoffed.

Sometimes Eric was one of the most brainless people that I had ever met. He had called me Amity enough times to know that my home Faction was Amity. I knew that there were Amity farms out there. I had been to them enough. I wanted to know what was out beyond the farms. When we were in Amity they never told us. They just pretended that the world ended after the farms.

"Are there really? I know that Amity farms are out there. I happen to be from Amity if you recall. I’ve been out there plenty of times," I snapped at him. Eric shrugged his shoulders, like I was nothing more than a little fly. "But beyond that?"

I wasn't even sure if Eric actually knew what was out there but I was dying to know. I wasn't even sure what I was expecting but I was hoping for something fun. It might be kind of fun to know what we were really defending the world from. The world was too boring right now. Sometimes we need a little spice in our lives.

"Places that never recovered from the war. Do you know?" he asked.

I figured that he was asking if I knew about the war so I nodded. "Yeah. We learned in school," I said. I had paid at least a little bit of attention in history class.

"Let's just say they built their fence for a reason," he said and I nodded.

It wasn't long after that that he turned away from me. I could tell that our conversation was over. "Now as I said this morning. The majority of you will end up here at the Fence. As watchers. That means that you’ll spend most of your day at the Fence and come back to the Dauntless compound at the end of your shift to sleep." That didn't exactly sound like a very fun life. Not the life that I wanted when I had transferred Factions. "It's a very tiring life," Eric said, driving the point home.

I glanced around the Fence and saw that people were standing everywhere on the Fence. There must have been at least one hundred guards lined all over the Fence. It shocked me just how many people were really up here. It always seemed like there were so many people still in the Dauntless compound. But maybe there were a lot more people in Dauntless than I had originally anticipated.

"What ranking do you have to be in to be on fence duty?" I asked Eric, curious.

I wanted to make sure that I wasn’t in the range to end up here on the Fence. I thought that the Control Room actually sounded like fun. Eric looked a little thrown by my question and I wondered if anyone had ever had the gall to ask that question. Maybe everyone had always just wanted to stay in Dauntless. Maybe they hadn't cared what they would be doing, just as long as it was in Dauntless. Well, I cared.

"Well at the end of your initiation there will be about twenty of you left. Maybe not even that many. Probably anywhere between the tenth and twentieth ranked spots will be out here," he said and I nodded.

That meant that right now I was safe. It meant that I wasn't going to be on the Fence. But that was as long as I stayed in my high spot. I nodded at Eric and went to go look out at the Amity farms. Some tiny part of me wondered if I looked hard enough if I would be able to see my parents. Maybe I could wave to them. Just let them know that I didn't hate them and that I wanted them to know that I was sorry. But just before I went to search for them, I thought of something else.

"What ranking would you have to be in to be a leader?" I asked.
That time I knew that my question had thrown Eric. "Excuse me?" Eric asked.

A small blush fell over my face. "I figured that you would be a good person to ask about that," I said bashfully, knowing that all eyes were on me.

It took him a moment but Eric finally seemed to get his thoughts together. He shook his head and snorted at me, like I had told him the funniest joke he had heard all year. That was probably what he actually thought that I was doing. Joking. But I wasn't. I wanted to know. I wanted to know if I had what it took to be a leader. If nothing else, to see the look on Eric's marched up to me, looking irritated at the question.

"Mostly either the first or second spot," he said. I nodded at him. I was getting close. Maybe I could move up there after the mental part of training. "None of you will be leaders though. All of the spots are filled and none of you have the potential." Well that was nice. "Not now."

It was times like that that I couldn't help but to wonder whether or not Eric actually had a heart. He walked away from us, leading us back down to the main floor on the Fence where we would wait for the others. I knew that it was pretty late. We had been here for a long time. We were getting close to my date.

"Well damn," I heard Dante say. I turned back to him with a little grin. "It seems like he doesn't even have the tiniest bit of faith in us. Can you believe that?" he asked me.

I shook my head. I could completely believe that. Eric wasn't exactly the type to have faith in others. "Honestly Dante, I can. He's right," I said and Dante scoffed at me.

Shaking my head at him as we walked down the stairs I sighed. I couldn't believe that people climbed this all day every day. And it was so damn hot out here. This was insane. I just wanted to be back and getting ready for tonight. The only thing that I wanted was too be in the ice cold showers of Dauntless. Maybe that was why the water was so cold.

"I hate to say it, but Eric is right. For now, none of us are good enough to be a leader," I said.

"Not for now."

"The only person here that fights like Eric is Hunter, but he would never be a leader. He isn't outspoken enough," I said and Dante nodded at me.

"People could learn," he said.

"That's true. Maybe one of the Dauntless born kids will become a leader," I told him and he nodded at me.

That seemed like the most likely case right about now. Or maybe none of us would ever be a leader. Like Eric had said, there weren't any spots open for a new leader right about now. But a good job would still be nice. And that meant having a ranking deserving of leadership. The Control Room or training sounded like it could be fun.

"That sounds more likely to me. Not that I really care. I just want to make sure that I have a spot here in Dauntless," he said and I glanced over to him.

I hoped that he wasn't worried. He was almost guaranteed a spot here in Dauntless. He was tough as hell. "You've got a perfect shot at being a real member here," I said.

"Thanks, Alex. I don't care if it's at the Fence or not," Dante said. I sighed at him.
That was probably more depressing of a statement than it should have been. I shook my head at him as we stopped on the main level. Eric was just ahead of us and speaking to one of the guards. None of the other groups were back so I leaned against him and dropped back onto the railing of the Fence.

"God I don't think that I'd ever want to be out here. It's so damn hot," I said as I pulled my tank top away from myself. I wished that I had worn my shorts. These stupid leggings were clinging like a second skin to me and it was miserable. "At least the Dauntless compound has some bit of air flowing in and out."

Not that it was real air. It was mostly the humid air from the outside that was only cold because there was hardly ever any sunlight in Dauntless to heat anything up. A boy with brilliant blue hair that had a little bit of black streaked in it walked up to us. He was wearing a pair of black dress pants and a tight black shirt. His muscles were bulging under his shirt and I noticed that he had striking green eyes. He screamed dangerous.

"What are you talking about? I love the breeze up here!" he yelled and laughed loudly.

He had a deep voice. "Do I know you?" I asked, before I could stop myself.

He acted like he hadn't heard me. "Of course, this won't be my job at the end of initiation. I'm in the first spot," he said and I nodded at him, grabbing his outstretched hand and shaking it. This was the boy named Aaron. "Hi, I'm Aaron." It confirmed my thoughts. "This is Jackson and Michael."

He was pointing to the two boys that were flanking his sides. One was tall and had orange tipped hair. The rest of it was blonde. I remembered him as the boy that had helped me scale the sides of the train station supports. He was the one that had caught me. I smiled and pulled Jackson into a hug. The other boy had green streaks and blue through his black hair. He looked mean and tough. But he, too, was smiling.

"Over there is Greg," he said, pointing to a tall boy with a shaved head. "I'm shocked. I don't think that I've ever seen so many transfer initiates round out the top ten before."

He was looking over all of us and I scowled at him. He looked as unimpressed as Eric had the first time that he had seen all of us. And that made me less than happy. I didn't need another Eric anywhere near me. "What?" I hissed, drawing Aaron's attention back to me. "Are you that surprised that someone not from Dauntless can be just as good as the rest of you? You look even more surprised to see a girl up here."

He was grinning madly at me and I couldn't help but to smile back at me. He actually looked impressed that I had even said anything to him. "Honestly I am," Aaron said. I nodded at him. At least he was honest. "I suppose that honesty is the best policy," I said lowly.

"Not necessarily because you're a girl but because of where you're from," he said and I cocked an eyebrow.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked him sharply.

"You're the Amity transfer aren't you?" he asked me.

"That's me."

The Dauntless born boys all smiled at me. "I've heard a ton about you. We all have. You're almost something of a myth over in the Dauntless born section," he told me and I scoffed.
Was he kidding? I was a myth? I didn't think that was quite right. "I think you might all be over-exaggerating me," I said.

They all smiled at me. "So do we get the pleasure of knowing your names?" Aaron asked me sweetly.

Aaron seemed to be waiting for my answer and I knew that the only thing left to do was for me to introduce everyone. "I'm Alex," I said and Aaron nodded, smiling at me. In a way he reminded me of Colt. But Aaron's smile seemed genuinely curious, not cold and calculating like Colt's was. "This is Draven, Jax, and Dante," I said, motioning to the respective boys.

The three other boys each shook Aaron's hand and introduced themselves to the other Dauntless born boys. The ones that had known from day one that they were going to make it into Dauntless. These were the boys that had all had everything easy. They were just here for another normal day.

"And what about the two boys over there?" Aaron asked. For a moment I really had no idea who he was talking about so I turned back to see Hunter and Colt talking with Eric. Well, Colt was talking with Eric. Hunter was standing and watching. "Talking with Eric? If they aren't with us that means that they're with you."

I had played nice with Aaron for about as long as I could tolerate. And I was not going to be here when Colt was. The last thing that I needed was to continue speaking with him. I hated him. Even more than I hated Eric. So, as Four and Lauren's group showed up back at the main area, I nodded to Aaron and made my way politely around him.

"If you want to know anything about them you can go and talk to them yourself. It was nice meeting you but I think that we're done here," I told him and Aaron nodded.

He didn't say anything else as I made my way down the staircase and back to the train tracks. They looked almost impressed by my abrasiveness. I was only standing by myself for a second before a sea of brown hair came to stand next to me. I saw that it was Heather and I grinned at her. I was hoping that she could get her ranking up. I didn't want her to be at the Fence all the time. I knew that I would have to talk with her about boys and things all of the time. I had no other girls to do that with.

"Hey, look at that. You made your way back here and you did it without getting yourself killed," she told me.

I laughed, shoving her. "Aren't you proud of me?" I asked her.

"I am. God I really hope that I end up in the top ten of training because I do not want to be out here all day. It seems so boring."

The one thing that I had noticed up there was that none of the guards ever spoke with one another. It might have been alright if you were at least allowed to talk with your friends, but eight hours in dead silence? That was too much. Even for us. Of course I was from Amity, we weren't used to that.

"Yeah, me too. I'd much rather work in the Control Room like Four," I said and Heather nodded. "At least you get to take time off to train the new initiates. That doesn't seem like it would be anything too bad."

But Heather snorted at me. She was right on some level. "You could deal with us?" she asked.

"Hell no." And that meant that for eight months every year I would have to deal with Eric. "Come on, let's go back. I haven't eaten anything yet today," I said as the train whistle sounded and it
rounded the corner.

As the train came into our view I ran forward and caught the railing, this time lifting myself into the cart much more gracefully. I still stumbled a little while I tried to find my footing, but it was the best entrance into the train that I'd made so far. Heather jumped in after me and I moved over a little so that she had room to land next to me. She grabbed me for support and I extended my arm until I was sure that she was steady.

We moved towards the far corner of the car. "But aren't you going out to dinner tonight with your mystery man?" she asked me and I hushed her, moving her away from Four and Eric.

Both looked at us like they knew that we were hiding something, but neither said anything. They just stared after us."Quiet. I don't want them to overhear us," I said softly.

"That you won't tell anyone about by the way! Not even me," she said and I sighed.

I did feel a little bit bad for hiding it from her. "I didn't want anyone to know. It's dangerous for everyone that's involved. I'm breaking the rules," I whispered.

Heather looked guilty, but she grabbed my hand and pulled me down against the wall. "Come on Alex, you can tell me. Actually you should tell me so that I can throw anyone who happens to be looking for you off," she said.

I knew that she was only telling me that because she wanted to know what I was doing tonight but she actually did make a valid point. "Alright fine," I sighed and Heather squealed.

"Thank you!" she chirped.

"I'm not going to tell you who it is but you have to promise me that you aren't going to tell anyone that I'm out with another person," I said and Heather sighed.

Clearly she had been hoping that I would tell her who it was. "I suppose so," she said.

Not that I don't trust you but they can't know because any relations like that are against Dauntless rules. I could be thrown out if we said that it was a date. I'll be at some fancy Dauntless restaurant during dinner time," I told her and she nodded.

"Where?" she asked.

In all honesty I had forgotten the name of the restaurant. I would just have to try and search for it. "I don't remember the name. Tell everyone that I felt sick and wanted to hang back," I told her and she nodded.

"I can do that," Heather said and I grinned at her.

Faster than it seemed like we had gotten here, I noticed that we were already approaching the Dauntless platform. I was pretty sure that the trains traveled faster in the middle of the day. Or at night. Whatever time five thirty was considered. That meant that I only had a half an hour before I was supposed to meet Damien for dinner.

Heather seemed to notice that I was getting nervous as time ticked by. "I'll get them out of the room right now to make sure that you have time to get ready for the date," she said.

"Thanks, Heather."
"Knock 'em dead girl. Whoever caught your eye has no idea the prize that's waiting for them. You're the best girl that's here in Dauntless. He's a lucky boy. I hope that I get to meet him one day," she said.

That time I couldn't help but to blush. Even Iris had never said things like that before. "Thanks," I repeated.

Grinning at her, we both jumped off of the train. Heather stumbled but managed to stick the landing and I fell into a somersault before popping back up, knowing that had I tried to stick the landing I would have gone sprawling onto the asphalt. We headed back into the dorms with a quick warning to get ready for dinner from Four. Everyone made their way quickly to the dining room as no one had eaten yet today. Everyone had stumbled stupidly off and onto the train from the lack of food. Even I was starving.

As the boys turned towards the dining room, I turned towards the dorms. "You're the best. And I think that I really needed to hear that. I'm actually pretty nervous," I told her as we walked back into the dorm room.

The boys had still followed and come with us into the dorms. I motioned for her to get them out of here. I needed to get ready and it would look strange if they were here as I did so. Heather took her cue and motioned at a piece of black cloth that was drooping out of her bag. I nodded at her and she smiled back at me.

"Don't be. He'll love you. Alright, now get ready. I'll get the boys out of here. Gentlemen!" she called. They all looked back over at her. "Come on, for I am starving and you are all taking too long. No buts!" The boys tried to reason that they were still getting themselves together to head down to dinner. "We're leaving before those stupid Dauntless can get another piece of that delectable chocolate cake."

She pulled the boys ahead, leaving me laughing softly to myself. It wasn't even a moment after Heather and the boys had left that I stripped my day clothes off and ran over to Heather's bag. I pulled out the fabric that was laying slightly out of the bag and smiled at it. She must have gotten it on one of the days that I had come straight back to the dorms. I knew that if there was anyone that liked shopping more than me, it was Heather.

The fabric turned out to be a silk black dress that went all the way down to the floor. The front dipped low, as did the back. But it was pretty. And extremely soft. I couldn't believe that she wanted me wearing this. It must have cost her most of her points. I grabbed it and threw it on, admiring myself in the mirror. There was a slit in the leg too that came up to just above my knee. I walked into the bathroom, smiling at myself and looked in the mirror.

There was only about ten minutes left until I had to meet Damien so I knew that there wasn't much that I could do. Glad that I hadn't been able to dry my hair this morning, I took my slightly curly hair and grabbed a few pins that were laying on the counter. I pulled the long tendrils of hair up and let some pieces fall down my back. It was the perfect mix of messy and dressy. I quickly applied a dark coat over my eyes and made sure that my eyeliner went all around my eyes. My lips were coated in a soft pink and I did a pop of color on my cheeks before dashing back out of the bathroom. I grabbed the one pair of heels that I had bought and slipped them onto my feet before glancing back to the full length mirror. I looked the prettiest that I had ever felt.

Knowing that there wasn't much time left, I grabbed the excess material of the dress and darted out of the dorms. To my luck there weren't that many people milling around. Most were probably at dinner right now. The few people that I did pass all just smiled at me and a few gave me compliments. Every day Dauntless felt more and more like a real family. As I made my way to the Pit I slowed
down and glanced around stupidly for the restaurant. I didn't know what I was looking for. Damn it.

But just as I began to panic I heard a familiar voice. "You look lovely." I turned back and saw that Damien, who was wearing a nice black suit, was grinning at me. "I'm glad that you decided to come. For a while there, I really thought that you weren't," he said and I smiled bashfully at him.

He held out a hand to me and I took it, glancing around to see if anyone else was on this side of the Pit. Thankfully, we were alone. "For a while there, I really didn't think that I would either," I told Damien, who nodded at me.

He had clearly been expecting that answer. "I wouldn't have blamed you," he said.

I wanted to get off of the topic and try to start anew. "But thank you. It actually isn't my dress, I just borrowed it from my friend," I said and he smiled at me.

"Well it looks beautiful on you," he said.

He took me by the hand and began to pull me into the back of the Pit, where I saw a pretty restaurant, glowing in blue lights, set far back into the Pit walls. Lanterns were hanging from the outside and the rock face was bare on the inside, lit with candles and a small river flowing through. It was prettier than anything in Amity. Damien looked down at me and smiled, obviously noting that I liked the place.

"What do you think?" he asked me.

"It's not as Dauntless as I was expecting," I said.

Damien laughed at my wording. "Some of Dauntless might surprise you."

Turning towards him, I nodded. "Some of it already has. Anyways, I'm glad that you were waiting out here. I don't think that I ever would have found it without your help," I said as we walked up to the hostess.

He laughed at me as he smiled at the hostess. She was one of the tamer people that I had seen here in Dauntless. Her bright red hair was slicked back and I couldn't see any tattoos or piercings except for one tiny stud that was in her nostril. It looked nice on her though. She had dark eye makeup and nodded to Damien.

"Damien Roberts. Reservation for two," he told her and she nodded.

"This way," she said.

She grabbed two menus and walked us about halfway into the restaurant before seating us at a table that was somewhat hidden. I couldn't help but to wonder if Damien had requested this table. "Thank you," he told her and she nodded, walking away.

"Your server will be with you shortly," she called back to us.

There were a few other couples in the restaurant, most spattered sparingly throughout the building. "I hope you like it here. This is my favorite restaurant in Dauntless," he told me.

A waiter came up to us, pouring each of us a glass of something whitish that certainly smelled like alcohol. But I knew that it wasn't vodka. I was pretty sure that it was wine. He asked for our orders and Damien nodded for me to go. I looked over the menu but nothing made any sense to me. I flushed and looked up to Damien, who seemed to take the hint. He ordered for me and I smiled at
him as he ordered himself the same thing and the waiter left the table.

"I'm sure that I'll like it. I've actually never been to a restaurant before," I said and Damien laughed loudly. "Don't laugh!" I yelled at him with a little laugh of my own.

It wasn't cruel, like Eric's. It was soft. I found that I liked it. "That's pathetic. How have you never been to a restaurant?" he asked, once he had calmed down.

"Amity doesn't have restaurants. We only have the one main eating area," I told him.

Damien looked genuinely confused by the fact that we only had one main eating area. I had originally thought that Dauntless only had the one dining room too. "Why doesn't Amity have any restaurants?" he asked me. I shook my head.

It was kind of an embarrassing story. It made us look like the biggest airhead peace lovers on that planet. "You'll just laugh again," I said.

"Probably. But I want to know. I didn't think having to go out to eat something meant that you weren't being peaceful," he told me with a teasing grin.

Smiling at him, I took a sip of the wine that was on the table. Damien clinked our glasses together as a toast and I smiled at him. It was extremely sweet and tingled on my tongue. I could just barely tell that there was any alcohol. "It was a rule that Johanna put in place. Probably when she took over as the leader of Amity. There used to be a restaurant but usually everyone wanted to eat there," I told Damien, who nodded at me.

"Amity food that boring?" he asked me teasingly. He was slowly sipping on his wine and I smiled. He looked so old, but it was nice.

Smiling at him, I shook my head. "It was actually extremely boring. Johanna felt like there wasn't enough peace in Amity, as everyone was separated during the most peaceful hour of the day. Dinner," I told him.

I knew that I was a little red in the face from my explanation and Damien laughed at me once more. "That's a load of bullshit," he said.

Laughing softly, I nodded, taking another small sip of the wine. It was almost impossible not to down the whole thing. I couldn't help but to wonder if Damien was thinking the same thing. "Trust me, I know that," I said.

"They don't think that you should be allowed to have dinner with a significant other, or family, or friend in just a little bit of privacy?" he asked me and I shook my head.

It was the one thing that all of the other Factions never understood about Amity. There was absolutely no privacy. There was even less privacy in Amity then there was in Candor. And that was saying something. "That's another thing about Amity. There isn't really much about privacy there. People in Amity don't think much about hiding things from each other. They think that it takes away from the peace," I said.

Damien cocked his head at me, as if ushering me to go on. "Things are that out in the open?" he asked.

We're worse than Candor, if you can believe it. We just aren't as outspoken about it. "It isn't unusual to walk around and see plenty of younger kids together, wrapped around each other. It's one of the things that always made me as uncomfortable as humanly possible," I told him, hoping that I didn't
sound like a gigantic prude.

Obviously Damien knew my worries. "You don't sound like a prude," he told me.

I laughed softly and shook my head. It wasn't that I minded that they were showing their affections for each other, it was just that I didn't like the fact that they had to go so far. And in public too. It seemed that Damien understood where I was coming from though as he smiled at me and nodded.

"Although you might have to worry about that here in Dauntless too," he told me and I groaned.

"I think I've seen more of people than I ever really wanted to," I told him.

We both laughed at my comment. "For most of the time it's all about work, but from time to time you might not want to go into the Pit. People get a little too much to drink sometimes. And then they just can't stop," he said.

I was brought back to the other night, about a week ago. "Yes, I understand," I said softly.

His brief flush of color told me that he had been thinking about it, too. "Sometimes Dauntless sounds more like Amity than people would like to believe," he told me softly.

The glass of wine was up to my lips and I had been about to take a drink. But before I could, I took the glass away from my lips and placed it back on the table. There was something that I had to say. Maybe I shouldn't have said it, I knew that it wasn't the nicest thing that I could say, but I wanted Damien to know that I hadn't completely forgiven him.

"Yeah, I understand about the whole people drinking too much. Especially down there in the Pit. Maybe they should put a limit on how many drinks that people can have," I said.

Just like I had been expecting, it came out about as rudely as I had thought that it would. I almost apologized, but I managed to stop myself. I just wanted him to know that I hadn't forgotten about that night. This night determined whether or not I would forgive him. His face was flushed and he looked down abashedly. He forced himself to look back up to me once the dinner plates came. We both thanked the waiters and placed the napkins in our laps.

"Look, I know that I've already apologized for the other night but I want to apologize again. I'm so sorry. I drank too much and I shouldn't have even come near you with myself the way that I was," he told me and I nodded.

I actually appreciated what he had told me. He was right. In that state, he should have never come anywhere near me. "At least you can recognize it," I said.

"But just believe that I will keep saying that I'm sorry until you actually believe me. I know that I shouldn't have laid a hand on you like that."

"I believe you."

He looked like he wanted to say something else, so I was glad when he continued talking. "I want you to know that I really care about... Eric?" he said.

There had been a bright smile on my face until the ending of his sentence. Could I really not even go on a stupid date without hearing about my awful leader? And did that mean that he actually had feelings for Eric? That would be so typical. The guy that I had come here with actually was gay and had feelings for that ass.
"You care about Eric?" I asked Damien.

He seemed to have been broken from his trance and he shook his head, looking at me like I had lost my marbles. I stared at him expectantly, waiting for him to explain to me why everything had just gotten so weird so fast. We had been having a nice night before this. As always, Eric ruined things for me.

"What? No," he snapped and I crossed my arms.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

Was I being set up here? "Turn around and look. He's right there." I turned back, my face turning an ashen white. There he was. "With... Of course he would come here with her," Damien growled but I didn't bother to listen.

My gaze was fixed on the hostess stand as I looked over at him. Well maybe I wasn't just looking. I was staring stupidly at the leader, with some girl I had never seen. His hair was slicked back and he was wearing a completely black suit. He actually looked gorgeous, but that just made me want to put the butter knife on the table through my hand. His girl was pretty too. She had long blonde hair that was curled gently and a few tattoos on her shoulders. Her black dress was short and landed on her mid thighs. He was holding her around the waist and seemed to be hardly listening to whatever story she was telling him.

Despite what I wanted to admit, a little pang of jealousy shot through me as I glanced at the couple. Maybe it was just because there was actually a girl that he treated nicely in this Faction. But the nagging little voice in the back of my head told me that it wasn't because it wasn't me on his arm. Needless to say I finished off the wine in the glass at that comment. The girl was giggling at something that Eric had said, but judging by the look on his face, it wasn't very funny. He actually looked kind of angry as he scanned the restaurant.

Was there a chance that he was looking for me? As his gaze turned over to me, I glanced back at Damien. "Is that his girlfriend? I didn't think that he was dating anyone," I said softly, making Damien ear his eyes away from Eric and look over at me. "I didn't think that anyone was foolish enough to actually want to date him."

My comment was definitely said angrily. I was not going to let Eric ruin this night. And I wasn't fool enough to not be well-aware that he'd come here to ruin my night. Damien snorted at me and I glanced over at him. He was shaking his head as he plunged into his dish. I followed his lead. Had I not been so angry about Eric appearing here, I would have realized just how good the food was.

"That's not his girlfriend," Damien said.

I couldn't help but to notice that my heart soared a little bit at his words. "Oh?" I asked, hoping that my voice didn't sound too hopeful.

"Eric doesn't have girlfriends," Damien continued.

"Oh," I muttered, my heart deflating.

Why? I didn't care about him. "He just has girls that he brings around every once in a while. He never has them for more than a week," he said.

Despite the fact that I really didn't know Eric all that well, it sounded exactly like him. "He sounds like quite the charmer," I said.
The corners of Damien's lips turned upwards. "I imagine that he's extremely charming. But those girls are always so excited that Eric wants anything to do with him," he said.

I glanced over at the girl once more. She was grinning ear to ear as Eric leaned over to her and gave her a tiny kiss behind the ear. Even from here I could tell that she was melting inside. I could also feel the burn in my stomach at his actions and the desire to chuck the kitchen knife through his fat head. He ate in the dining room every night. Why, of all nights, did he have to come here? Just to irritate me.

"What kind of girl would want anything to do with Eric? He's a damned monster," I said to Damien, not really meaning my words.

Just as the hostess began to show Eric and his date to their seats I looked away and focused my attention back on Damien. We were going to have a nice night. Eric's being here was not going to ruin it. I wasn't going to let it happen. Damien sighed as he leaned back in his chair, swallowing another piece of his food.

"They think that he's dangerous. Girls apparently really like that," he told me and I laughed.

"Well you aren't exactly way out in left field. That's kind of true. But he isn't just dangerous, he's just an ass," I hissed.

Maybe the whole thing explained the strange fascination that I held for Eric. "Plus no one has ever been able to tame Eric. Every girl thinks that it would be perfect to be able to say that they were the one that tamed the wild Dauntless leader," he said.


He was an asshole who could care less about whose feelings he hurt to get where he wanted to be. "Plus apparently they think that he's attractive," he said.

That time I couldn't help but to laugh. I wasn't going to tell him that it was true. But I had no interest in Eric like that. Despite what my heart told me every time that I looked at him. An ice cold voice cut my laughter short though. I wanted to turn back and snap at the laugh but I knew that I was already on thin ice.

"Hello, initiate," Eric sneered and I turned back to look at him.

"Hello, Eric," I said softly.

"Roberts," he nodded quickly in Damien's direction before looking back at me. "What the hell are you doing here for dinner?"

In the reflection of the plate, I could see that I was going completely white. I had to make sure that I was careful with my words. Eric could throw me out of here on the dime. "Eating, I thought," I said quickly.

Unfortunately it was the wrong thing to say. "I thought that you would want to be downstairs in the dining room. Not up here, blatantly breaking the rules of Dauntless," he snapped.

A little surge of anger shot through me and I rolled my eyes. Damien was watching us carefully, seemingly ready to step in at any moment if the need arise. "Eric, the last time that I had checked it was not against the rules to go out and have dinner with a friend," I snapped at him.

"We'll take this table," Eric said, motioning to be seated at the table right next to us.
Of course that wasn't enough as Eric motioned for the two tables to be pushed together. I rolled my eyes as he smirked at my obvious annoyance. "Even if that friend happens to be a Dauntless member," I muttered.

He leaned into me as he took his seat and I couldn't help but to feel bad for Damien. He had brought me here so that we could have a nice dinner and now here was Eric, ruining everything. Eric sat himself next to me as the girl sat herself next to Damien. We were all staring at each other curiously.

"Watch yourself Amity. You might want to be careful with your next few steps," he told me. He was always threatening me over something. Even if that something made no sense. The girl that he was with cleared her throat irritably and I glanced up at her. "This is uh- Sally," Eric introduced, like he could care less.

He hadn't even bothered looking up at her. He had only held his hand out to take the seat next to Damien. Rather than just continue to make the night awkward, Damien stood up and pulled out her chair, giving her a soft smile. I grinned at his act and nudged his leg as they both sat down. It was actually rather nice. Maybe he wasn't the kind of guy that I had first pegged him for. Damien still had a soft smile on his face, but Sally looked furious.

"Sarah," she snapped darkly at Eric.

I very nearly laughed. What an asshole. He was that careless that he hadn't even bothered to remember his date's name. That was a typical asshole move. She seemed to agree with me as she stared down Eric, not that he had even bothered to look up from the menu. Finally looking up from his menu, probably sensing that we were waiting for him to say something, he dropped it onto the table and stared back at her like she was less interesting than watching a wall dry after it had been painted.

"That's what I said," he told her and I rolled my eyes.

That most certainly had not been what he had called her. "No it isn't," I muttered.

His gaze turned to me and he scowled. "Anyways, I just think that it might be fun to all have dinner together," he said.

He hadn't bothered to look at anyone other than me. I knew that this night was going to turn into a pissing match between the two of us. I silently apologized to Damien. Maybe he would take me out again so that I could make up to him for tonight. Because I knew that this was no longer our date.

"Besides, I would just love to see how you do around real Dauntless members," he told me and I scoffed.

He really had absolutely no faith in me. "Thanks for your faith in me," I snarled.

"Oh and you can tell Damien here all about the trip to the Fence. Where, if you do somehow end up staying here, you know that you'll be working," he sneered at me.

If there had been a glass of water on the table I was sure that it would have gone all over his fat head. He just wanted to make me mad by saying things that weren't even true. I was not going to end up at the Fence. I was currently not even in the rankings that went to guard the Fence. And I didn't intend to drop back down.

"Excuse you!" I hissed at Eric, startling Sarah and Damien. "If you don't happen to recall, I beat the top ranked initiate from the transfers during our first fight." Eric scoffed. Maybe he was thinking about how close I had been to losing. "I beat him and I'm pretty good with the guns for only having
been using them for a week. I'm ranked fifth! That puts me up for one of the best spots here in Dauntless."

"It's still early. You have time to slip down," he said.

"But I won't. And you know it."

He scoffed at me and leaned back in his chair as Sarah gasped and smiled at me. It wasn't like she didn't seem like a nice girl but some part of me already hated her. The little voice that had become quite a problem in the past few days told me that it was because she was the one that was here with Eric.

"Wow you beat the top ranked initiate for the transfers?" she asked me.

I nodded at her. "Yeah. But it took a while," I said.

"That's pretty impressive. What did you do?"

Instead of saying something, I just stared stupidly at her. I knew that I was about to sound like a complete moron, but I had no idea what I had done to fight him. The only thing that I had even thought to do was to just kick his ass. But I was pretty sure that it wasn't the answer that she was looking for.

"Umm, I just fought him. The way that anyone would have fought," I said softly.

She grinned at me with a wide smile. I was wondering how she ever made it through initiation. She looked like she barely knew how to fight. "Not anyone. Someone weak," Eric put in.

My gaze snapped over to him. "But anyways, Eric, I can't wait to be at the top of the initiate ranking so that I can get a leadership position," I said.

His eyebrows rose. "Come again?" he asked.

"You heard me. Getting a leadership position. Then we can talk about how great I am all the time," I bragged.

Eric scoffed at me and shook his head. He looked utterly unimpressed and I noticed that both Damien and Sarah were sitting at the table awkwardly. They clearly wanted us to stop this fighting but I was pretty sure that Eric and I would be snapping at each other until we left later. I supposed that both of us would have something to make up for. Although I was sure that Eric wouldn't care what Sarah thought about the date.

"Please, initiate. I intend to see you at the bottom of the rankings so that I can personally see you out the door," he said.

"That's so nice of you. You care so much that you would walk me out," I snapped back.

"I don't give a damn about you."

"Thanks."

"The only reason that I'd walk you out is so that I could watch you be with your true family," he sneered.

Well I definitely should have seen that one coming. I growled deeply. This had gone on long enough and we were both making our dates uncomfortable. Turning my head to go look at Damien, I smiled
sweetly at him and saw that he was smiling at me as well. I was glad to see that our stupid little interruption hadn't done anything to damper his mood.

"Damien? Would you please go get me a drink?" I asked him politely.

He nodded, standing up from the table. "Of course. What would you like?" he asked.

"Anything works."

Damien took a step back from the table and smiled at me. "Of course. I think it's time that we all get a drink. I think we'll be needing one," he said. I couldn't help but to laugh. He was right about that. I was pretty sure that none of us were getting out of here without a good laugh. "Sarah would you care to come with me?"

She looked almost impressed that someone had spoken to her. "Yes. I'd like that," she said. She smiled and let him help her up from the table. Before they walked away he turned back to me and I smiled at them.

"We'll be right back. Try not to have too much fun without us," he told me with a little wink.

There was no way that Eric and I would ever have any fun together. He seemed to be thinking the same thing as he snorted and shook his head while they started to walk away from the table. "Don't worry, we won't," Eric called after them.

Barely a second passed before he turned back to me. Now that we were alone, I was acutely aware of how close together we were. He was smirking at me and leaning into me. It unnerved me but I managed to stay where I was and watch him. Although I would have loved to punch him as he slipped his legs between my own.

"Now tell me. Why are you really here with him?" he asked me.

I let my head fall to the side. "Excuse me?" I asked.

"I know that you aren't the type to come back here with a guy who damn near assaulted you. So why are you here?"

He was just trying to admit that I was coming here on a date with a full Dauntless member. "I'm trying to have a nice night with a friend," I snapped.

"I don't think so."

"I really don't think that I care."

"Trying to make me jealous perhaps?" he asked me with a sly grin.

I scoffed loudly and felt like I might throw up. There was no way that I wanted to make him jealous. I didn't care about him! "Please!" I snapped at him, dropping my head when I saw that I had drawn the attention of a couple a few tables down from us.

"No need to get so excited, Amity," Eric teased.

Calm down, Alex. Don't look like an idiot. "I couldn't care less about you! I do not want you and I never will. That will always be the case," I sneered at him.

He didn't look the slightest bit bothered as he merely scoffed and shook his head. He clearly thought that I had some feelings for him. "We'll see about that," he said.
I tried to brush off that comment. "I came here with him because I wanted to give him a chance to be friends. I don't have a romantic interest in him and especially because it's against the damn rules here in Dauntless. I'm not stupid. Despite what you think," I said when I heard him laugh. "So now it's your turn. Why the hell are you here, of all nights? And with your little friend?"

Part of me had thought that I might catch Eric off guard with that question but I had known that I wouldn't. He knew that I was going to ask him that question the minute that the two of us were alone. "You know what? I think it's cute, you're so jealous her," he told me and I rolled my eyes. "I am not jealous of her. I couldn't care less about you," I snapped at him.

There was no way in hell that I was jealous. I never would be. "I'm here because I have a new woman that I wanted to impress," he told me with twinkling eyes and I scoffed. "Somehow I can't believe that."

"Believe it or not, I'm a very sought after date here in Dauntless," he said.

That time I couldn't help it. I burst out laughing. He was glaring darkly at me and I really couldn't help myself. I knew that it was a bad idea to laugh at a Dauntless leader but the fact that girls actually wanted to date him was a maddening thought. Did they have any idea what they were actually getting into with him? He was a damn monster.

"I actually do find that very hard to believe."

Eric raised his pierced brow at me. "And why is that?" he asked.

"Because I know you. You're an ass. Anyone that would willingly come to you must be out of their mind," I said.

He merely smiled at me. "And are you?" he asked.

My heart gave a little flutter and I forced myself to ignore it and his question. "And I also find it nearly impossible to believe that you're actually trying to impress her," I said and he raised an eyebrow at me. "I just think you're here because you want to try and ruin my night out."

He grinned a cruel grin at me. I didn't like the look that he was giving me. Eric gave me a little smile and leaned into me, grabbing the last bite of food on my plate and popping it into his mouth. I wanted nothing more than to jam my fork through the skin on the back of his hand. He was such an ass.

"Why would I care anything about you?" he asked me.

I scoffed, brushing off his comment. I didn't want to admit it but that had actually hurt to hear. But I knew that I didn't matter to Eric. I was just another initiate that he probably wouldn't ever speak to again after initiation was over. And that shouldn't have been something that bothered me.

"I don't think that you care about me," I said, my voice adopting an almost weak tone.

"You're fun to mess with but I couldn't care less about who you really want to spend your time with. I just want to make sure that I make your life as hard as possible. I enjoy watching you squirm," he hissed lowly.

I went to retaliate back to him but I never got the chance. So I settled with saying something else. "So I've seen," I muttered under my breath.
Damien and Sarah returned before I could say anything and I stared at the two as they both returned to their seats. Damien placed a glass of whiskey down in front of me and I thanked him softly as he placed his own in front of himself. I stared at him as he took a seat and had to fight to smile at him. Eric had made me so angry that it was damn near impossible to smile.

But the other two missed the tense gazes that were exchanged. "Well look at that. No one has killed each other yet. Here you go," he said as he handed it over to me. I angrily turned the glass back and downed the entire thing before slamming the glass back down. "Whoa - Uh - Do you want another one?" Damien asked as the waiter walked over.

"Yes, please."

The waiter merely nodded and walked off so that he could get me another one. I glanced over after the waiter had left and I rolled my eyes at the sight. Eric and Sarah were locked together, both smiling into the kiss. Well, Sarah was smiling, but Eric was merely smirking. Little asshole, he knew that this was getting to me. He just wanted to make me angry.

"That is disgusting, isn't it?" Damien asked me as he leaned forward.

"It almost reminds me of being back in Amity," I told him softly.

"I just wish that we could get him back," he said.

Or maybe he really wanted a kiss. Either way, I wouldn't have minded that. Suddenly a little light went off in my head. I realized what I could say to make them feel as uncomfortable as I did. Smirking at Damien, I leaned into him a little more. I didn't need Eric to hear this right now. Not that he was probably listening to me.

"I think I might actually know a way to get him back. Just make sure that when I make my offer, you say no," I said.

He raised his eyebrow. "What are you planning?" Damien asked.

"Say you have to work tomorrow or something."

"Okay."

Turning back to the other couple I cleared my throat. At least neither one of them made a move to separate themselves from the other. But, as I coughed again, they managed to finally bounce apart. Although it looked like Eric still wanted to be in a kiss with her. Sarah was blushing softly but Eric was watching me with a knowing smirk.

"So sorry to interrupt, but Sarah, may I speak with you for a moment?" I asked the woman.

She nodded at me. "Of course, Alex," she said.

"I just love to meet new people but greetings like this are so hard to get to know each other. So I propose that we play a game," I said deviously.

She smiled brightly, clearly not understanding that the game that I was proposing was not something that was exactly friendly. It was designed just for me to embarrass Eric. There had to be some way that I could. She looked excited at the prospect, Damien was watching me with a smile, and Eric was leaning back in his chair, grinning at me.

"Well I love games. I think Eric does too," she said brightly. He nodded, just barely noticeable. "Or,
at least, you love my kind of games.”

There was a little smirk as she leaned into Eric, who grinned back at her. I recoiled in disgust and shook my head. I did not want to hear about that. Although a little part of me was almost curious what kind of games Eric liked. Probably ones where he was in power. I assumed that he was the kind of guy that always liked to be in power. Sarah finally looked back over at us and grinned.

"What type of game did you have in mind?" she asked me.

Trying to brush off my disgust, I smiled. I grabbed the next drink and made sure that it was full, placing it at my side. "A game that I've seen plenty of you Dauntless play," I said. She nodded at me, seemingly finally catching on to what I was saying. "No one in Amity played it and it always looked like so much fun."

"If it's the game that I'm thinking of, it's really fun. We play all the time," she said.

Although Damien still looked a little lost. I wasn't sure if Eric knew what I was talking about. "You ask a question, and I can either take a drink or tell the truth. It goes all the way around the table," I clarified. Although I was pretty sure that they all already knew how to play. "Any takers?"

For a moment I thought that no one was going to decide that they wanted to play and I almost began to blush. That hadn't gone the way that I had been expecting it to. I had really thought that someone would want to play. To my surprise, it was actually Eric that stepped in to save the day.

"I think I'll go for a game. I'd love to see what it is that you're hiding here," he hissed at me, staring at me through lidded eyes that made my core tingle.

Breaking my deep stare at Eric, Sarah's light voice brought me back to the present. "Why not? I love to tell people about my life," she said and I scoffed. I had already noticed that. Now that I knew that she was the one that warmed Eric's bed at night. And I definitely hadn't wanted to know that. "And it isn't like I have anything to hide."

She might not have anything to hide, but I had quite a few things to hide. I nodded at both of them, thinking that we were done deciding who was going to play. But before I could ask the first question I noticed that Damien was filling up his own drink. Even after I had really not wanted him to play.

"I think I'll play too," he said. I looked over at him. I had told him not to play for a reason. I didn't really want him drinking. I wanted to see what he was like completely sober. "Don't worry. I like these kind of games. And it's killing me to see what the great Dauntless leader is hiding."

He was looking at Eric with a dark smile. And, with that, I nodded. I could see why he wanted to play now. I couldn't blame him. They clearly weren't very good friends. And that was long before I had come into the picture. Just before we started the game though, I knew that I needed to take a moment. I wasn't really sure what for, but I just needed a moment. So I stood from the table and gave an awkward smile when Damien looked over at me.

"Um, actually before we get started I think that I'm going to use the bathroom. I'll be right back," I said with a grin, trying to look completely fine.

"You alright?" Damien asked, looking like he was about to stand and follow me.

Smiling softly, I gently pushed him back into the chair. "I'm fine. Just need the restroom. Don't start without me," I said with a little lilt to my voice.

It was very hard to try and look like I wasn't a little awkward. So I stood and headed out from behind
the table and towards the bathroom. Turning to the back of the restaurant I was stopped by Eric, who stood from the table as well. Seriously? Could I not even go to the bathroom without him bothering me?

"I think I'll second that notion. Been a busy day. I haven't gotten to use the bathroom yet," he said and Sarah nodded at him.

Maybe he really was just trying to go to the bathroom... The two of us walked to the back of the store, both of us standing as still as possible. I went to keep walking back but Eric grabbed my arm and pulled me down the correct hallway for the bathrooms. I was about to thank him but I never got the chance. He grabbed me tightly by the shoulder and pushed me back against the cave walls. I was just barely able to stop a scream from tearing out of my throat. Eric pressed himself into me and I gasped. Was he actually going to kill me?

"What the hell do you think that you're doing with him? Did you forget about me saving you the other night?" he snapped at me.

Well this changed quickly. I shook my head at him. Sneering at him, I shook my head and tried to get out of his grasp. But I couldn't. He was like a steel panel up against me. There was no way that I was going to be able to get away from him. He made sure that his weight was directly on top of me so that I couldn't move.

So I would have to just speak to him. "Of course I didn't forget that. There was a reason that I said thank you the other day at breakfast," I said.

Eric stared darkly at me. His stare was piercing. It felt like it was going directly through me. Like he knew all of my secrets. I didn't like it at all. "Obviously you didn't listen," he snapped at me.

"I'm not here because I'm interested in him. I'm here because I wanted to give him a second chance to be a friend. I believe that most people deserve a second chance," I said honestly. That was the truth. "Especially one when they're sober."

I genuinely did believe that Damien was a good person once he got all of the alcohol out of his system. Eric scoffed at me and pressed his body into mine once more. I hated to think it but we actually fit well into each other's body. We were just the right difference in height to fit well into the curves of each other's bodies. What the hell was I thinking? I didn't fit well at all with Eric.

"Oh, please, tell me the truth," he said.

I cocked my head at him. I wasn't quite sure what the truth was. "What are you talking about?" I asked.

"You looked like you were having a nice conversation, but I can tell. You want something more. You're bored here, pretending that you don't want something more," he told me and I scoffed.

He was so full of himself. I didn't need anything more. Maybe I wanted it. But I didn't need it. "I was having a lovely day here with my friend," I hissed at him.

"No you weren't."

"I was too!" I barked.

But he was right. I was bored. Damien was perfectly nice tonight, but I wanted something more entertaining and exciting. "I see it in your eyes right now. But maybe it isn't for Roberts. Maybe it's for me."
I knew that I was starting to turn pink. Damn him. "Get over yourself," I snarled.

"Maybe that's the reason why you keep glaring at Sarah out there. Is it me that you'd rather be here with?" he asked me, leaning into my neck.

Pushing back against him, I blushed when I felt his lower half hit mine. But I refused to show him that he was getting to me. "Get over yourself!" I yelled, stopping when I realized that I wasn't strong enough to get him off of me. "I don't want anything to do with you. I don't want to be with you. In fact, I pity the poor girl."

Eric raised his pierced brow, motioning his hand towards me. "Go on," he said teasingly.

"She has to go back to your room tonight. I only can imagine how big you make yourself out to be, only to let her down," I told him sweetly.

He laughed at me and shook his head, now letting most of his weight lay down on me. I coughed and tried to push him away from me. But just as before, it wasn't working. "You really think that I'm a letdown in my own bed?" he asked.

Did I think that he would be a letdown? "I..." I trailed off, unsure of what to say.

So I merely shrugged my shoulders at him. I had no idea actually. And despite what that little voice in my head said, I didn't want to find out. "I'm sure that I have something that I could show you. You'd probably even like it. Just say the words and I'll take you back there right now," he said.

My jaw practically dropped as I gulped deeply. Was he really offering to break Dauntless rules to be with me? "What?" I asked.

"You can leave that asshole and I'll leave Sally," he whispered and I rolled my eyes.

"Sarah," I corrected. I knew her name better than he did.

"I don't care, and neither do you. We'll go back and I'll show you that you aren't nearly as good as you like to think," he told me softly.

There was a soft purr to his words. Part of me wanted to shove him off of me and tell him to get the hell away from me. But another part of me wanted to know what it was that was going to get me back into his bed. No, I couldn't do that. I had a date right out there. He had a date right out there. But still, I just wanted to know. Knowing the words wouldn't hurt.

"And what are those words?" I asked him so low, I wasn't even sure that he could hear me.

But he had. He leaned into my ear and I shivered as his hot breath hit my ear. He did things to me that no one else could have ever done to me. "I think that you know," he told me.

I shook my head at him. I had no idea what he wanted me to say. "I don't know," I whispered softly.

My voice gave a small shake as I spoke slowly. "All I want to hear is, you win," he said.

And it was right then that I realized what he wanted. He wanted me to lose the bet. He couldn't have wanted me in his bed less. The only thing that he wanted was to win the bet. He just wanted to get to put a tattoo on me. He didn't want me, and that stung a little. Even though I would never admit that. Although I essentially had. I had told him to tell me what I had to say. I had pretty much told him that I wanted to go back with him tonight. But that wasn't true.
It would never be true. "Come off of it! I don't want you. I never will," I hissed at him as I shoved him off of me. This time, he actually backed off of me. "Just wait, Eric. I can't wait for these next few months to be over just so that I can get to put a tattoo on you anywhere I please. And of whatever I want."

His gaze narrowed at me as he came back over to me. But that was not what I wanted right now. "You know that you're going to lose. Just admit it," he said.

"I will not. Now get the hell off of me. I'm not going to sleep with you," I hissed at him.

The last thing that I wanted right now was to lose a part of my dignity to this asshole of a leader. I wished that he had gone somewhere else during his Choosing Ceremony. I didn't want to have to deal with him every day. He made my life here a living hell. And it had only been a few weeks.

"You're right. You won't," he told me.

I cocked my head at him. What did that mean? "What?" I asked. I thought that he wanted me to sleep with him.

He was obviously please with me. "You'll try and for a while I'll let you. But I'd never want someone like you. Weak. Just pretending to fit in here. It's actually really pathetic," he said. I couldn't help the sting that shot through me at his words. No one had ever spoken to me that way. "Don't worry, I'll let you take it just far enough so that I can win that bet and then, then you never have to deal with me again. See? I'm actually not that bad of a person -" he continued, but I cut him off.

Before he could utter another word, I reached out and slapped him across the face, hoping that my tears were not going to fall. His words had hurt me a lot more than I would have ever wanted to admit. And I never would admit it to him. I was stronger than him. Just because he was telling me that he didn't want to sleep with me didn't mean that I was a bad person.

"Fuck you," I snarled.

But it had come out much softer than I had meant for it to. It was weak and shaky. Not wanting to have him turn it around on me, I turned and walked out of the hallway. As I made my way back to the table, where Sarah and Damien were talking softly to each other, I plastered on a fake smile and grinned at them. They both looked completely content with the night. Eric took a seat right after me and I was happy to see that there was a small print of my hand on his face.

"Sorry about that. Took me a minute to find the bathrooms and Eric was so polite to wait for me," I said and Damien nodded at me as I took my seat back.

Eric and I exchanged a quick look with each other. The other two didn't notice the tenseness in my stance. "That was sweet of you," Sarah said.

Eric completely disregarded her. "We ready to play the game?" I asked.

Everyone nodded at me. "Absolutely!" Sarah chirped.

"Definitely," Damien said.

Eric said nothing but nodded. He was staring right at me but I fought not to look at him. I didn't want to see him right now. "Alright, well I suppose that I'll go first. Eric, what is it that attracted you to Sarah in the first place?" I asked him. He looked pissed that I had questioned him. "Just yesterday I thought that you were single."
He gave an answer that would have made any self-respecting girl reach out and slap him, just the way that I had done not two minutes before. "I just saw her and knew that she was someone that I had to take back home," he said with a little shrug. Sarah had gone a little pink but she was still smiling. "Turns out that I was right. Do you have any idea how bendy yoga makes a person?"

He was asking me and I nearly threw up my dinner. I did not want to hear about his private life. "No, but thank you for informing me," I said quickly.

"Maybe you should try it sometime. I think you're a little stiff," he told me with a grin. I shook my head and looked away from him. "Alright. My turn. Damien." I glanced up. I thought that his question would be for me. "How's your love life going? Anyone in Dauntless you're interested in?"

There was a small smirk on his face. Damn him. I knew that he was asking that just so that he could get Damien to admit that it was me. As if he could make my night even worse at this point. Damien raised his glass to Eric and took a drink. Eric scoffed and looked away and just as he did, Damien turned back and winked at me. I blushed a little and looked away. At least I knew that someone at this table was really interested in me. Damien finally set the glass down and looked over at Sarah.

"Sarah. How about one for you?" he asked and she nodded happily. "Why would a nice girl like you be with Eric?"

I leaned in, curious as well. Sarah giggled softly and glanced over at Eric, who looked like he could have cared less about her answer. She seemed to be a very sweet girl and it was killing me that I didn't know why she was going out with someone as awful as Eric. She smiled at us and leaned over the table slightly.

"Oh well I actually never thought that Eric was a bad guy," she said and I snorted. "I always saw someone sweet under all of that hate. I just hope that I can find it." At least she was a good person. "And if nothing else, he's a great bed warmer at night." This time she winked at him. There went any respect that I had gotten for her. "Alright, how about you, Alex? You haven't gotten a question yet." She was right about that. "I just want to know one thing. Why did you choose to come to Dauntless?"

If I had been drinking something, I would have spit it out all over the table. My eyebrows shot up to my forehead and I stared stupidly at her. That wasn't the question I had been expecting. I had thought that it would be something about training or why I was here with Damien. I had not thought that it was going to be why I came to Dauntless. From the looks of it, it didn't seem like anyone else had been expecting the question either.

"Oh during the Choosing Ceremony?" I asked her and she nodded. "Wow, that wasn't the question that I was expecting."

I was scratching nervously the back of my neck when she smiled and picked up the glass of wine that she had set out in front of her. She took a small sip before speaking. "Well I actually was in the Records Room, which is where I work, and I saw your file. I couldn't help it," she said with a little blush on her cheeks. I gave her a small smile. I had done the same thing when I had seen my friend's files. "Eric had come back grumbling about you and I had to know why." I scoffed. Of course Eric had been complaining about me. "So I read your file and saw that you had scored Amity on your Aptitude Test. So why did you choose to come to Dauntless?"

I had to fight to make sure that the color didn't drain from my face. I had to come up with a lie here. I had come here because I had scored multiple Factions. I was Divergent. But there was no way that I could tell them that. They would kill me for sure. I had to lie and say that I had just decided to come here because I hated Amity. Or something like that. I would figure it out.
"Oh I - Uh - I always forget about that. I just couldn't go back there. I hated Amity so much that I knew the minute that I was told that it was the Faction that I suited for that I had to leave. I didn't care what the Test said. So I came here. And thankfully it seemed to be the right choice," I said.

Sarah nodded at me, looking pleased with my answer. "That's as good a reason as any," she said.

I nodded at her and turned to Eric. "So now, Eric. Why is it that you are so hard on me here?" I asked him and he stared at me. "And it is not because you think that I can't make it here. So why?"

I genuinely was desperate to know what the answer to that was. I had to know why he treated me so poorly compared to everyone else. But naturally, he wasn't going to answer that question for me. Eric raised his glass and downed it, never looking away from me. I shook my head at him and sighed. He had to be kidding.

"I think I'm done playing. Just like me calling you by your name, you'll earn that answer one day, initiate," he said, sneering the last word at me. I sighed and shook my head as he stood from the table and held out a hand to Sarah. "Come on."

Sarah grabbed his hand and let him pull her to her feet. She said a quick goodbye to us and I waved at her, watching them head up to the hostess table, pay, and leave without looking back once. I was a little bothered that Eric hadn't even looked back at me once. I would have. My eyes were still locked on the place that they had been standing when Damien placed a hand on my shoulder, surprising me slightly.

"Are you ready to go, too?" Damien asked me.

"Yeah," I said, letting him pull me to my feet, just the way that Eric had done.

We walked over to the hostess station and I watched as he paid for our meals. "Hey, I'm really sorry about tonight," he told me.

"It's fine. You have nothing to apologize for," I said. He didn't know that Eric was going to show up here.

"I didn't think that Eric was going to show up here. I've only ever seen him here once." I raised a brow at him. So he wasn't a regular here. He only showed up on the night that he knew that I would be here. That figured. "And that was over by the bar," he said and I smiled.

The hostess handed his card back and Damien thanked her, leading me from the restaurant. It was later than I had thought that it was. Most people seemed to be turning in for the night and I knew that my friends would all be asleep by the time that I got back. That was a good thing though. I could avoid the questions for now.

"It's alright Damien. I know that you didn't plan this. I'm just sorry that Eric has to come and destroy everything that I want to have. This date, or meeting, or whatever this was. I had fun, even though Eric was here," I told him with a little smile.

We made our way through the halls, back to my dorm. There really weren't that many people that were lingering around. Damien turned down to look at me with a smile and I went to wiping my face. Did I have food on me or something? That would have been the perfect ending to this night.

"Did you say date?" he asked me.

That was mortifying. He didn't want to be on a date with me. He just wanted to make up the other night to me. "I - I - Well I don't know but -"
"No, hey, I thought that it was cute," Damien interrupted, smiling at me. "I'm glad to hear that you still want to be together." I nodded at him and smiled softly. So maybe I had judged him a little too fast. He was a good guy. He had just made a mistake. We all made them. "Even after me acting like an ass and after Eric barged in."

I couldn't help it. We both laughed loudly. We were passing through the Chasm and I shivered. Damien wrapped an arm around me and I smiled at him, sneaking further into him. This place was always colder here than I really thought that it would be. I smiled at him and looked up. He was definitely taller than me, but I liked it. I wouldn't want a guy that was my size.

"Well I guess I decided that you really do deserve a second chance. And you made tonight fun for me. I'd like to do this again," I told him honestly.

It was nice being with him. It made me feel like I belonged here. Damien seemed to agree with me as he nodded and led me out of the Chasm, not bothering to let go of me. "Again would be good," he told me and I smiled.

At least he felt the same way that I did. "Good," I said softly, blushing and looking down at the floor.

"Look, my apartment is just past the dining room. Its number 1021," he told me and I blushed. Was the really telling me his apartment number so that I could come visit him? Maybe he liked me a little more than I had thought that he did. "Come visit me whenever you want to go do something again."

"I'll take you up on that offer," I told him.

"Or we could stay in if you want to avoid your Eric problems. I think he might have a tracker on you," he said.

Despite how angry Eric made me, I couldn't help but to laugh. I needed that. He smiled at me as I laughed and I grinned brightly at him. He was smiling at me in a way that no one had smiled at me before. Not even Florian had ever smiled at me like that before. It was nice to see from someone much nicer than Eric.

"In that case it would probably be good that I stay away from your apartment. God knows that he's looking for any reason to throw me out of Dauntless," I said and he laughed, shaking his head at me.

I was pretty sure that he still wanted me to come visit him, I would just have to be careful. That could get the both of us in trouble. "That's Eric for you," Damien said.

We came up to the door of the dorms and I smiled. "Thank you for walking me back to the dorms. You might want to stop here though. My friends would probably never leave you alone if you went in there," I said.

Although I was well-aware that they were probably already asleep. He nodded at me anyways and I waited awkwardly in the hallway. I wasn't sure what I should do here. Whether or not I should kiss him, or hug him, or maybe do nothing. We were friends but we were kind of together, too. I wasn't sure what I could say or do with him.

"Then this is goodnight. I had a good time with you, Alex. Despite everything," he said.

That was a nice thing to hear even after our horrible night. "I had a nice time, too."

"I hope that you come visit me soon."

"I'll definitely think about it."
He leaned into me and I smiled as he gave me a soft kiss on the cheek. That was a nice compromise. But that was not what I wanted. I wanted something more after a night of Eric drilling it into my head that he would never want me. So I leaned into Damien and pressed my lips gently to his. It didn't last more than two seconds. Our lips merely brushed and we both smiled at each other. My stomach warmed as I pushed away from him and grinned. He didn't try to lean back into me but he did smile and brush my cheek that I was sure was completely red by now.

"Thank you for tonight. I have to focus on training for the next few months but I'll stop by soon," I told him honestly. Training was number one, but that didn't mean that I couldn't have fun too.

Giving me a quick hug, Damien retreated down the hall a little before turning back to me and smiling at me. "I can wait as long as you need," he told me and I smiled. He reminded me of Florian in some ways. Maybe that was why I was pulled to him. He was something familiar. "I know how stressful initiation is. Hey, don't let Eric get to you."

I laughed. "You have no idea how many times I have to tell myself that daily," I said, making him laugh.

"I'll see you soon. Goodnight," he told me.

He smiled at me one last time before walking down the hallway and disappearing from sight. I smiled back at him and waved before sliding open the door and walking inside. Like I had expected, everyone was already asleep and I smiled. They all looked like they had been out for a while so I knew that I had to be quiet. I really didn't want to wake them up and have them question me on where I'd been. I slid into the bathroom, making sure that I took off the shoes first. They clacked so loudly.

Once I was in front of the mirror, I let my hair down out of its hold and placed the pins back in my bag before walking into the bathroom and washing my face clean of all of the makeup. Once I was sure that it was all off, I walked back into the bedroom and slid the dress off, placing it back in Heather's bag. I wasn't worried about anyone seeing me so I leaned down and grabbed an oversized black shirt, slipping it over my head and jumping into bed. As I drifted off to sleep, I thought all about my date and the next time that I would be able to see Damien. For the first night in a long time, I didn't think once about Eric.
Chapter Eight

My dream had been so good. I would have wanted it to continue for the rest of my life if it could. I had been with Iris and Florian, running through the fields of Amity. But we had come back home to the Dauntless compound. My family had been waiting at the dining room tables and I had seated myself with them. I had been able to say whatever I had wanted. My parents hadn't yelled at me for cursing or talking with my mouth full or throwing food at my friends.

Heather, Cole, Buck, Dante, Jax, and all of my other friends had integrated themselves with Florian, Iris, and my parents. It was like we were one happy family. A man had been sitting next to me, his arm draped around me, laughing softly. I couldn't see his face though, it was blurry. I wanted to think that it was Damien, but the body was wrong. He was too big, and he was too powerful. I knew who it was, but I would never admit it.

Of course I hadn't had to deal with my denial for long before a loud bang of the door sounded loudly throughout the dorm. Shouting softly, I flipped out of my bed and onto the cold floor. Eric was standing over me and I stared up at him angrily. I was only wearing an oversized shirt that was riding up a little higher than it probably should have. I glared at Eric, wishing that I had picked a bed farther towards the back of the room.

It was almost impossible not to notice that his eyes were roaming over me. "What the hell are you looking at?" I snapped.

He glared at me for a moment. "A Softie with numbered days," he growled before looking away.

"Asshole," I muttered.

Eric whipped back around to me before looking back into the dorm. "Wake up, initiates!" he shouted.

The sudden increase in volume of his voice had ended up startling a few people into falling out of their beds, just the same way that I had done. It made me feel a little bit better about myself. I noticed that both Cole and Skylar had fallen out of their beds as well. Even Colt looked a little startled. Eric looked very pleased with himself.

"In the Training Room, three minutes," he growled before leaving the room, slamming the door behind him.

That was one of the nicest that I'd ever seen him in the morning. Automatically a few people made their ways out of the room. Jade, Colt, and Hunter were a few of those that had gotten up and left. I sighed and stood from the ground, picking a shirt and pair of pants out of my bag. I pulled on the stretch pants before stripping off my oversized sleep shirt and grabbing a long sleeved shirt, pulling it over my head. The back was low and drooping and I sighed, pulling my hair through it.

Everyone else was trying to quickly get ready. "Isn't that sweet of him? Giving us a whole extra minute to get ready?" I asked Heather with a little laugh.

She was trying to step into her pants and failing at her mission. "You'd almost think that he was a different person," she said.

I noticed that she wasn't really focusing on getting changed though. Instead she was staring at me. So I placed my things down and looked at her, shrugging my shoulders. "Okay, I give up. You're gonna have to tell me. Do I have something on my face? Is my black eye getting worse?" I asked.
It had been nearly two weeks since my date with Damien, when I had looked so nice without any bruises or cuts. As per usual with being here in Dauntless, we couldn't remain looking nice for too long. My nice dinner look was not the case right now. A few days ago I had been in a fight with Buck during sparring and he had gotten a wonderful hit in on my eye. It had left a nasty mark that had hurt for days. I knew that he still felt bad.

"You know, you were out pretty late last night. I was a little surprised. I mean we all went to bed well after midnight and you still weren't back," Heather said.

She was completely right. I sucked in a breath. I knew that I was eventually going to get caught. "Yeah I was just out for a while and lost track of time," I told her.

The truth was that I had been over at Damien's apartment and we had been, socializing, for a lack of a better word, well into the night. "Where the hell have you been these past few weeks? We barely see you anymore," Heather said sadly.

Sucking in a breath, I sighed deeply. She was right. These past few weeks I had been spending so much of my time with Damien and that wasn't fair to my friends. They hardly saw me anymore. Other than meals and training, most of the time I was hanging out with Damien. I had thought that they hadn't even noticed, but Heather seemed genuinely upset that I had been basically ignoring her. My heart twisted as I grabbed her hand and led her out of the dorm. I wanted to explain to her, but I also didn't want Eric to rake us over the coals for being late.

"Oh, I'm sorry Heather. I've just been busy," I said stupidly.

But the lie didn't get past her. She was no fool. She had been a Candor, there was no point in lying to her. "Is that so?" she asked harshly.

"I made a friend who's a full Dauntless member and they're good to hang around with. They teach me about what's going to come during these next few months and... I guess I never really thought about you guys and that you would miss me," I said.

Heather looked up at me, clearly shocked at my words. "Well we do," she snapped.

I should have figured, considering they always questioned me when I was leaving and when I would come back. It wasn't just because they were curious, they wanted to see me in more than just my zone and when I was exhausted. I had been absolutely terrible to them over the past few weeks. I needed to make it up to them. And it all began with telling them how completely sorry that I was for blowing them off.

"Oh, Heather. I'm so sorry," I said, grabbing her in for a hug.

She merely smiled into my shoulder and hugged me back, letting me go after a few seconds. "So what do you say? Tonight forget about your little Dauntless friend and come hang with the real Dauntless crowd!" Heather whooped.

That sounded like the perfect night. I laughed at her, nodding. I was glad that she wasn't mad at me. "That sounds wonderful," I told her honestly.

"Good. Maybe we can go shopping or something tonight? I was thinking about doing something to my hair," she said as she flipped her soft brown hair over her shoulders.

Giggling at her softly, I walked with her past the Pit, my stomach growling. I should have woken up earlier so that I could eat. I was starving. "Yeah that works for me. After training then?" I asked her.
"Absolutely. Something to get over the miserable time that they put us through today," she said.

We both laughed as we walked through the Chasm. It led straight to the training room and I found myself a little anxious. I really wanted to hit the punching bags or something of the like. We were right at the doors to the training room and I noticed that it was silent. Everyone was probably still exhausted. We had all had long nights.

"I heard that we were supposed to be doing our second fight today," I told her. That was what Damien had said that he thought that we would be doing today.

Heather nodded at me. "That makes sense to me. It's been a few weeks since we had our first fights," she said.

"Think that's really what we're going to be doing? I mean they've been taking it easy on us these past few weeks," I muttered, more to myself than Heather.

Before she could get a chance to answer me, I heard the voice of one of my least favorite people in Dauntless. Of course, it had been a few days since he had last taunted me so I should have figured that he was going to tease me today. He had been working a lot the past week or so which meant that he really hadn't been around the initiates much.

"That's what you think, initiate," he told me, making me roll my eyes.

There was his favorite thing to call me. Initiate. Or Amity. It was always one of the two. Occasionally I even got Softie. "That's not my name," I muttered under my breath.

Eric stood pressed up against my back and shoved me forward. "I don't care," he hissed in my ear. "Today is going to be your second fight."

He gave me no chance to say anything back to him as he walked by us. So I merely nodded blankly. I had figured. The problem was that we hadn't been spending a lot of time doing anything more than some simple sparring. Eric and Four had told us that it was to clean up the moves that we had learned over the past three months. We only had about another three months of physical training left.

But that wasn't really where my mind was. I was more surprised that Eric had said nothing nastier to me than what he had. So I stared at Eric, watching as he walked away from me. I wondered if he wasn't feeling well. That was about the only reason that he wouldn't insult me. I was thrilled to hear that today was our second fight though. I was hoping to get Jade, who had made it a point recently to talk about my whereabouts. Usually saying that I was out selling myself for my ranking. She was such a joy.

"Why didn't anyone tell us that today was going to be the second fight? We should have had time to prepare!" Jade hissed at Eric.

Everyone turned to look over at her. She seemed to immediately regret what she had said and I couldn't help but to smile when Eric walked up to her angrily. I was standing with Heather, Buck, Cole, Dante, and Jax as we all watched the exchange between the two. I noticed that Cole was standing closer to Heather than he normally did and I grinned at the pair. They might have thought that they were being slick, but I knew that there was something going on there.

"Do you think that in the real world you're going to have time to prepare before a war starts?" Eric asked Jade, walking up to her and towering over her figure. Jade was tall, but she was nothing compared to Eric. "Are you going to have time to practice your kicks and punches before you get ambushed?"
He was mocking her and she knew it. She was smart enough to remain silent. Eric merely watched her for a moment before laughing under his breath and walking off to stand with Four. The two were talking politely with each other, but I could tell that their jaws were clenched. They clearly didn't want to be having whatever conversation they were.

"So who do you guys think you're going to have to fight?" Cole asked, bringing me out of my thoughts.

Everyone started talking about people that were close to themselves in skill and I scoffed. That was not going to be my fate. Eric was the one that put together the fights and I knew that he was going to do something brutal to me. Last time it had been Colt, I was sure that this time it would be someone else strong.

"Considering that Eric is in charge of who fights who, I'm sure that he's going to put me up with the biggest and toughest fighter. Someone that's sure to rip my head off," I said with a shrug.

Cole laughed for a moment before turning white in the face. Part of me wanted to ask what had happened, but the more intelligent part of me knew that it was because Eric was standing right behind me. I turned back and nodded when I saw that it was him. He merely grinned down at me. Everyone else that was standing around us were watching closely. I could see how nervous they'd all become at the sight of me.

"With me," Eric growled.

And that meant that I couldn't argue with him. "Okay," I said. I sighed, walking with him.

He brought me to the edge of the training room, where the fights that would be on the board were still covered. "Now why would you think that I would do something like that?" Eric asked me.

He stared at me as I crossed my arms over my chest. "You're joking," I said.

He knew exactly why I thought that. "I'm not nearly done with you yet, initiate," he said, sneering the last word.

Rolling my eyes at him, I leaned back against the wall. Four was watching us out of the corner of his eye and I grinned at him, letting him know that he didn't have to babysit while I was around Eric. I was tough enough to keep the leader away from me. Although I did feel a little better knowing that Four was only a shout away.

"You're right," I said, looking back at Eric, who looked a little taken aback at my words.

"What?"

"I'm not leaving here. Not yet. Not until I hear you say my name," I told him.

But it very nearly backfired on me. I was shocked to hear that the last part had come out as more of a purr than anything else. Eric seemed to have noticed it, too, but to my pleasure he said nothing. He merely smirked and leaned into me. I knew that everyone was absorbed in their own conversations or they were preparing for the fights, so they wouldn't notice us, but it still made me nervous. I was afraid that someone might notice what we were doing. Not that we were really doing anything, but I certainly didn't want them to hear what we were talking about.

"There's always an easy way to earn it. You know what it is," he told me, his voice deeper than it normally is.
Shaking my head at him, I pushed against his body with my own. It did absolutely nothing. "Get away from me," I snarled.

But he didn't. He merely smirked, knowing that the feel of his body brought me somewhere that I didn't want to go. "I think I'm perfectly content right here. Come on. You know what to say," he goaded.

"Yes I do," I snapped and he smirked at me.

I hated that Eric knew exactly what to say to push my buttons. He was the only one that did. Iris and Florian, who had both known me for sixteen years, had never been able to do anything that Eric could do to me. Florian, who I had always thought that I might marry, had never given me even a fraction of the feelings that Eric did. Neither did Damien. And I wished for everything that he did give me the feelings that I felt with Eric. But he didn't.

"But that doesn't mean that I'm going to stoop so low to do anything with you. I don't want you. No one wants you. Not even your stupid girlfriend," I hissed, thinking about Sarah.

"Explain," Eric said, obviously uncaring of my little insult.

"She probably just likes saying that she's romping around with a big, bad, Dauntless leader," I said it with a bubbly voice, mimicking Sarah.

The truth was that I was a little bitter, watching Eric and Sarah walk around together these past two weeks or so. They were never holding hands and Eric never really spoke to her, but he played it up when he knew that I was in the area. He would kiss her, grab her, and make sure to make a loud enough announcement that they were going back to his apartment so that I could hear him. He drove me up the damn wall.

"Is that a little hint of jealousy I hear in your voice?" Eric asked me with a teasing tone.


I was certainly not jealous of Sarah. I had my own Dauntless guy that I could spend the night with if I wanted to. "Are you upset that it's her that comes back to my apartment every night and not you? That can change. You know what you have to say," he told me.

For a fearful and fleeting moment, I actually considered it. I had heard plenty of Dauntless girls walking through the halls, talking about how wonderful Eric was. Evidently there were a number of girls that he had been with. The only thing that they ever said was that he never called them back. Not that they should have ever expected him to call them back. He wasn't that type of guy. And I would not be another notch in his bedpost.

"Never," I snapped at him.

"We'll see," Eric said lowly.

"I pity the poor girl that has to end up in your bed every night. You know something is wrong if the day ever comes when I ask to be in your bed. I have another one to go to," I said before I could stop myself.

The minute that I had said it I wanted to take it back. I wanted to smack myself in the face. Why the hell had I said that? I had basically told him that I was in a relationship with one of the Dauntless members. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Eric's face hardened and I sucked in a breath. I knew that I was about to get chewed out.
He took a step towards me. "I'm still your leader. Be careful what you say to me unless you want to end up either Factionless or dead," he said. My eyes widened. I knew that he wasn't lying. He really would kill me if I made him that mad. "Relationships with Dauntless members are against the rules and a few more comments like that to me and I'll be sure to have you on your ass out there."

He was motioning away from the two of us, and I knew that he was pointing towards the Factionless district. A sudden burst of anger at his words shot through me and I shook my head. He was such a hypocrite. Here he was saying that it was against the rules to have a relationship with a full Dauntless member but he wanted me to come and sleep with him.

"Listen to what you're saying, sir," I said with a little sneer. "Dauntless members are not allowed to have relations with initiates. But here you are, trying to convince me to lose the bet and come to your bed," I told him.

It was softly enough to ensure that a Dauntless member standing close to us couldn't hear me. "I'm a leader," Eric said.

I rolled my eyes at him. "That doesn't mean that you're an exception to the rules," I sneered.

He shrugged his shoulders at me, clearly not caring about anything that I said. It made me so angry that he always had that stuck up attitude. Like he could do anything that he wanted as long as we all listened to him. "I might make an exception," he said with a dangerous glint in his eyes.

His words had actually caught me off guard. Was he really saying that he actually wanted me to come to his bed? And that he wasn't going to kick me out of Dauntless for doing so? A little voice in the back of my head was urging me to do it, just say yes. What was the worst thing that Eric could put on my body? But I wasn't going to do it. For my own pride, there was no way that I was going to do anything with him. Not when I knew that he wanted me to do it.

"You'd really be willing to break the rules?" I asked.

"That's what they're there for," Eric said, almost making me smile.

Maybe one night wouldn't be that bad. "And as for Sarah?" I asked him, hands on my hips.

It turned out that I knew the answer before he even said anything. And when he did give me his answer, I actually felt a little bad for Sarah. Something that I didn't think that I was capable of. "Just something to pass the time until something better comes along," he said with a shrug, like she was nothing more than a speck of dust on his shoes.

Scoffing at him loudly, I shook my head. I couldn't believe that I was attracted to someone like that. Someone that could care less about women. He treated them like so many other people did. Like they were a fun toy to play with for a few weeks before he got bored and moved on to the next one. And I was not going to be that next one. Not when he would use me and move on in a matter of weeks, making me feel completely useless.

"You're despicable, you know that?" I asked him.

He merely stared at me, not looking happy at what I had just said to him. "Yet here you stand," Eric said, flooring me.

He made a halfway decent point. I could have walked away by now, but I hadn't. "I don't know why she even bothers wasting her time with you. She should know that you aren't going to change. You're always going to be that asshole that could care less about who he hurts, as long as he gets what he wants. A child," I sneered.
Obviously it had been a mistake for me to say that. I shouldn't have added the last part, knowing that I had just made my punishment ten times worse. It seemed like Four had heard the tail end of my retort as he motioned for me to come to him. I was walking over towards him when Eric's voice called me back.

"Get back here initiate," Eric hissed at me.

My feet stopped me in the middle of the training room. I sighed as I looked in between the two men. I would much rather talk to Four, but I knew that it was a better idea to go back and talk to Eric. Four would chew me out but Eric would actually cause me bodily harm. I walked back over to Eric, who had his arms over his chest, and was seething.

"Yes?" I asked.

"You listen to me, no one speaks to me that way. No matter how tough you really think you are. So I want you in here. Tonight. We are going to get rid of that attitude of yours," he told me.

Snarling at him, I shook my head. I guess I had known from the beginning of our conversation that I was going to end up with a punishment tonight. I just hoped that he made it after dinner and after time for shopping. Heather would kill me if I had to push back our day after having not been around much for the past week.

"What are you going to do, beat me into submission?" I hissed at him, knowing that I still wasn't making things any better.

Smirking at me, he nodded at me and I rolled my eyes. He was extremely pleased with himself. He had obviously been hoping that he would get on my nerves and I would say something to earn myself a punishment from him. He had set this up from the minute he walked up behind me this morning.

"Something like that. Be in here, tonight. Ten," he said.

"Wouldn't miss it for the world," I muttered.

In the back of my mind I was grateful that it was so late. I would be able to go out with Heather and grab dinner with my friends. I could even hang out with them afterwards. But, on the other hand, it was an extremely late punishment. He was going to keep me up most of the night so that I would be groggy and hardly able to concentrate tomorrow. He was clearly hoping that my ranking was going to drop.

"Great. I have to come in here late enough to make sure that no one else is walking around. That way, if you decide you want to kill me no one is going to be around to stop you. Lucky me," I growled.

Eric scowled at me before turning and walking off. I returned the glare before turning back and walking away from Eric. This time, he didn't stop me. I didn't want to have to deal with him tonight, but I knew that skipping out on the punishment would only make things worse. So I stayed silent and walked back over to my friends. It was a short time that we stood around chatting and laughing, waiting for Four and Eric to make final adjustments to the fights.

They were apparently at an impasse. I was sitting at the very edge of the ring, watching the two snap back and forth at each other. Finally, after what was nearly half an hour, they programmed a name into the computer. I wished that I hadn't had to get up this early, they could have figured out the fights first and then come to get us. Or maybe they could have let us eat first. But no, that would
have been nice. And we all knew that being nice was fleeting in Dauntless. Four and Eric walked over to us and revealed the board. I scanned down the list, looking for my name.

Jet vs. Colt

Buck vs. Jade

Draven vs. Dante

Cole vs. Raven

Skylar vs. Jax

Alex vs. Heather

The fights were mostly fair. Jet and Colt were on about the same fighting level. Jet was faster but Colt fought dirty. I had a bad feeling that after his loss to me, Colt was going to ensure that he won this fight. Hopefully Jet would be able to hold his own for a while. Buck and Jade were somewhat even. Buck was stronger, but, like Colt, Jade fought dirty. I was seriously hoping that Buck would win though. Hell, I'd kiss him if he sent Jade to the hospital. I had a feeling that we all would.

Draven and Dante would be one hell of a fight. They were both great. I had no idea who was going to win out of the pair of them. They nodded at each other, seemingly not surprised with the fight. Cole and Raven would be a fast fight. Cole wasn't the best fighter but he was better than Raven. I was pretty sure that he would take it easy on her, the same way that he had done with Heather. Skylar and Jax would be a fast fight. Jax was a great fighter and Skylar was weak.

My eyes hung on the last fight for a little while though. Heather and me. That meant that Hunter would be the one to sit these fights out. Once more I knew that Eric was behind this. He knew that I would be able to beat Heather, but he also knew that I wouldn't want to hurt her. She was my best friend and she had already lost a fight. She couldn't risk losing another one. I was in a dilemma. I could let Heather win her first fight and risk my rank dropping significantly. Or I could go and win the fight, risking pushing her below the red line. I didn't like either one of the options.

Glancing over at Heather, I saw that her face had gone a ghostly white. She looked nervous and there was a few beads of sweat on her forehead. I felt awful standing here, not nervous at all. The only thing that was making me nervous was what I was going to do with her. All of our friends were looking between the two of us, curious which one of us was going to speak first.

It was Heather. "Oh, uh, that wasn't the fight that I was expecting," Heather said awkwardly.

It was the least confident that I had ever seen her. "Yeah me either," I muttered.

Shaking my head at her, I grabbed her hand. I knew that we were going to have to really fight each other no matter how good of friends we were. Neither one of us could afford to concede a fight. And I would hate to see what Eric would do if I conceded a fight just because I didn't want to hurt my friend or her ranking. He probably would kill me if I did that.

"Come on, it's not shocking that you two got paired together. You're close to the same skill level," Cole said.

The way that his voice was told me that he really didn't believe that. He knew that I was faster and stronger than her. But he didn't want to say it. "No we aren't," Heather said sadly.

"It doesn't matter. I know who did it. Eric," I said, glaring in his direction. He was facing away from
me and I hoped that I was burning a hole into his back. "He's still mad at me for all of his issues so he put me with the one person that he knows that I don't want to fight against. Hey, I'll take it easy on you," I told her.

The last thing that I wanted was to hurt her. She was my first and best friend here. She looked up at me with a smile. She was shaking her head and I sighed. I had known that she wouldn't let me do that. I didn't like this at all. No matter what I did, one of us was going to hurt the other.

"Don't do that. If you get caught taking the fight easy on me they'll make sure that you get dropped a few ranks. I don't want that to happen to you," she said, but I could tell that she didn't really mean it. She wanted me to take it easy on her so that she could win. But she wouldn't say that. "Just fight like normal."

I turned so that I was facing her full on. We were still sitting at the edge of the mat and Buck was directly behind us, laying his head on my shoulder. I could feel his heart beating on my back and I smiled. Even if this place gave me heart palpitations, I was glad that I could make real friends here. But that also meant that I had to beat them up to train myself. I understood Eric's point at the set up between Heather and me. Sometimes you would have to fight your friends. You couldn't go easy on them.

But that didn't mean that I wanted Heather to lose the fight. "But I don't want your ranking to keep dropping. Heather look at where you are right now," I said before I could stop myself.

She glanced over at me and glared. She knew where she was in the rankings. I had a lot of wiggle room. "I know where I am, Alex," she said darkly.

"No offense, but you're only four above the red line," I said.

"I know where I am," Heather repeated.

"If I beat you in the fight you might fall to below the red line. Maybe if we go a little easy then the fight won't be considered a total loss. The rankings won't drop as much," I tried to reason with her.

She was my friend but we were fighting on the same side. I couldn't just attack her. I didn't have the heart. Especially considering that her ranking was so precarious. Dante sighed and I could hear him speaking behind me. Our backs were pressed up against each other, each of us keeping the other supported.

"Don't get caught doing that. Eric won't be happy. Neither will Four," he said.

"I know," I said.

If I was going to lose this fight I had to make it look like I was just having an off day. Or like the first fight had just been my anger that I was taking out on Colt. Which it was. "And you know that Eric is just looking for a reason to have you out of Dauntless," Jet told me.

"Taking it easy on a friend during a fight is grounds for a lot of point deductions. And, Alex, Jet is right, you don't need to make Eric any more angry with you than he already is," Dante reasoned.

It was why I loved Dante, he was the type of person that could joke and laugh with you when you needed it, but he was also great to teach you a lesson when you needed to hear it. "They're both right, Alex," Cole said.

Turning slightly, I looked over at him. He was sitting next to Heather with his arm over her shoulders. He was trying to make her feel better but nothing seemed to be working. "I know that
"They are," I muttered.

"Eric has something against you and you don't want to do anything to make it worse. Just go in somewhat strong but don't seriously hurt each other," Cole said.

That was probably going to be the best way to go about it. Right in my ear, Buck spoke up, making me jump. He seemed to realize that he had so he rubbed my arm before speaking again, this time quieter. "Or just make it fast" he said.

Every eye in the room turned to him, glaring at him for his suggestion. "What?" Cole asked.

I should have figured that Cole would be the one to step in when it came to someone suggesting that I hurt Heather. "What? I mean I hate to say it but we all know that Alex if the better fighter. Just get it over with, and fast. Maybe Heather will get lucky in her third fight," he said, patting Heather on the leg.

He seemed to have offended her slightly. Not that I blamed him. I would have been offended, too. She knew that she wasn't a good fighter but that didn't mean that she wanted to hear about what a terrible fighter she really was. And it wasn't like she was terrible. She had hard hits but she lacked the skill. I assumed that it was because she was a little clumsy. The long limbs seemed to trip her up. It was why I was glad that I was short with short limbs. It worked in my favor.

"I'm pretty sure that there's only one fight left after this," I piped up, making all eyes turn to me. Damien had told me during his training, five years ago, there had only been three fights.

"So?" Cole asked.

"If Heather loses this fight and the next one, there won't be much that she can do to bring herself back up above the red line," I said softly, hoping that I wasn't offending her.

For the first time in nearly ten minutes, Heather looked completely alert. And she also looked a little angry. Maybe that was a good thing. She could take out her anger on me during the fight. "Hey now, let's not talk about Heather like she isn't here. Alex, don't go easy on me. Take this fight like you would any other one. I'll kill you in your sleep if you take it easy on me," she said and I couldn't help but to laugh. I was pretty sure that she would kill Buck before me. "I'm not going to be Factionless. Even if I lose this fight, it doesn't matter. I'm going to be here in Dauntless, with all of you guys."

She wrapped her arm around me, hitting Buck roughly in the side of the head. I laughed at the put out look on Buck's face and everyone else followed a moment afterwards. He looked like he wanted to say something to her but I shook my head at him. I wanted him to leave her alone for now. At least until the first fight was over.

"First fight! Let's go!" Four called. I backed a few scoots away from the mat. I didn't want to get landed on. "Jet versus Colt, on the mats, now!"

I grabbed Jet's hand as he walked by and squeezed it, letting him know that I had faith in him to win the fight. I would love to watch Colt lose another fight. As the two boys walked up to the mats I saw that Raven looked extremely nervous. She was biting her nails and I smiled at her. Skylar was comforting her. I could tell that the dark haired girl was extremely fond of Jet. Not that I blamed her. He was a wonderful guy. She had picked a good one. She had better taste then I did.

As the two boys began circling each other I watched as they kicked out at each other and went into low attacks. Both of them fought low to the ground and took each other down every few minutes. They were dripping sweat after a nearly twenty minute fight. They still didn't look anywhere near
done though. They were moving faster than ever and I could tell that Four and Eric were watching them curiously. They clearly enjoyed the fact that both boys were such good fighters. Neither one showed any signs of slowing down. I dazed in and out of the fight. The fight could have lasted an hour or maybe even a day. It seemed to go on forever. They were both covered in bruises and scratches from each other. They even had a few burns from the mat.

Four looked to be on the verge of calling the fight a draw, but one look from Eric warned him off of it. Jet got in a few hits to Colt's head and I smiled. He was going to win this. But Jet took a quick turn to gather up speed for a hit that was aimed to Colt's head and just when he wasn't paying attention a bloody Colt pulled his leg up and turned, kicking Jet directly in the head, clearly with a lot of force. Jet fell to the ground and I gasped as Cole took his booted foot and slammed it onto Jet's head. My friends and I hissed, screaming at Colt, about how it was unfair that he used such brutal contact. Behind us, Raven was crying.

Jax ran up and caught his friend over his shoulder, grabbing him and looking to Four. I turned back and placed my hand on Raven's knee, consoling her that he would be alright. Colt was shouting about what an incredible fighter he was but one glare from Eric made him shut his mouth. Four helped Jax grab Jet and drag him off of the mat.

"Obviously the winner is Colt," Four said. I noticed that Jade was hanging over Colt like he was a hero. Hunter was softly congratulating him. I rolled my eyes. "Take him to the infirmary, tell them to check for any lasting head injuries." He let Jet's weight slowly fall into Jax before waving him out of the training room. "Next fight! Buck versus Jade."

This time I was sure that my favorite was going to win. Before he could walk past me, I grabbed Buck's hand. Jade was snickering with Colt as she flipped her hair over her shoulder and walked to the mats. "Come on Buck, you got this. And if you lose, I'm disowning you," I told him with complete seriousness. "No pressure though."

We both laughed as I waved him off to the mat. He, and my friends, laughed before sending Buck off to the mats, all of us cheering on Buck. Jade looked excited about standing there with Buck. Four called for the fight to start and I watched in fear as she immediately swept Buck's feet from out of him. He hit the ground but didn't let it affect him as he grabbed her legs. I laughed as she fell to the ground and smashed her face on the mat. It made me shout with glee when I saw that she had blood dripping down her face.

They fought back and forth for a long time, probably half of the time that the previous fight had gone on. But it still meant that it was a long time. I was hanging on the edge of my seat as I watched the pair of them. Jade had taken quite a few hits to the face and most of her face was swollen. With the last hit that Buck had gotten to her other eye I knew that she was somewhat blind. It made me happy. She was now throwing blind hits and trying to keep Buck away from her. It looked like she couldn't see at all. Jade had surprisingly good technique but now that she was nearly blind, her punches were being thrown blindly and her kicks had thrown her off balance a few times. Buck was advancing on her but he was also trying to avoid her flailing limbs.

Eric looked fed up with the fight but he still stood with his arms crossed. I had to give it to him. It must take a lot of patience to stand there for hours on end, watching people that were nowhere near as good as you were fight each other. But this was part of his job, whether or not he liked it. Jade threw a hit blindly and I groaned as it caught Buck in the eye. He dropped for a moment. But he quickly gathered himself and tackled Jade to the ground. She yelled and I gasped as she raked her nails down his face. He hissed in pain before hitting her in the face over and over again. Her movements became slower and sloppier until she finally stopped moving and Buck fell off of her.
He gathered himself and stood up, laughing and raising his arms in the air. Jade was rolling around on the ground as Colt and Hunter ran up to help her to her feet. On the other hand, Buck came running over to us. We all laughed and shouted, gathering him in hugs. Everyone was so happy to see that he had won the fight, especially considering that it was against Jade, one of our least favorite people. Jade was standing limply with Hunter and Colt, both whom were looking at Four like they were expecting him to tell them to take her to the infirmary.

"Buck wins. Good fight," Four said, with something that was just shy of a smile. I knew that he was happy to see Jade lose. "Just bring her to the wall and get her a towel or something. She doesn't need to go up to the infirmary." I barked out a laugh. All three of them looked horrified that Four wasn't telling them to help her. "Next fight! Draven versus Dante."

We all waved at our two friends. The fight would mean well. They wouldn't try and hurt each other. Buck walked over to us on a slight limp and we all wrapped him in hugs. Buck had been knocked to the ground and Jade had stepped on his knee earlier in the fight. I could tell that she hadn't dislocated it or anything but that didn't matter, I was sure that it still hurt him.

"Hey, good job!" I yelled, pulling Buck into me.

Eric was behind us, rolling his eyes. "Thanks, Alex," Buck laughed into my shoulder.

"Someone needed to knock her down a peg or two. Or maybe ten. And this means that your ranking is going to go up!" I yelled happily. It was obvious that everyone really hated Jade. She was a damn bitch. "Thank God, I was getting sick of looking like I was from Amity," Buck said.

Glancing over at him, I laughed. " Shut up, asshole. If we're lucky maybe that knocked her under the red line," I snickered, ignoring the scathing look that Colt was giving me.

Glancing up I noticed that the fight between Draven and Dante was now going on. Like the fights before theirs, it took forever. Both men were wonderful fighters, besides Hunter and Colt they were probably the best. But they didn't fight with strictly brutality. They fought with the amazing skills that he had. Draven was obviously the better fighter but we could tell that Dante was faster. It was funny watching the two of them fight. It was almost like they were doing an astounding dance.

Everyone was watching them with a little smile, clearly happy that the fight was much more impressive than the others. On more than one occasion they had been thrown out of the ring and everyone would back off suddenly. But Eric or Four would push them back into the ring and the rest of us would laugh. Each boy barely had any blood or bruises on them other than their arms and their legs, which they were using to block the attacks. They were clearly some of the best fighters. It was astounding that neither one had fallen to the ground by being pushed by the other.

I could tell that both Eric and Four were impressed with the fight. They were watching with arms crossed over their chests, watching with curiosity. From where I was sitting I couldn't see the clock but I was praying that we were getting close to lunch. I was starving. For a while the boys started darting around the mats and I watched as the hits became harder and were aimed at weaker places. They were shockingly fast and currently more brutal than the other fights had been.

Finally I watched as Draven barreled into Dante and knocked him to the ground. I watched with my breath held as Dante tried to push the heavier boy off of him but was unsuccessful. Draven wrapped his hands around Dante's throat and I gasped, hoping that he was going to let Dante go. My nerves were bundling in my stomach as I watched him tighten his grip and Dante's body began to go limp. I turned back to Four and shouted his name, stunning him from his stupefied revere.
"The fight is over! Let him go," Four hissed at Draven, who was still strangling Dante.

Neither boy seemed to be completely in it. They both looked exhausted and not completely there. They were angry and tired. Dashing up to the fight, Four grabbed Draven and pulled him off of Dante, who immediately came back to. He was leaning over himself and dry heaving. I wanted to run up and help him but Eric got there first, helping Dante to his feet.

"We are here to disarm and stop each other, we are not here to kill each other. If you make it in Dauntless, you'll have time for that later," Four snapped, shoving Draven away from him. Eric threw Dante into Draven's arms, who caught him roughly. Draven was awake but he looked like he was about to be sick.

"Bring him to the infirmary," Eric told Draven and he nodded, walking out of the room.

"Next fight! Cole versus Raven," Four shouted, but everyone was still watching Dante and Draven leaving the room. "Now!"

That was enough to startle everyone into moving. Without bothering to let us say goodbye to him, Cole went dashing up to the mats and stood with his legs shaking. I could tell that he didn't want to fight Raven. He was such a nice guy and this was the second time that he had to fight a girl. It had been Heather that he had fought against last time and he had beaten her. Now he had to fight against Raven who he was sure he could beat this time. That meant that she would also be someone to lose two fights in a row thanks to Cole. Four called for the fight to start.

It was very easy to see that Raven was shaking as she raised her hands up in front of her face. Cole immediately jumped to her and punched her roughly in the face. She stumbled back and hit the ground before bouncing up and shaking her head. Cole got yelled at by Eric to not give them time to recover but Cole ignored the leader. Cole ran after Raven time after time, hitting her but not at his full power. Everyone could tell and Eric looked less than pleased that Cole was taking it easy on the girl. But since the fight was still obviously swinging in his direction, Eric kept his mouth shut.

Raven got in a few good hits from time to time, but she was nothing spectacular. I felt awful for thinking that she wasn't going to make it in Dauntless. She actually wasn't doing halfway bad, but she was nothing compared to Cole. At least she was lasting for a little longer than just a few minutes. The fight had only been going for about ten minutes before Eric yelled for Cole to end it as he easily missed a hit from Raven.

"Stop playing with each other," Eric said, his voice bored and drawling.

Cole followed orders and in the momentary distraction Raven got a good hit at his eye. He gasped and covered his eye as both Heather and I laughed, whooping for Raven. I was glad that she had at least done something right. Even Four was grinning. He seemed to be the type to like the underdogs.

The hit clearly snapped Cole out of the sweet demeanor that he had been in before as he launched himself after her. It would be the end of the fight. He hit her time after time in the ribs, knocking her to the ground. She yelled and sank to the floor, leaning over and coughing up a little bit of blood. That stopped the fight immediately.

Without really needing to, Four yelled out and shoved Cole away from Raven. "That's it!" he hissed before leaning down to her. "She awake?"

Raven barely managed to pick her head up off of the mat. "I'm fine," she said, nodding weakly before coughing once more.

More blood came up. "Good," Four said softly before bringing her to her feet. Jax came and grabbed
her from Four. "Get her to the infirmary. Make sure that she's alright." Jax nodded and heading
through the doors with Raven barely able to stand. "Go take your lunch breaks. When we come back
there are going to be two more fights. I'll let you guys go after that."

We all nodded, following him out of the training room. As we walked out of the training room and
headed into the dining room we all grabbed our trays and gathered food onto it. I made myself a taco
and grabbed a bottle of water and an apple before heading out to the table, where most of my friends
were already seated. I took a seat next to Heather and grinned at her. Buck was on my other side and
he stole a fry off of my plate. I laughed softly and gave him a handful of them. I had more gotten
them for him rather than myself.

Damien was at a table a few down from ours and I smiled at him, blushing at his piercing smile. It
was pretty obvious that he was mentally asking me if I could come over tonight. I shook my head,
mouthing I'll explain later, at him. Not wanting my friends to follow my gaze, I looked away from
him and back to Heather.

"So we go to get our hair done tonight?" I asked her.

She nodded at me. "No backing out now," she said.

I laughed softly and shook my head. "Don't worry, I won't. I don't even know what I want to do to
mine. I mean, there isn't really much that I'd want to do. I kind of like my hair just the way that it is,"
I said, pulling my long blonde hair over my shoulder.

It was definitely my favorite thing about myself. I was very attached to it and I didn't want to part
with it. Glancing up nervously at the clock I saw that it was already past two. My eyebrows shot to
my forehead. We had been in the training room so much longer than I had thought.

"Oh good, let me do something to it!" Heather shouted, forcing my attention back to her.

"Excuse me?" I asked, blanching slightly.

I loved and I trusted her, but that didn't mean that I wasn't afraid of what she was going to do to my
hair. Especially if I gave her free reign. "Come on now, I'm serious. You trust me, right?" she asked
me.

I nodded sadly. "Of course I do," I said.

"I wouldn't do anything awful to your hair, especially because I know that you like it the way that it
is. I would just make it a little more Dauntless," she said, grabbing my hair and twirling it in her
fingers.

Would I really let me do something? I looked at Buck and shook my head when I saw that he looked
like he had a bad plan forming in his head. "How about you guys make a little deal?" Buck asked us.

Both Heather and I stared at him, wondering what the hell that he was on about. "I'm not overly fond
of bets," I said, remembering the one that Eric and I had made.

Neither one of us were completely convinced that this was a good idea. I had had enough of bets to
last a lifetime. Eric was too much for me already. "If Heather wins the fight, Alex, you get to do
whatever you want to her hair. If you win the fight, Alex, Heather gets to do whatever you want to
her hair," he said and I scoffed.

He knew as well as the rest of us did that I was going to win the fight. But that was a good thing. It
meant that she wasn't allowed to do whatever she wanted to do to my hair. Not that I didn't trust
Heather, but the one thing that I had always liked about Amity was the way that they wore their hair. It was probably the only thing from Amity that I had ever liked.

"Is this just a clever way to make me want to lose the fight?" I asked Buck with a raised eyebrow.

I was pretty sure that he wanted me to cut my hair and that meant that I had to lose the fight. "I didn't think that you'd catch that," he said, laughing softly.

"I did."

Butting himself into the conversation, Dante spoke with a little bit of a smirk on his face. "I actually think that it's a good thing to do," Dante said, making me roll my eyes.

"I thought that you were on my side here!" I barked at him.

Apparently not. I guessed that no one was on my side. Everyone wanted me to cut my hair. They thought that it was so funny that I was turning into Dauntless in every way other than my hair. Traitors. "Come on, you both know that you guys are friends. You aren't going to do anything too terrible to each other," he said.

He was actually well within his reason. Cole chirped up next to us so we all glanced over to him. He was wearing a bright smile on his face and I cocked an eyebrow at him. That would be nothing good. He was usually the most chipper of us and that meant that he was always the one to come up with the funniest and most terrible plans.

"Or you could let us decide what you ladies do with your hair!" he yelped, making us all laugh loudly.

There was no way in hell that I was ever going to let them do anything to our hair. "No!" we both shouted at the exact same time.

It was pretty obvious that no one felt that letting Cole do anything to our hair would be a good idea. The boys were terrible. They'd turn our hair green or something. Heather and I looked at each other and laughed loudly. We both knew that it was a terrible idea to let the boys do anything to our hair.

"And no way boys, not tonight. Its girl's night tonight," I said and every eye turned to us, giving us curious looks.

"Hell yeah!" Heather cheered.

But then I remembered. I turned to her and sighed softly. She looked like she was about to launch into a berating. "Oh, I forgot to tell you. At ten I have to go down to the training room with Eric," I said sadly.

Tonight I wanted nothing more than to enjoy the night with my friends, people that I had barely seen in the last few weeks because I had been with Damien so much. But of course on the first night that I was going to hang out with them Eric was going to make me spend the night having to deal with his bullshit.

"What?" Heather asked.

"What the hell did you do to Eric this time?" Jax asked me, leaning in.

He hadn't said really anything today and I rolled my eyes at his words. He seemed to always think that I was doing or saying something to Eric that I probably shouldn't have. Most of the time he was
right. But that didn't mean that I was going to admit it. I'd never admit that the things that happened with Eric were partly my fault.

"I didn't do anything!" I yelled.

But it was very clear that no one believed me. Especially not Jax. "Sure you didn't," Jax said.

"I didn't. That's the stupid part. Eric always wants to get me for something even when I didn't do anything. He's such an ass. He thought that I was mouthing off to him earlier so he decided that I needed to spend my entire night in the stupid training room as a punishment. It's probably because we're going to be doing something super hard tomorrow that he wants to see me fail at," I mumbled angrily, stabbing at my plate.

Trying to ignore the chastising looks that all of my friends were giving me, I grabbed the bottle of water on the table and downed it with one huge gulp. "Are you sure that you didn't do anything to him?" Heather asked me.

I very nearly spit the water all over the table. "Heather!" I barked.

"I mean, not to side with Eric or anything but it seems like sometimes you do ask for it. I don't know what it is about the two of you, but you definitely like to push each other's buttons," she told me.

There was nothing more that I could say so I glared at the table. After that my friends continued to talk but I said nothing. They seemed to all know that Heather's words had affected me so they all chose to leave me alone to think about it. Could she be right in thinking that Eric and I had some pull that neither one of us could get rid of? We both clearly were physically attracted to each other. Or at least, I thought that he was physically attracted to me.

Some part of me in the back of my mind thought that I really was physically attractive to him. I hoped that I was. He always backed me into a corner and seemed on the verge of kissing or touching me. It made me nervous to be in the training room alone with him tonight when everyone was going to be asleep. It made me think that something might happen between us tonight. Did I really want to be in his bed like he thought that I did? I knew that answer. Yes. I would love to be the person that he brought back to his bed at night. But I refused to tell him that. If he wanted me to come back with him one night, he was going to have to use my name. The thought of him calling me by my name in his raspy voice made my toes curl.

Thinking back to Amity, I scoffed. No one there had ever made me feel the same way that Eric did. Florian was a great friend of mine. He was the first guy that I had ever spent a night with. He had always made me feel loved. He made me feel like I would never be alone. He was probably the best man that I had ever met. I just wished that I had felt the same way about him that he felt about me. But I didn't. He only made me feel happy. I liked Damien, too. He got my pulse going, but it still wasn't the same thing that Eric gave me.

It wasn't the feeling that made my toes curl and my heart pound and my pulse race and every inch of my body tense. That was what I wanted. But no one could do it. No one except Eric. There was no way that I was ever going to come to him and tell him that I wanted him. I especially didn't want him to know that it was the way that we fought. When we yelled at each other and had each other pressed up against walls, that was what really got me going. But I could hide that in the back of my mind. No one, not Eric or anyone else, needed to know that.

Startling me from my thoughts, Four walked over to the table and called us all back into the training room. I sighed and walked out of the dining room and into the training room. Heather had gotten quieter in the past few minutes. She was nervous for the upcoming fight. I didn't blame her. As we
made our way back into the training room. I was hoping that Eric would have found something better to do. But, to my horror, he was right at the mats, watching me enter the room with a broad grin on his face.

He wanted to see the way that I reacted to the fight. "How shocking. Eric has come to watch the last two fights? No doubt does he want to see me get my ass handed to me," I muttered.

Heather glanced up from her shoes to see that Eric really was at the front of the mats, staring at us as we walked into the room. She nodded at Eric's figure before dropping her gaze back to the ground. "Yeah probably," she said. I glanced up at her in shock. Had she really just said that? Heather glanced up and noticed my surprised face and smiled at me. "Just kidding! I promise I won't hand your ass to you. Or at least, not that hard."

We both smiled. It was good to see that she at least still had a sense of humor. We made our way in from lunch and I realized that everyone was back from the infirmary. Raven looked a little worse for the wear but she was smiling, so that was always a good sign. It seemed that now that everyone had eaten and gotten a break from training, moods were higher than they had been this morning. But I was sure that both Four and Eric were going to end that good mood shortly.

"Alright, let's keep going with the fights. Next we have Jax versus Skylar," he said. I dropped at the edge of the mat and waited for the pair to make their way over. I didn't relax back though, it wasn't going to be a long fight. "Come on guys, get on the mat! Now! Or else you can fight me."

We all laughed as the pair dashed up onto the mat to face each other. As they walked back and forth I noticed that they were both a little nervous. Skylar knew that Jax was going to end this fight fast. I wasn't sure if that was either a good thing or a bad thing. It was good because she didn't have to spend too long looking like a fool, but she also knew that it wasn't going to be long before she had her ass handed to her. She knew that, unless she had a chance to fight Raven, there was no way she would make it through initiation. The fight probably took just under ten minutes, and it only took that long before Jax clearly didn't want to have to seriously hurt her. But unfortunately the only way to end a fight was to render the other person unable to fight.

I wished that we were able to concede fights, but Eric had made it very clear to us that we had to keep going until one of us was unable to. I understood why. In a real fight, your opponent was not going to concede when they thought that they were going to lose a fight, they were going to keep going. And an opponent would laugh if you tried to concede. In a real fight it would keep going until one of the fighters was passed out or dead. That was what they were trying to show us. I glanced back at the mat as Jax shoved Skylar to the ground and jumped on top of her. She had her hands up to shield her face, but Jax was stronger. He grabbed both of her arms and moved them off of her head so that he could hit her. He sent a couple of heavy hits to her face and temples before her eyes finally rolled back and Jax jumped off of her. Eric and Four looked over her before nodding.

Jax put his arms under Skylar and helped her to her feet. She was awake but staggering around badly when Raven ran up and offered to take some of her weight. She grabbed Skylar and brought her over to the wall while Jax stood, still on the mats, staring off into the distance.

"Alright, good fight. Get her some water and a cold towel. She doesn't need to go to the infirmary," Four ordered. Raven nodded, leaving Jet to watch over Skylar while she grabbed the supplies. "Last fight! Heather versus Alex! Get up here ladies." I sucked in a breath. This was the part that I had not been looking forward to. But I had to. "When this fight is over you can all go. We have nothing else for you to do today."

With the exception of Heather and me, everyone nodded, laughing and chatting. Both Heather and I stood from the ground, departing from our friends with bright smiles. I could tell that Heather's was
not real. She looked nervous as we stepped up onto the mat. She was standing at the near end, closer
to our friends and both Eric and Four. I was standing at the other end, trying to block out the jeers
from Colt and Jade.

"Hey you got this. May the best woman win, right?" I asked Heather with a little smile.

"Absolutely," she said, shaking out her hands a few times before raising her fists to her face.

From behind me as we circled the mats I could hear Eric yelling at us. "Enough niceties or I put you
both below the red line!" he yelled. I narrowed my eyes at him. I had no doubt in my mind that he
would do that. "Fight!"

At least he wanted us to get down to business. Maybe he wanted this fight over with too. Sinking
down onto the balls of my feet and pressing them into the mat, I waited to see if Heather would
attack first. I was pretty sure that she wouldn't. I charged at Heather and swept her feet out from
under her. She shrieked and went falling to the floor. Not wanting the fight to be over that fast, I
backed off and feigned falling over onto the mat.

Eric scoffed from the edge of the mats as I stood along with Heather. She looked saddened by the
fact that I wasn't fighting full force but I didn't say anything. I just wanted to keep going and hope
that Heather could catch up to me. I didn't want to hurt her or see her fall below the red line. Heather
finally charged after me and I smiled, grabbing her arms and throwing her off of me. She stumbled
back and I waited for her to advance on me again. She did and threw out a punch. She hit me twice
in the arms and stomach. It didn't really hurt but she did make me take a few steps back. Eric was
grumbling off to the side but I didn't care.

I walked back up to Heather and threw out a punch, praying that she could deflect it. She didn't and I
gasped as I hit her square on in the face. She stumbled to the ground and I fell with her. I sat on her
hips but my weight was barely there. I was giving her the opportunity to throw me off. Thankfully
she caught what I was doing almost immediately and tossed me off of her before standing up. She
should have jumped on top of me. Heather threw out a few more punches to my face and one to my
legs when I caught her leg and tugged it out from under her.

She fell on her back and once more I feigned a stumble. I took a few steps back and waited for her to
regain her breath so that she could stand back up. She did so, shocking me when she jumped after
me and punched me in the stomach. I bent over for a minute before bringing my leg back up and
roundhouse kicking her in the stomach. She bent over and gave a few dry heaves and I sighed. I
hadn't meant to kick her that hard. Heather was covered in sweat but I barely had any on me. I wasn't
tired, I was just hoping that Heather could get up to finish it. But she had told herself since she saw
the pairings that she was going to lose this fight. And now it seemed that she actually believed it. I
also had the terrible feeling that Eric knew what I was doing.

My thoughts were confirmed when I heard Eric snap at us from the sidelines. "Amity, get over here,"
Eric snapped at me.

Heather took a few steps back and I stepped back off of the mat to join Eric off on the sides. He
brought me back a few steps away from everyone else and I stood there with my hands on my hips.
He had never stopped a fight before. That meant that he was seriously angry with me.

"What? I was in the middle of a fight," I snapped.

"Were you?"

"Yes."
"What the hell do you think that you're doing up there? I know that you're taking it easy on her because she's your friend and you don't want to hurt her. News flash, there are no friends here. Fight her like you mean it, or you can fight me. And I will not take it easy on you, in the slightest," Eric warned me.

His hands were heavy on my shoulders and I nodded at him, not trusting my mouth to function. He shoved me back into the mats and I stumbled, blushing slightly when I glanced at Heather. She seemed to understand what was going on so she smiled weakly at me. She knew that she was going to lose. I mouthed to her that I was sorry, ensuring that I was facing away from Eric. She nodded at me, getting into a fighting stance.

We both rocked back and forth before Heather came charging at me and I knocked her onto the ground. She sighed and leaned back up as I barreled into her once more. I had come at her a little too fast though because I slipped right past her, giving her time to stand back up. She did so and the two of us both threw our fists out together. I deflected hers but mine went directly into her eye. She shouted and stumbled back, kicking out and hitting me in the stomach. I groaned and dropped over before rolling out from under her and catching her leg. I yanked it out from under her and watched as she went stumbling to the ground.

Just like Jade had this morning, Heather hit the ground roughly and cried out in pain. I felt bad for doing it to her but I jumped after her, knocking her flat on her back. She cried out in pain as I hit her in the face a few times. She grabbed me by the hair and yanked me off of her. I groaned at the sudden pain and hit the ground. She dragged me back a few feet and I cried out. If I was really going to lose to Heather, this was not the way. I swung myself around, hoping that I wasn't ripping out too much hair. My foot was directly out and I grinned as I kicked her in the throat. She dropped to the ground, covering her mouth. She looked like she was about to be sick as she dropped onto her knees. She tried to get back up but I grabbed her under her arms and flipped her over my back. She hit the ground and coughed a few times while I jumped on top of her and grappled with her. We were both grabbing each other and hitting back and forth. Her hits were more panicked and they weren't very hard. But that didn't matter. At least she was still fighting against me. And that meant that if she lost her ranking wasn't going to go down as far as it would if she didn't put up a fight. Heather got a good hit into my cheek and I reared back and punched her roughly in eye. She was still doing a good job. I grabbed Heather's hair and ripped her head to the side. She screamed in pain and I grimaced at her. I really didn't want to have to do this but I had to end it. For both of us. I hit her roughly in the temple four times before she finally laid back limply and her eyes glazed over slightly.

Four ran into the ring and I backed up to let him get a look at her. She was bleeding from a few spots and had bruises forming on her but she didn't look like she needed immediate medical attention. "That's it!" he called out. I nodded as my name was highlighted on the fight list, indicating that I had won. "Get her up."

I did so, grabbing her under the arms, thanking Cole as he came over and helped me lift up her limp body. We got her off of the mats before laying her down on the cold cement of the floor. Her eyes were rolling around in her head and I knew that the hits to her temple had done some damage. I just hoped that she would still want to hang out with me later. I didn't want to lose a friend because I had beaten them at a fight.

"Heather? Hey Heather, are you alright?" I asked her, snapping my fingers in front of her face.

Heather seemed to be coming back into it as she nodded at me. But it looked like she might also pass out at any minute. Her mouth was full of blood from the few times that I had hit her in the jaw and I sighed. She smiled at me with her eyes full of clouds and I sighed at her. At least she could smile at
"I'm sorry about that. Come on, let's get you back to the dorms so that you can shower. We'll go get our hair done after that. Okay?" I asked her and she nodded weakly at me.

Cole helped me pick Heather up and I smiled at him, thanking him for the help. "Alright, day's over, for all of you," Four said and I looked up at him with a little smile. All I wanted to do was go back to the dorms, shower, and go out shopping. I just wished that I didn't have to come back here in a few hours to serve some form of a punishment with Eric. "Go back and shower, get dinner later. Anyone that doesn't feel right after their fights, head up to the infirmary. Don't try to tough it out and stay in the dorms."

We all nodded before walking out towards the dorms. Heather seemed to be able to walk somewhat straight as we headed back up to the dorms. A few people that were Dauntless members helped open doors and helped me support Heather as we walked. They could clearly tell that she had just come out the loser in a fight. The farther we made it back to the dorms though, the easier it was for her to stand up. By the time that we were all the way back to the dorms she was standing by herself and only wobbling every few feet.

The boys all said goodbye to us at the doors and headed to the Pit so that they could hang out for a little bit and Heather and I could shower without anyone else coming in to disturb us. We walked into the showers quickly and made our way out in a few minutes. We wanted to go hang out and shop, we didn't want to have to spend it showering. We got out quickly and I let a towel hang around my chest, covering me up slightly.

When we got out of the shower and started to get changed I sighed when I saw that Heather was covered in bruises and a few of them looked like they had been bleeding. "Hey I'm really sorry about the fight earlier," I told her.

"It's fine, Alex," she said.

But I felt terrible for nearly killing her in the fight. Even if that was an exaggeration. "I didn't want to do it but Eric said that if I didn't start fighting the way that he knew that I could I was going to have to start fighting him," I told her.

She walked over to me as we both pulled on our underwear and set a hand down on my shoulder. I smiled at her as I walked into the bedrooms to grab some clothes for today. I wanted to wear anything but I knew that in a few hours I was going to have to come back to fight Eric. It only made sense that I wore workout clothes. So I grabbed a black tank top and a pair of tight black shorts. Heather was still getting changed.

"Alex, it's really alright. I don't mind. I knew that I was going to lose the fight. I'm just proud that I stayed in it for that long. Hey, don't worry about me, I'm going to figure out what to do. I'm not leaving this place. I promise you that," she told me and I smiled.

"You better not. I'd lose my mind having to deal with them by myself," I said.

We both laughed at each other. She was pulling on her boots but I grabbed a pair of sandals, sick of wearing boots all of the time. It seemed like that was the only thing that I ever wore here in Dauntless. Sometimes I missed running around barefoot in the fields of Amity. But I knew that it was so much better being here in Dauntless. I was still glad that I had chosen to come here. Even if that meanted that I had to deal with Eric.

"Come on, I'm ready for you to do whatever you want to my hair. Take it easy on me though, I'm
"delicate!" I yelled at her.

She laughed loudly as we walked through Dauntless and past the Pit, letting the boys know that we were done and they could go shower. As we walked through a few Dauntless members smiled at us and offered to buy drinks but we shrugged them off. After all, this was a girl's day. We made our way up to the top of the Pit to a shop right next to the tattoo shop. It was the hairstylist place. A lot of people were already in the chairs and I smiled. Some had more subdued hair and other had bright colors and choppy hairstyles. It was shocking just to see how crazy some of these Dauntless members got with their hair.

We approached the desk where a woman with bright red hair was standing, smiling at us. Heather was talking to her and I could tell that she was giving the woman exact instructions on the way that she wanted each of our hair done. I paled slightly when I glanced to the back of the room and saw that Damien was sitting in a chair, having some hair brushed off of his shoulder. He glanced back at me and smiled. Heather came up to me and I immediately rushed her into a chair close to us. She sat down in the chair and everyone smiled at her, starting to pick up her hair and play with it.

But I backed up towards the rear of the store and smiled when Damien finished paying. "Alex?" Damien asked as he walked up to me. I turned back and smiled at him.

He clearly hadn't known if it was really me or not. "Last time I checked," I teased.

Smiling at him, I turned back to him and grinned brightly. He seemed to be tired but I understood. We had kept each other awake well into the night. "Good to see you," he said, kissing me.

I nodded at him when I pointed over to where Heather was seated. He smiled at me and grabbed my hand. My heart was pounding as I prayed that no one was paying attention to us. And it didn't seem that they were. Everyone was too busy in their own lives. Which was good for right now.

"Hey, it's alright. Come here for a minute will you?" Damien asked me.

I nodded, letting him lead me out of the back of the shop and into a nook in the wall where we were both sure that no one was going to find us. He backed me into the wall and I smiled at him, leaning up against the wall while he stood in front of me. He was nothing like the way that Eric backed me into the wall. The little voice in the back of my head was telling me that I would rather it be Eric pushing me back into the wall.

"I think you want something," I teased.

"So what do you say to come by my place tonight? We could have a good time. I could give you some pointers for training," he said, coming to stand a little closer to me.

"Pointers?" I asked, with a quirked eyebrow.

He laughed at me and pressed another kiss against my lips. "Yeah. We could learn all sorts of new things," he said.

Smiling at him as his body pressed into mine I grinned brightly, knowing that a blush was covering my face. "As much as I would really like to do that, and trust me, I would, I can't. But I don't know
about you teaching me anything, I might actually be able to teach you a few things," I told him with
a sly grin.

He grinned back at me and pressed his hips into my own. "I believe you," he said.

"But I can't actually," I said and the smile faded off of Damien's lips as I sighed. "I mouthed off to
Eric earlier and now to make sure that I can't do anything tonight, and probably that I don't get any
sleep, he's making me train all night long."

Damien kicked the wall and I sighed behind him. "Damn him," Damien growled and I nodded,
grabbing his hand and twining my fingers with his. "He seems to know when people want to have
plans so that he can step in and ruin them." I scoffed. I was pretty sure that Eric had bugged me or
something. "Well maybe in a few days then?" I nodded happily. "I'd say tomorrow but I can't. I have
to work. All week too. Maybe at the end of the week?"

Smiling at him, I nodded happily. "Yeah I'd like that actually. Just come find me whenever you're
free. If you can't find me otherwise, just know that I'll be in the dining room always at noon and at
six."

"That's perfect," he said.

I wished that we had phones but that was a privilege that only real members had. Initiates and
dependents basically had to run around until they found the person that they were looking for. "I
gotta go, I told Heather that she could do whatever she wanted to my hair. I might be regretting that
soon," I said with a little laugh.

Damien nodded and gave me a little smile. "Well just don't cut it too much, I like it," he told me and I
laughed at him. He wrapped a strand of my hair around his fingers and tugged it gently. It reminded
me of something that Florian used to do back in Amity. But he never actually tugged on my hair.
That wasn't peaceful.

"Don't worry, I don't intend to cut my hair that much," I said.

He smiled at me. "That's alright, I should really get back to work anyways. This was just my break,"
he said and I nodded. "I'll see you around."

Before he went to leave he ran his hand up my back and I shivered at his touch as his hand ran up
the base of my neck and tangled itself through my hair. He pulled me into him and tilted my head
back as his lips met mine. I smiled softly and leaned into the kiss. Somewhere in the back of my
mind the little voice was asking if kissing Eric would be the same. I shook it out by grabbing Damien
harder and bringing his body into mine, trying to shut out the intrusive thoughts.

After what seemed like nearly an hour Damien pulled away from me and I sighed at the loss of him.
Without saying another word he kissed me on the cheek and turned to leave. I made my way back
inside the hair salon where Heather was finishing up her new look. She was laughing and chatting
with the styling woman. I was glad to see that the bruises on her face weren't half bad. Heather
motioned me to the chair and I sighed, hoping that she wasn't going to do anything too drastic to me.

Heather went to telling the woman what she wanted to do to my hair, making sure that I couldn't
hear what she was saying. I looked over at Heather and saw that she looked perfect. She had
darkened her hair so that now it was black and layered. It was softer now and had lost the slight fuzz
that it had had beforehand. At the bottom of her hair it was now a soft brown and I smiled at it. It
looked great. It had been cut too. Most of her hair laid around her shoulder blades. She looked so
much older. She actually looked like she was about twenty now. But it was perfect for her attitude. I
wondered what Cole would think of it.

I had just looked up at her and she was smiling brightly. Her transformation to Dauntless was going better than I had thought that it would. She still looked a little bit like a Candor so I knew that we were going to have to get a little bit more done to her. Maybe another piercing once physical training was over.

"Heather, that's perfect. Your hair looks amazing," I told her.

"Thanks!"

"It makes you look so much older. And more Dauntless too." She smiled at me. "Now all we need to do is get you tattooed!" I shouted and the woman that was going to be doing my hair nodded at me with a smile.

She clearly agreed that Heather needed to get a tattoo. Heather looked a little bit upset that I had even suggested her getting a tattoo in the first place. I knew that she was a little nervous but that didn't mean anything. She was getting one whether or not she wanted to. I would be sure of that. Finally Heather sighed and I smiled brightly.

"Alright fine, you let me do whatever I want to your hair and I'll go with you to get a tattoo," she said.

That was a deal that I could take. "We have a deal," I told her.

"Just to complete my Dauntless look! But you have to get one too," she said with a little grin in my direction.

My eyes widened and I stared at her. I hadn't been expecting that but it didn't bother me. I was more than willing to get another tattoo. I had actually been thinking for weeks that I wanted another one. They really were addictive. "Works for me. We can go after my hair is done and then we can go get dinner," I told her and she nodded at me. "Look, while she's doing my hair go run downstairs and tell the boys to come get dinner at around eight instead. I think we're going to be a little late."

It was already almost six. We would be missing dinner. Plus this meant that Heather wasn't going to be able to see my hairstyle until it was done. "Got it," Heather told me and I nodded.

Heather leaned into the woman's ear once more and I laughed as she resumed telling the woman exactly what it was that she wanted. She turned away from me and I smiled when she popped back up and headed for the door. "Don't you dare tell her to shave my head," I snapped.

Heather laughed as she backed away. "I'll be back in a little while. Enjoy!" Heather yelled to me before dashing out of the store and tearing around the corner.

I laughed before leaning back and letting the woman get to my hair. She turned me away from the mirror and I closed my eyes, sinking back in the chair. It was too late now. She was going to do whatever she wanted to my hair because for some stupid reason I had allowed Heather to have free reign. As the woman snipped away at my hair I couldn't help but to wonder what ranking she had come in during initiation. It had to be a low one. I didn't want to do anything like working at one of the stores. I was pretty sure that the only thing that I wanted to do was something along the lines of leadership.

Maybe I could be a leader. But Eric had said that there were no leadership spots open. Maybe I could do something important. I actually liked the idea of training the initiates. Maybe that was something that I could do. But then it meant that I would have to spend all of my waking time with Eric. Or at
least, a lot of it. I wasn't really sure how I felt about that either. I liked Four just fine but I didn't want to have to spend all of my time with Eric. I did that already.

I kept thinking about the jobs that I could do that meant I would never have to see Eric again. Unfortunately I couldn't come up with any. After a long time the stylist told me that she was finished. I glanced up to see the work that she had done. Immediately my jaw dropped and I smiled at the new hairstyle. My hair was now layered the same way that Heather's was. But it wasn't as short as hers was. The longest layer was still at the middle of my back. And my hair was still the bright blonde that it had always been. The shortest layer was at my shoulder blades. I grinned at the sight. It looked amazing. The best part was that at the bottom of each layer my hair was a bright red. My bangs now fell to the bottom of my chin. The whole look was amazing.

Flipping my hair around my face I smiled brightly. It was so perfect. "Thank you!" I told the stylist.

She smiled and nodded at me. "Not bad initiate," I heard Eric sneer at me.

I glanced over to see that Eric was in the chair next to me, having the sides of his hair shaved off once more. He was grinning at me and I rolled my eyes. I seriously couldn't even get away from him for more than an hour. "Following me?" I asked.

He merely rolled his eyes. "Finally starting to look a little more like you belong. I'm sure that they'll like it in the Factionless sector," he taunted. I rolled my eyes and stood up, hoping that he was going to ignore me if I walked away. I walked over to the front desk and told the woman my name, watching as she docked some more of my points. "Don't forget, initiate, ten. Be at the training room. And be on time. You won't want to see what happens if you're late."

Heather was rounding the corner and I knew that she would be in the salon in a minute. Good, I wanted to leave so I didn't have to worry about Eric bothering me. I rolled my eyes once the woman finished my hair. "Don't worry about it, I wouldn't dream of being late. I'll be there. See you tonight," I told him and he nodded, looking away from me.

Walking out the front door and thanking all of the people that worked there, I headed out of the salon with my new hairstyle and walked over to where Heather was waiting. She saw me quickly and smiled brightly at me, laughing and grabbing my hair. The two of us stumbled together in a hug.

"Hey, it looks perfect!" she yelled.

She looked thrilled that I had finally done something to my hair. "You're the one that picked it," I said.

"Oh I'm so glad that she understood what I was saying. Come on. I want to go to the tattoo shop so that we can finish up there and I can get some food. I'm starving," she said. I laughed as she pulled me along. I was hungry too. But we had made a deal that we would both get tattoos first. "And the boys are complaining too but they're going to wait for us."

It definitely sounded like the boys. We walked along the way to the tattoo shop and I laughed at her. "Alright, fine, we'll get some small tattoos so that it doesn't take too long. Come on now!" I said.

The two of us were speeding each other along as we dashed into the tattoo parlor. I was hoping that Tori was going to be there. I wanted her to be the one to do my second tattoo. "I'm so excited!" Heather cheered.

"I want to see what we can get. Hopefully Tori will be there. She's the woman that administered my test. You'll like her," I told Heather, who nodded at me as we walked into the parlor. I noticed that
Tori was in the back of the room cleaning her supplies. "Hey, there she is!"

Heather smiled and waved at the woman. Tori smiled softly at Heather before smiling brightly when I stepped out in front. "Hey, kid!" Tori called.

I waved at her, dragging Heather into the back of the store. "Hi, Tori," I said.

"Come back for some more?"

"Definitely."

"Good, I'm glad. You know what to do. Just come find me when you're done and have what you need," Tori said.

I noticed that she immediately went to work cleaning the rest of her supplies and setting them out. Heather and I went searching for something to tattoo on ourselves and I realized that Heather was quick to find something. She walked over to Tori to have her do it. The two women spoke for a minute before Heather laid down on the table and waited for Tori to start. Heather must have known what she wanted before we had even came here. I didn't have a clue what I wanted. But as I searched I finally found something. Picking up the glass tablet I made my way over to Heather and glanced at the tattoo that Tori was finishing up. It was a small heartbeat symbol that had an unfamiliar name underneath it. It was on her hip.

I wanted to ask her more about it, but I chose not to. It was clearly personal. Heather walked away to pay for the tattoo after thanking Tori and I settled into the chair. I ended up settling on a quote from an author that I loved back in Amity. I hadn't really been considering a tattoo but when I had spotted it, I knew that I had to get it. The book with quotes looked like it hadn't been opened in years and Tori looked a little surprised that I was getting something like that. But she nodded at me and asked where I wanted to put it. I thought about it for a moment before deciding that I wanted to do something a little more risqué. A little more Dauntless.

So I pulled my shorts down and pointed from my hip, over my waist, and down to the top of my thigh so that it went down the side. The only way that anyone was going to be able to see the whole thing without me having to move clothes around would be if I wasn't wearing anything at all. Tori smiled and laughed. She seemed to agree that this was the best place for me to put it.

It was something that was perfect for the warrior Faction. The people that had to face death every day but weren't afraid of it. The tattoo took nearly an hour to do and it hurt like hell went she went to copying it over my hip, right near where the bone was. Once she was done, Tori allowed me to stand up. I did, glancing down at the tattoo. 'The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and the other begins?' It was written in a neat script with vines that tangles through the words. On both edges were skulls, and the vines wove in and out of their mouths. My clothes would cover it up completely. It was like a surprise to whoever pulled my clothes off. I wondered if Damien would like it. That little voice in the back of my head was more curious to see if Eric would like the tattoo. I shook that thought off fast.

Heather was standing with me and was talking fast about how amazing the tattoo was. It was on the other side from my angel wing tattoo. They complimented each other well. Tori smiled as I was allowed to pull my shirt and pants up over the tattoo. It was a little ginger but not too bad.

"Very pretty. Not many people in Dauntless go for quotes," she told me. I had figured that considering the quote tattoo book was hardly ever used. "Usually the only people you see doing that are former Erudite's."
Shrugging my shoulders at her, I tried to ignore the dull ache that was going through my hip. It was the same kind of ache that I had experienced after getting the angel wing on my ribs. "I wasn't thinking about it until I saw it. I knew that I wanted it. One of the things that people seem to underestimate on Amity is that we are more like Erudite than they think," I said.

"What do you mean?" Tori asked.

"We read a lot. Edgar Allan Poe was a banned author because he wrote about death and all of those horrible things. It wasn't peaceful. But I loved him," I said. I wasn't sure if Tori understood, but she seemed to understand that Edgar Allan Poe was the person who had written the quote. "I used to sneak his book out of the restricted section all of the time to read him. I always loved this. The second that I saw it I knew that I had to have it."

Tori laughed and began to clean up the needles and pads. "Well it looks amazing," Tori told me. I smiled at her. She was the one that had done it. "And wait until some guy gets to see it. They'll love it. Tattoos like that drive them crazy. Trust me." She winked at me as I blushed and laughed. I knew that it meant that Tori had a tattoo like mine. "I'm sure that I'll see you again?"

I intended to look completely Dauntless once I became an actual member. And that meant that I would be back to get more tattoos. And eventually a piercing here and there. "Of course. It might be a while though," I told her and she glanced over at me.

"Good luck restraining yourself," she teased.

"I wanted to buy some more clothes soon but the problem is that I'm getting low on credits. So it might be a while before I'm back here," I said sadly as I looked at all of her tattooing materials. I really wanted another one but I was going to have to wait.

Tori grinned at me and shook her head as she walked over to place the pad back on the wall. "Not to worry, after the first part of training is over they'll replenish your credits," Tori told us and my eyes widened.

"They do?" I asked her. I didn't think that they were going to replace the credits until we actually became members and got real jobs, which paid in real credits.

"They expect you to use them up looking Dauntless. Depending on what your ranking is going into the second phase of training you'll get the credits accordingly," she said and I smiled.

Heather also seemed to think that it was amazing that we were going to get more credits as she shouted next to me. I jumped at the sound of her voice, having momentarily forgotten that she was there. "Wow that's awesome!" she shouted.

I glanced over at her. It looked like her hip was in pain from her new tattoo as well. "It really is," I said.

"I didn't know that they were going to do that," she mumbled.

It was only a moment before I smiled and pulled Heather to the front desk where we went to pay for the tattoos. "Well then I guess that means that I'll be back here sooner rather than later. Maybe I'll do a piercing next time. I just want to wait until after physical training is over. I don't want anyone to use that against me," I called back to Tori.

"That's smart," she said.

I watched my credits deplete most of the way down and knew that there was really only going to be
enough credits in there for me to have one more small shopping trip. I figured that I would do that right before the end of stage one. "Either way, we'll see you soon Tori!" I called back to the woman.

Heather walked up to the cashier and I watched her credits deplete as well. She had a little more than I did and I smiled at her. We were probably the two that had run through our credits the fastest. "Bye ladies! Hope you enjoy them!" Tori called to us with a little laugh.

We ran out of the store and headed down to dinner. It had been a long day and it was late. We were both starving by now. We wanted our dinner. As it turned out, our friends were already at dinner with plates laid out for us. They all yelled at us for taking so long as they practically inhaled their food. We all laughed and joked with each other as we explained our afternoon. We both got compliments on our hair and I smiled as Cole kept playing with Heather's hair. Heather showed off her tattoo at the end of dinner and everyone cheered at it, clearly happy that she had done something else to herself. Like me, no one said anything about who the tattoo was for. She seemed grateful that we had ignored the tattoo, settling for cheering her on for doing something that was clearly out of her comfort zone. She was becoming more Dauntless by the day.

They all asked to see my tattoo immediately. Mine was not as easy to show off as Heather's. But I pulled part of my shirt up and pulled my pants and the waistband of my underwear down. They all howled and yelled with laughter and shock at the placement of my tattoo. They were all cheering for my boldness. I blushed at them and pulled my clothing back into place. Everyone was saying how lovely the tattoo looked and I smiled at them. They had no idea what that meant to me. Of course it wasn't long before they started to joke about who was going to be the first person to see the tattoo in its entirety. Everyone was pointing around the dining room and I laughed. I almost lost my mind though when Damien walked through the dining room and they all motioned to him. They had no idea how right they were about that. I was so glad that Damien hadn't noticed me and just kept walking through the dining room. I didn't want to explain anything to him.

It was an hour before we all walked back to the dorms and settled in. People were relaxing and drifting off to sleep. I was jealous that they didn't have to go downstairs and deal with Eric. I wished that someone else had gotten into trouble with him too. I didn't want to be alone in a room with him. Strange things seemed to happen when we were alone together. And no one would be near us. While everyone was chatting and laughing, I laid against my bed for nearly an hour. Heather finally warned me that I only had twenty minutes before I was supposed to meet Eric in the training room. I really wanted her to come with me. Eric would leave me alone if there were other people in the room. Everyone was settling down to go to bed but I stood up, wanting to be early. The last thing that I wanted was for Eric to give me another night because I was late.

Heading out of the room I kept getting odd looks from the Dauntless members that were still awake. Most people were heading to bed. The Pit was still alive with music and I sighed. I wished that I could be down there with them. I fought my way through the crowd before heading into the area where the training room was. As I had expected, no one was anywhere near the area. Everyone was either in bed or down at the Pit. No one wanted to hang around the training room this late at night. I pushed open the door. Eric was already there and beating the living hell out of a swinging bag. He looked like he was about to knock it off of the chain that it was hanging from. I had never seen someone fight the way he did. It was so primal. He wasn't wearing a shirt. I gulped when I saw that he was sweating and it was gleaming with every contract of the muscles. I was still ten minutes early. He obviously didn't know that I was here and I wasn't sure whether or not I should tell him that I was here.

Finally deciding that it was a better idea to say something, I spoke up. "Can't help but wonder who you're picturing as that bag," I said with a little teasing note to my voice. Eric immediately stopped hitting the bag but didn't turn to talk to me. I wondered if I had made a mistake saying anything to
him in the first place. But I had already spoken up and there was nothing that I could do now. "Is it me? I wouldn't be very surprised. I know that you hate me."

My voice was echoing off of the walls as I walked forward. Eric finally turned away from the bag and I blushed when I saw him. My eyes immediately darted down to his chest and I had to stop a smile from coming to my face. Eric clearly had followed my line of sight as well and he smirked at me. I imagined that he knew exactly what I was thinking right now. I noticed that he had the V that guys who were seriously in shape had and my eyes followed it to where it ended. His pants were slung low on his waist and I blushed once more before tracking my eyes back up his torso.

"You're early," he told me. His voice was husky from his training and I knew that the heat was traveling down to my chest and neck.

I nodded stupidly at him."Yeah. I didn't want to give you a reason to give me another night of punishment," I said.

Eric merely stared at me, watching my gaze drop towards his chest again. "I'm sure you'd hate that," he said.

"I would," I said, my voice shaking slightly.

"You're going to be fighting me," he said.

Trying to get the images of what I was hoping would happen out of my head, I took a deep breath and willed myself to get back the teasing demeanor that I always had. I needed it now more than ever. "Now, you know, if you kill me I'm going to be sure to come back as a ghost and haunt your ass," I told him.

To my shock he actually gave something of a smile. "You'd be very scary," he said.

And, to my shock, I laughed. He had actually joked with me. "I'm determined not to die until I become a full Dauntless member. Just so that I can prove to you that I can do it," I told him with a little more venom in my voice than I had meant there to be.

Without bothering to see if I wanted him anywhere near me, Eric walked towards me, making me blush softly. Instead of keeping rooted to my spot like I had wanted to, I backed away from him. Whether it was because I was afraid of him or I didn't want to test my resolve, I didn't bother to think. I wasn't sure that I wanted to know the answer.

"I don't think you can," Eric said and I snarled at him.

He really was one of the worst people that I had ever met. "That's why I'm still here. To prove you wrong," I said.

"You won't. In fact, I'm sure that you can't. It's not just physical. It's mental and emotional. Are you sure that you can handle that? People stronger than you can't. Can you go into your own mind and face your fears? Can you dig deep into yourself and realize that things that you have pushed down for so long, determined that they aren't real, are?" he asked me.

He was continuing to back me up. Eric had backed me into a wall and I knew that my face was red and contorted with rage. I was so angry that he always thought that I wasn't strong enough to do this. He had me pressed back into a wall and I sucked in a breath. Part of me wanted to touch Eric but the smarter part knew that I couldn't do that. I had to attack him. He knew that I wanted to touch him. So I launched myself after him and the two of us went sprawling to the ground.
We were fighting with an unadulterated fury between the two of us. We were wrestling back and forth on the ground, punching and kicking out at each other, and tripping one another up. We kept falling to the ground and more than once Eric threw me across the room. It was probably a few hours before we started to slow down, but even that was barely anything.

We were still pressing against each other. I noticed that in a fight, this was physically the closest I had ever been to someone. More than one time we had pressed against each other and I wasn't sure if we would kiss or strangle each other. I was sure that I had bruises all over me from when he had tripped me to the ground. I shouted as he tripped me once more. He was sitting on top of me and settled in between my legs. I tried to throw one up to his face but he caught my thigh and pressed it back so that I was contorted in a strange way. For the first time in nearly two hours, we were still.

I was pinned to the ground and I realized that my shirt had come up slightly. Something in the air shifted as the fight ended. Eric was leaning over me, settled in between my legs and my heart was pounding. We were both drenched in sweat and our bodies were slicking together. Our legs were rubbing up against each other and my blush rose. Eric was staring down at my tattoo and I shuddered as his fingers ran over the writing that was on my hip. I wondered if he was going to ask me what the rest of the tattoo was.

"Got a new tattoo, huh?" he asked me.

"Yes," I whispered, not trusting myself to say anything more.

He raised my shirt even more to read the rest of the quote and I shuddered as his fingers ran over the writing. His pupils were so dilated that I was sure that his eyes had actually turned black. My skin erupted in goosebumps as his hands ran themselves over my sweaty skin. I had been more intimate than this before but this felt like the most intimate I had ever been.

To my utter shock, Eric grabbed the waistband of my shorts and began to pull them down. I didn't know what had gotten into him but I did smell alcohol on his breath. I wondered if he had drank a lot before I had gotten here. Or maybe he really did want me just as much as I wanted him.

"Don't," I warned, grabbing his hand with my own.

My voice was so raspy that it didn't even sound like my own. It came out as more of a gasp than an actual word. Eric wasn't looking at me, his eyes were still on my hip as were his hands. My heart was pumping so fast that I thought that it was going to beat out of my chest. I couldn't believe that this was really happening. This was Eric. I was Alex. We hated each other. We didn't do things like this.

"Get off of me," I told him in a husky voice.

"Be quiet," Eric growled.

And I did. My mouth shut but I tried to force myself to continue to force him off of me. I tried to move his hands off of my waist but he had a steel grip on me. The little voice in the back of my head was now screaming at me and telling me that I did not need to get him off of me. I really did want him here. Eric merely grabbed my hands and pushed them away from his own.

It was easy to tell that he wanted free reign of my body. I was shockingly ready to give it to him. He moved my hands off to the side so that they were trapped under his legs. Eric's eyes were lidded and I knew that mine were too. We were both breathing heavily, despite having stopped fighting a while ago. "Don't you dare move," Eric warned me with a deep voice.
His voice sounded exactly like mine. It sent shivers down my spine. He turned my hips gently to the side and I complied. My back was still on the ground as he rolled my hips off to the side so that he could look at the rest of the tattoo. He pulled the waistband of my pants down and I blushed. It felt like he was about to pull them completely off of me. The terrifying thought was that I probably wouldn't have denied him.

Most of my ass was now hanging out of my shorts and part of my most private area was visible to him as well. But his eyes were only on the tattoo as he read over it. He nodded once his eyes had stopped flitting over the words and my breathing began to pick up again. He pushed me back onto my back all the way and I groaned as my back dug into the ground. My shorts were still pushed down and I couldn't tell what came over me but I suddenly got the urge to do something that I shouldn't have.

My heart was pounding in my chest as I pushed my hips up and they met his. He growled in what I assumed was pleasure as he pushed back against mine and they pushed me into the ground. He gave off something close to a growl and I panted softly. It wasn't anything that I had ever heard before. His hips hit my own, roughly, and my eyes glazed over. I wasn't sure what was happening but I knew that I didn't want it to stop.

The only thing that I wanted was to continue this. I never wanted it to stop. I gasped softly at his movements and watched as Eric leaned over me and lowered himself to me. His bare chest was pressing against mine and the sweat on our bodies made us slide against each other. He was looking at me like no one else ever had and it made my heart nearly burst in my chest. What the hell was happening? I didn't know and I didn't care. I just knew that I wanted it. He was leaning directly over me and his lips were less than an inch away from my own. I wanted him so badly.

"Eric..." I moaned softly, not really meaning to let it out.

He didn't seem to really register that I had even said anything. I knew that he was off in his own little world. He wanted this as much as I did. I could tell. He didn't care about his girlfriend, I didn't care about Damien or my friends, and neither one of us cared about the implications. None of the ramifications meant anything to either one of us. He pressed into me once more and I groaned, closing my eyes. I felt something against my leg that I assumed was his own so I moved my leg. But when I bumped into what I was sure was his leg I stopped. That didn't make any sense. He didn't have three legs.

Suddenly I realized what it was and my eyes sprang open, shattering the haze of lust that had come over us. My hands were gripping at the concrete on my sides and his hand was still on my tattooed hip. I gasped at the scene and blushed softly. Eric seemed to snap out of it as well as the haze faded out of his eyes and they narrowed on me, like this was somehow my fault. He jumped off of me with a grace that I didn't know he possessed and I watched as he walked away from me. He crossed to the other side of the room and leaning his forehead against the punching bag he had been at when I had first come in nearly two and a half hours ago.

"Get out," he hissed at me in a voice that told me that he wasn't joking.

I was still laying on the ground with my legs open and my clothing shifted around. I panicked and jumped to my feet, pulling up my pants and shifting my shirt. Once I was sure that I looked presentable enough I walked over to Eric. I kept my distance just in case. He was shaking and I could tell that I would have to be careful with my words. That was clearly not something that he had been expecting. Neither had I.

"Eric. What the hell just happened?" I asked him, but he didn't respond to me. He still had his head against the punching bag. "Eric? Come on, talk to me," I tried to tell him softly.
He turned to me with a sudden ferocity, fire blazing in his eyes, and I jumped back a step or two. He looked at me with eyes that were practically glowing red. He must have been convinced that this had been my own fault, even though it was as much his as it was mine. We were both on that ground together. It wasn't just me that had done that.

"Get out!" Eric bellowed at me.

He shoved me back with a hard hit to my shoulders and I went tumbling to the ground. Panicking, I stumbled to my feet and dashed out of the training room, ripping the doors open and throwing myself through them. I wanted to be out of there, away from him. I went tearing through the compound, tears running down my face. I was so glad that no one else was around here. I didn't want them to see me. I darted into the dorm room before closing the door as softly as possible and slamming myself onto my bed, muffling my cries to the best of my ability. He was going to throw me out after this and I was going to be alone in the Factionless section. He was right, I wasn't cut out to be in Dauntless. Not at all.
Chapter Nine

Eric's P.O.V.

All damn night Eric had been storming through the Dauntless halls. He had tried everything that he knew of to get the damn Amity transfer out of his mind. He was sure that if he didn't stop thinking about what had happened in the training room, he would end up tracking her down in the dormitory and dragging her out, back to his apartment. She wouldn't resist. He knew that she wouldn't. He saw it in her eyes. She had wanted it as much as he had. But they had both snapped out of it and the night had gone to hell. Now he was just furious. With himself, with her, and especially with his lower regions.

They hardly ever betrayed him, but they just had. Eric had brought women back to his apartment all the time and he had never once felt bad about kicking them out not long after he was done with them. They always just seemed happy that a Dauntless leader had paid them any attention. Even if it was for only five minutes. Not that he only had them for five minutes. It was always more than that. He always treated the women in his life the same way that he treated the initiates. And it was for the same reason. Neither one would stay in his life for very long. He was sure of it. The initiates would either stay in Dauntless and go on about their business or they would become Factionless and Eric would never see them again.

But an initiate had never fascinated him the way that she had. She intrigued him in every way possible. She was brash and bold, but she was not overly violent. It couldn’t be surprising, considering that she was from Amity. She took precise movements but she could also move faster than most of the other initiates. But the one thing that made him the most interested in her was the fact that she didn't back down from him. Initiate were always terrified of him. He was pretty sure that the Amity was afraid of him too, but she was good at not acting the part. It drove him crazy. On one hand, he was always convinced that he was a second away from ending her life, but on the other hand, he did enjoy teasing her. He enjoyed watching the way that she tried to deny the way that her body reacted to him. No woman had ever denied it. Except for her.

What had happened last night was something totally new to Eric and he was nearly positive that it was something new to her, too. Eric never had a problem bringing a woman back to his apartment and throwing her down, sure to have his way with her. But that wasn't what had happened in the training room only a few hours beforehand. He had been completely gentle with her. A word that Eric hadn't been sure that he had known before last night. It had shocked him, the way that he had barely touched her. The way that his barely-there touch sent goosebumps faster to her skin than any woman he had ever taken to bed before.

But once he had gotten back to himself he had thrown her from the room, probably injuring her slightly. He hadn't cared at the time and he still didn't care. He knew that he could have handled it better but it was too late now. He just wanted the first phase of initiation to be over so that he could get her the hell out of Dauntless. He didn't want the smart-mouthed initiate to make him have to question his teaching methods one more time. He hated that she always had to challenge him. Even more, he hated that he liked her challenging him. It made things more interesting.

He knew that she wasn't like anyone that he had ever known. When he had lived in Erudite every woman had been cold and calculating. There was no passion anywhere. Not even in anger. No one was really angry. They would get angry but it wasn't enough to really make things any more interested. Most girls in Dauntless were the opposite. They were quick to get into fights. But they
only did that to impress the men for the most part. Eric knew that for a fact. He was one of the men. Every woman in Dauntless was willing to come back to Eric's bed.

All but one. A stupid Amity transfer. He could tell that as the weeks passed, her resolve against him was failing. It meant that lately she tried to avoid him when she could. Naturally that meant that he wanted to get closer to her. He wanted to push her. He liked watching her bend. It drove him nuts that she was from Amity. He had always claimed that they were the weakest Faction, with the exception of maybe Abnegation, but she had proved him wrong. She took to the Dauntless activities better than most. She reminded him of himself when he had gotten here.

Not that she knew that. She thought that he was a born Dauntless. He had never bothered to correct her. He looked and acted like one. But then again, after only a few weeks, so did she. She had already had the right attitude for it, but now she looked like it too. Her hair was dyed and she already had an ear piercing. Along with those things she now had two tattoos. And he had gotten a damn good look at one last night. And Edgar Allan Poe quote. She would never understand how much he appreciated that. Being from Erudite he loved to read. Poe was one of his favorite authors.

When he would look her over, it was always appreciative. Eric had always thought that Dauntless women were the most attractive. They were the only ones that truly wore striking clothes and made their own senses of self. It drove him mad that she was starting to look more and more like a Dauntless woman. She looked exactly like the type that he loved to take back to his bed. But better. She had the natural beauty that came from being Amity along with the edgy looks of Dauntless. And that wasn't to mention that she had the personality that could damn near match his.

Standing in the shower, Eric found himself beginning to get a little too uncomfortable with the thought of the Amity transfer. He wanted to hate her, and a part of him did. But a bigger part of him wanted her here. Just for the night though. He would never be the type of man to want to keep a woman for more than a few weeks. They got boring. He was washing the sweat, liquor, and sex away from his body, knowing that it would just be a repeat process the next morning. He turned the water off and wrapped a towel around his waist, walking out into his main room.

He found himself only more annoyed than he had been before getting in the shower. He was angry that Sarah was still in his bed from the night before. He had wanted her gone but had fallen asleep before he had gotten the chance to kick her out. She knew that she was supposed to leave. Maybe she had fallen asleep too. That was too damn bad. She was leaving. Now. Eric hated women staying in his bed the night. It made him feel too close to them. He had never been close to anyone. Not even to his own parents. They had always told him that he wasn't the type of person to be close to someone. He would always be more machine than man.

Grabbing her probably a little rougher than he needed to, Eric shook Sarah awake. Her eyes opened slowly and Eric recognized the familiar haze of sleep in her eyes. She was smiling at him and he rolled his eyes. He wanted nothing to do with her right now. He didn't want to hear her talk and didn't want to see her. He just wanted her gone.

"Leave," he told her.

"What?" she asked dumbly.

On a different day Eric probably would have thought that the look on her face was funny. But he didn't want her to leave and never come back. Right now Sarah was a good lay. Someone to take out his frustrations on after a day of dealing with the Amity. He hated listening to her talk about her mundane days but he rarely actually listened. He usually just waited for her to finish talking so he could get what he wanted. He only really kept her because she was good in bed. He briefly thought of the Amity, who was a riot to talk to. Especially when he was able to rile her up. It was so easy to
do. And she was the only person that he could do it too. Everyone else became afraid and backed
down.

Sighing, Eric knew that he was going to have to try and be a little nicer today. "I need to get ready for the day," he explained to her.

She nodded like she understood and got to her feet. The sheets feel from her bare frame and she turned to Eric, waiting for the appreciation of her body. But it never came. Eric was currently busy thinking about another woman who was presumably getting ready right about now as well. Figuring he was just lost in his own work, Sarah grabbed the dress that Eric had torn in his furious and drunken state last night and slipped it on, maneuvering it to a spot where it wouldn't fall off of her shoulders. Once she had she gathered her things and walked over to Eric, she gave him a quick kiss on the lips. Eric didn't respond in the slightest and that made him furious. He should have.

He had to force himself not to throw Sarah back onto the bed and take his mind off of the transfer. But she had places to be and so did he. As she left the room Eric knew that his rage was going to be taken out on someone in training today. He was looking forward to it. The initiates always proved a good outlet for anger. In the back of his mind he hoped that it would be the Amity. He did enjoy watching her turn red from irritation. Eric grabbed a tight shirt along with a pair of black pants to change into. He had them on and was slipping on his boots when a knock came at his door.

He pitied whatever person was on the other end of the door. He didn't want to deal with anyone today other than the people that he had to. As he prepared to scream at whoever had come to bother him, Eric immediately snapped his mouth shut. It was the Head Leader, Max. He was shocked. Eric normally only saw Max in the halls or at private meetings. It was rare that Max ever visited leaders in their apartments. Eric had never even seen Max anywhere but the perch in the dining room and his office.

"Good morning Eric. I trust that you slept well?" Max asked with a little glint in his eyes.

Eric growled, knowing damn well that Max knew that Eric hadn't slept a wink last night. Eric could only hope that Max didn't know why. Still, Eric had to be diplomatic around Max, so he nodded. "Yes. Thank you," he muttered.

"Good. May I come in?" Max asked.

Eric was suddenly very glad he had gotten rid of Sarah when he had. He stepped to the side and let Max enter his nearly perfectly kept apartment. The only thing that was out of place were his sheets. He would have to throw them in the wash later. Eric hated the perfume that Sarah doused herself in and now it was all over his bed.

"I'm making coffee," Eric blatantly lied. He had been about to leave. "Would you like some?"

He was doing that more as a courtesy. Max knew this, but he nodded anyways. "Sure," he said.

Eric quickly made himself and Max a cup before handing the older man the steaming cup. Eric breathed in the scent of the coffee. It was certainly helping the pounding headache that he had right now. They sipped on it for a moment before Eric decided to get down to business. He wasn't a very patient man today.

"What can I do for you, Max?" Eric inquired, trying not to sound like he wanted to leave. Which he did. He hated being alone in a room with Max.

But the leader seemed to pick up on that long ago. That was why he tried to always get Eric alone.
He knew that Eric wasn't fond of him. Just the same way that Eric wasn't fond of Four. But that was for a totally different reason. "Got word in from Erudite today," Max said flippantly, draining a little bit more of his coffee.

Although the change wasn't noticeable, all two hundred and six bones in Eric's body tensed at the mention of Erudite. He hated everything to do with the blue-clad Faction. "Oh?" Eric asked flippantly.

"Not much new there. The initiates are doing well. They should be getting near the end of their initiation soon. They still think that we take too long. I say we're just thorough," Max said with another shrug.

Once more he drained some of his coffee. Eric nodded, not at all sure where this conversation was going. "It's long but it's effective for everything that we have to train the initiates," Eric said.

It had to be headed somewhere. Max didn't come just for social visits. "Anyways, Jeanine Matthews is coming to Dauntless this weekend. Obviously we need you there as well," Max said.

Heart dropping into his stomach, Eric nodded. He couldn't let Max see the moment of weakness. Out of all of the many things that Eric hated about Erudite, Jeanine Matthews was probably the thing that he hated most about the Faction. She was awful. She reminded him of his mother. Eric didn't like the sound of Jeanine coming to visit. The only sanctioned visit that Jeanine had to Dauntless was right after the first phase of training was done so she could scope out the new recruits. After all, the majority of initiates who made it through stage one would become Dauntless members.

"And why is Jeanine Matthews coming here over the weekend? She isn't due for another trip to Dauntless for weeks," Eric said. He couldn't help but to ask that.

Max simply shrugged his shoulders. Eric didn't like the way that this conversation was going. Jeanine always had reasons to come. It was never just because she wanted to say hello. She had better things to do with her time. "It's curious. Jeanine seems to want to know which Dauntless initiates come with the most promise," Max said and Eric raised an eyebrow.

It must have had something to do with her hatred of Divergent's. "What does she want with them?" Eric asked.

"She wants to speak with the initiate that we believe has the most promise. I don't know them well, but you do. Four does as well. I've already spoken to him on this matter. So tell me, Eric, who do you think has the most promise?" he asked.

Eric thought that he was the wrong person to go to. He didn't like the initiates. Not one of them. He thought that they were all too weak to want to do anything with them. Jeanine was wrong if she thought that these kids were going to make good soldiers. The vast majority of them would be at the Fence. They weren't the worst bunch that Eric had ever seen but they certainly weren't the strongest. Eric thought about the Dauntless born first. He didn't know them that well but he had seen them training more than once and he knew who the best ones were.

"Aaron, Jackson, and Michael are good Dauntless born initiates. Greg isn't bad either," Eric said. He knew that Lauren had said once knife training had started Greg's ranking would go up. He was evidently very good with them. "Hunter, Draven, Jax, and Colt are good from the transfers."

Part of him wanted to say the Amity, but for once he was doing something to help her. He doubted that she would do well, having to be polite around Jeanine Matthews. She could barely do it around him. Max nodded and drank a few more sips of his coffee as he processed the names. Max didn't
seem very impressed and Eric scowled. Max should be bothering Four about this. He knew the initiates. Eric wanted to go. He wanted to see if he could catch the Amity before breakfast started. He wanted to see what kind of attitude he could get from her this morning.

"Jeanine seems to only want to think about the transfers for now," Max said.

Eric nodded but raised a pierced eyebrow. "Why?"

"I'm not sure. But I imagine that there's a reason."

"Okay," Eric said slowly, unsure of whether or not Max was baiting him.

"Colt; he's a bit too brash. You told me once that the Amity transfer beat him," Max asked.

Eric nodded, repressing a smirk. He had known that she would beat him. "She did," he said.

"I don't think Jeanine will like that. Hunter, he's a little too silent. I'm not sure I've ever even seen him speak. Draven and Jax are that way as well. What about the Amity? She's ranked rather high, isn't she?" Max asked.

After a moment of hesitation, Eric nodded. He had been trying to keep her out of this. "She's ranked fifth," he said.

"And she's won both of her fights?" Max asked and Eric nodded once more. She had beaten her friend yesterday. "Good with guns?"

"She's not the best but she isn't hopeless either," Eric said.

He was hoping that it would get the Amity out of whatever Max and Jeanine wanted. "Yes, I think Jeanine will like her. Bring her to my office on Saturday. After training," Max stated.

For a moment Eric hesitated. That wasn't what he wanted for her to have to deal with. He knew that the Amity had never spoken to Max alone and he was sure that she had never met Jeanine. This would be one hell of a weekend for her. But he nodded anyways, knowing that there was no getting her out of it.

"Alright. Anything else?" Eric asked as he tossed his mug to the side of the counter.

Shaking his head, Max made to stand. But before he could walk towards the door he stopped and turned back to Eric. "Does she trust you?" Max asked, who cocked his head. "The Amity transfer. I've seen the two of you speaking with each other frequently. More than I've ever seen you speak with any other initiate," Max said with a smirk on his face.

Eric felt a pit forming in his stomach but he kept his face passive. "She probably trusts me enough," Eric said slowly.

Max seemed to know that Eric was uncomfortable anyways though. "It isn't a bad thing. We need more people on our side. The world needs to know what a threat that Divergent's are. Make her trust you, and make her like you. Using any means possible. I know that there are rules here but sometimes rules must be bent," Max said.

Eric immediately nodded, knowing what Max meant. He was smart enough to know what Max was telling him. Breaking the rule about Dauntless members not having relations with initiates. That meant that Eric could bring her back here and have nothing fall back on him. He wasn't sure if he liked knowing that or not.
"Thank you for coffee, Eric. Best of luck with the initiates today. Try not to stab any of them," Max teased.

Without meaning to, Eric laughed softly. "I'll try my hardest," Eric said.

Max wasn't a very friendly guy and he could definitely border on creepy sometimes, but Eric liked him well enough. He was better than Four and most of the other people in leadership. Taking Max's cup and tossing it in the dishwasher, Eric closed it and walked out of the kitchen. As Eric turned to leave the room he wondered if Max really wanted Eric to use any means necessary to get the Amity on Erudite's side on the Divergent situation. It certainly seemed like it. And Max had spoken like he already knew that Eric was dying to drag her back here and keep her until he had gotten the desire to break her out.

As Eric made his way to the dining room he knew that it would be easy to eventually get her into bed with him. To get her to trust him. It would take time. She had a strong mind and seemed to think that he would be a bad person to fall into bed with. Eric smirked. She would be right. But it did bother him in the back of his mind that he wasn't pissed off at the fact that she had to get close to him. That didn't bother him in the slightest. And that fact bothered him. He actually thought that it would be a little fun getting physically close to her. And that was the part that infuriated him the most.

Alex P.O.V.

My eyes were opening slowly and I sighed at the sudden blast of cold air. The dorm room was so much colder than it usually was. But as I leaned up I realized why. I had fallen into bed without the covers and I was still wearing my shorts and tank top from training last night. I shivered and stood up from the bed, wincing at the creak that came from the bed. I wanted nothing more than to crawl back under the covers and go to bed but I knew that I couldn't. I had to get to work for the rest of the day. Even though last night had made me want to sink into the shadows and never emerge, I knew that I couldn't. I was here in Dauntless to make myself a spot for the rest of my life and I intended to do just that. And I intended to have a top spot. If nothing else, just to smile at the look on Eric's face. Eric. What the hell had happened between us last night? Easy answer; I had no idea. The two of us had been closer than we ever had and I knew that if we had been there a moment longer something would have happened that neither one of us could have taken back. In a way I was pissed that it hadn't happened. It bothered me more than it should have that I had loved his touch and that I had craved more.

Deciding that I needed a cold shower before going to do anything today, I walked into the bathroom and turned on the water, for once glad that Dauntless seemed to only have cold water. Although the moment I stepped in, my muscles contracted and I nearly keeled over from the sudden invasion of cold water. As I finally relaxed under the water I thought about last night. In some way, I had actually seen the softer side of Eric.

But it was funny. Even his soft side was still commanding. He had ordered me to not move, and for whatever reason I had listened. I hadn't fought him. And I knew that it had shocked both of us. I didn't want to go out there to get breakfast or go to training, considering that I knew that Eric would be out there. I wasn't sure what I would say to him. I knew that he would be angry. He always seemed to be after one of our confrontations. And that meant that he would make my life, and everyone else's, miserable today. I felt extremely bad for that. Although I enjoyed watching him scare Colt and Jade.

As much as I wanted to skip breakfast today and hide in the back during training, I knew that I couldn't avoid the Dauntless leader forever. He would only make things worse for me if I avoided
him. I would just have to buck up and put on my big girl pants. There was about twenty minutes before the rest of my dorm mates would be awake so I dropped my towel and walked into the main room. Wanting to hide from Eric slightly, I grabbed a looser long-sleeved shirt and a pair of compression pants that hit my mid-calf. Ignoring the boots that I normally wore and instead grabbing a pair of black trainers, I brushed through my wet hair and let it hang from my shoulders.

Walking quietly from the room, I accidentally woke Cole as I banged into Heather's bed, but whispered for him to go back to bed. He complied, mumbling something about a dance that he was nervous for. We all knew that Cole talked in his sleep and it was usually pretty funny to listen to. We had stayed up a few nights just to listen to him talk. Of course he didn't know that. He would be mortified if he knew that. We weren't that cruel.

As I walked through the halls and passed a piece of a window, I looked into my reflection. I noticed that my eyes were slightly puffy and I scoffed. That was great. I looked absolutely terrible this morning. It was the worst that I'd looked since being here. I knew that Eric would be sure to point that out. If he didn't kill me first. I never knew whether he wanted to sleep with me or kill me. That was rather unnerving.

It was never something that I had dealt with in Amity. Everyone had always been happy, and there was no sexual tension. If you wanted someone you just went and got them. And if they didn't want you all you had to do was smile and say thank you anyways. It was so much easier. But it was also much less fun. As I walked into the dining room I saw that Eric was in the middle of it and facing me. He was staring at the table and I knew that he hadn't noticed me yet. But the room was empty, besides us. He would know that I was here soon enough.

Walking into the kitchen I grabbed myself an apple before walking back into the room and grabbing a cup of coffee. I decided to sit in the far corner of the room, hoping that Eric would either not notice me or not say anything to me. But that was wishful thinking. Stupidly, I sat on the side that was facing Eric. I debated on getting up and moving, maybe to even go and wait in the training room, but before I could, Eric spoke up.

"Too afraid to come near me?" Eric asked, without bothering to look up from his meal.

In the back of the mind I knew that he was trying to rile me up. A huge part of me wanted to snap at him and give him exactly what he wanted but I couldn't. I had to show him that he was not in control of my life. I was in control of my own life. "No," I said.

My voice was soft and barely audible even in the silent room. "So why are you all the way over there?" he asked.

"Because I'm not in the mood to deal with you," I snapped.

"You were in the mood last night."

And that was the last straw. "Not today. I'm not in the mood for this today, Eric. I don't know what happened last night but unless you're willing to talk like an adult about it, I don't want to hear it. I just want to focus on training today," I told him.

My words had obviously surprised him. I took huge bite of my apple and the juice began to dribble down my chin. Eric looked at me and smirked and for a moment. I could practically hear his thoughts. I knew exactly what he was thinking. Wiping the juice off of my chin, I scowled at Eric. No one was in the room besides the two of us and I knew that it meant that we were speaking freely to each other. Normally we both had to keep a little bit of control on ourselves during training hours but when it was just the two of us, we were truly cruel towards each other. Most of the time
anyways.

Other times it was a strange mix of anger and wanting to drag each other to bed. "Why? We all know that you don't need to work on training," Eric told me.

My jaw nearly dropped at his words. Was he actually being nice to me? Maybe he was trying to make up last night to me. "What was that?" I asked softly.

"You'll be Factionless in a matter of weeks. At least you know what's going to happen to you," he told me.

A huge surge of anger shot through me. But I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of making me angry. I shook my head and sighed. He always pissed me off. Every single damn day. I should have known that he wasn't being nice to me. He was just setting me up to look like a fool.

"Alright. Fine. I don't want to deal with this today so I'll be the bigger person and leave," I said before getting up from the bench to leave. "See you later, Eric."

I had barely made it a few steps before Eric called back to me. "Initiate," he grumbled.

Rolling my eyes, I wanted nothing more than to leave and never speak to him again. But he was still my leader and that meant that I couldn't just walk away and pretend like he hadn't said anything to me. He could easily throw me out of Dauntless or make me clean the training room floors for the rest of my life. So I turned back to Eric and nodded for him to tell me whatever he needed.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"You are requested this weekend," he said and my eyes narrowed.

No way. "No, thank you," I snapped.

He obviously understood what I was thinking about as he shook his head. "Not by me, I don't want to deal with you. By Jeanine Matthews," he told me.

My heart dropped into my stomach and I sighed. I had only met Jeanine once but it had seemed like she was trying to goad me into saying that I was Divergent the entire time. She was not someone that I wanted to see again. And I didn't like that she wanted to see me.

"Why?" I asked Eric, somehow thinking that me having to meet with Jeanine was his fault.

Of course the sun could have come crashing into the earth and I probably would have blamed him. "Not sure," he told me with a shrug.

I scowled at him for being so lackadaisical about the situation. Everyone hated Jeanine, even all of Erudite. Eric must have hated her too. But I guessed that he was thinking that it was better me than him. "I want to know why," I pushed.

"Max recommended that I bring an initiate that shows promise. Four seemed to agree with me," Eric told me.

That time my jaw did drop. I knew that Four thought that I showed promise. But Eric did, too? He really thought that I showed some promise? He was always telling me that I was never going to make it in Dauntless. "You think that I show promise?" I asked, a small smile tilting upwards on my mouth.
Eric merely ignored my comment. "Either way, Jeanine wants to speak with a transfer initiate that she believes has potential. Probably to continue peace relations between Erudite and Dauntless," he said.

Not liking the sound of our impending meeting, I nodded anyways. I knew that there was no way that I was getting out of this. Not a meeting with Jeanine Matthews. All of the Dauntless leaders would know about this and so would Erudite. This wasn't just Eric telling me to do something, it was my entire Faction.

"Alright. I guess I don't have a choice," I said.

Eric almost smiled at me. "No. You don't," he said.

But there was still something else bothering me. Something that I needed to know. "I see why Four could have thought that I showed promise," I said.

"God knows why," Eric interrupted.

"Thanks," I snapped. "I have a high ranking and I was relatively good with guns as well. But why you?" Eric looked over at me. We were still sitting at opposite tables and his eyes were searing into me. "You hate me. I would have thought that you would have picked Hunter or Colt or someone like that. Someone a little higher ranked."

He shrugged at me and gave me a look that immediately let me know that I wasn't going to like where this was going. By the look on his face I knew that he was going to bring up something that I wasn't ready to face yet. "I would have thought that after last night you would have known that I don't hate you," Eric told me.

My cheeks burned at the memory of his touch and I tried to push the burning desire for his touch out of my mind. "It still kind of seemed like you hated me," I said, digging at his literally throwing me from the room.

Eric smirked at me, probably knowing exactly what I was thinking about. "I certainly don't like you though," he told me.

That was a good thing though. My want for him would be easier if he hated me and wanted to stay away from me. "Feeling goes both ways," I snapped.

I just wished that he hated me enough to never speak to me again. "After training and dinner you'll come with me back to the same place where you fell from the net. Remember it?" he asked me.

I had only been there once but it was a hard place to forget. "Yes," I said.

"Good."

He got up to leave and I sighed happily. I had gotten out of that conversation with minimal embarrassment. That was all that I wanted, for him to leave. Although the little voice was pleading with him to come back. As he walked past my table, a little something called word vomit came up.

"Eric," I called and the man turned back to me. "What was last night about?"

I could have slapped myself for saying anything. He was leaving! Why the hell did I have to open my big fat mouth? He would have been quiet and not mentioned what had happened. I should have just let him go. But it was too late now. His pierced eyebrow was raised and I sighed. I knew that I was in for it now.
"Why? Did you enjoy it a little more than you let on?" he asked me.

"No," I sneered.

"I don't believe you."

As we'd snapped back and forth, Eric had walked over to stand in front of me. He was now leaned over me, his arms on each side of me. He was completely trapping me against the table. My heartbeat picked up as he bent near me and leaned close so that his mouth was pressed up against my ear. His breath was fanning on my face and I was ashamed to say that I liked the feeling. Florian had never done anything like this. He had always let me lead, only doing things that I was comfortable with. Damien was a little more demanding, but he still let me choose what I wanted.

For some reason, I liked the way that Eric completely took charge. It made my heart race with anticipation of what he was going to do. One of his fingers was just barely touching my back where my shirt had ridden up and I knew that I was blushing. I hated myself for it. They began to tighten over my hip and back.

"Although, Amity," he growled. I hated to say that I was starting to like the way that he called me by my old Faction. "If you want, you still don't have to be in training for another twenty minutes."

And I knew that I would enjoy every second of those twenty minutes. I was absolutely horrified that, for a moment, I had considered saying yes. What the hell was I thinking? But in the back of my mind I thought that for a fleeting moment, he might have wanted me to say yes to. But I couldn't say yes. I would not give him the satisfaction of taking me back to his apartment. Never. So I stood up, standing now stomach to chest with Eric. He was looking down on me with a smirk.

"No. Not now and not ever."

"We'll see."

"We won't. I don't want you. If you're really that lonely, go find Sarah," I said. For a moment I saw that his smirk faltered and he scowled at me. I wondered if maybe she had done something to make him angry. "I have someone to satisfy my needs."

The moment that I had said that, I wanted to punch myself in the face. Why had I told him that? He knew that I didn't like any of the initiates that way. I had essentially just told him that I was having a relationship with one of his members. That was grounds to get me kicked out of Dauntless. Damn me.

"Is that so?" Eric asked me with a quirked eyebrow.


This wasn't going to end well for me. "Tell me something. Did he really make you feel the same way that you felt last night?" Eric asked me and I scoffed.

I would not let him know that I was actually hoping that he might drag me back to his apartment. I needed to take my frustrations out on something. And Eric seemed like the perfect person right now. "I felt nothing last night," I sneered.

Liar. "Please," Eric said, rolling his eyes. "I felt you trembling, I saw the way your eyes dilated, and I felt how fast your heart was beating." He was right. "Just the way that you are now."

My eyes widened. Was I really? "Nothing is happening to me right now," I hissed.
But it was. That was exactly what was happening. Last night and now. "For me," he said proudly. "Or are you just thinking about him?"

I knew that he was trying to get another rise out of me and I was sick of giving it to him. "You don't mean a damn thing to me. You make me feel nothing other than unadulterated hatred," I snarled.

Not wanting to hear anything more, I pushed past him and stormed out of the dining room. "I thought so," Eric called to me.

I wanted nothing more than to go back and hit him as hard as I could, but that would only make him happy. So I forced myself to keep walking. He had bothered me enough today. As I walked through the hall, I passed Heather and the rest of my friends. They all smiled at me and waved at me. I probably should have said something to them but I said nothing.

"Hey, where were you?" Heather asked as I stormed up to them.

Instead of answering her I grabbed her hand and began to drag her away from the rest of our friends. "Come with me," I muttered under my breath.

"Whoa! I guess I'm not hungry. See you guys after breakfast!" Heather called back as I dragged her away. All of our friends were calling back to us but I ignored them. I had to speak with her. "Wait, bring me a muffin!" We turned the corner just barely out of view. "Calm down, what's going through your thick skull?"

But I continued to stay silent as we walked over to the training room and I stopped on the outside. The doors were closed and bolted shut so I figured that we were going to have to talk out here. Something new must be set up in there. It was the only time that the doors were ever locked. Heather was standing with her hands on her hips, a mixed look of irritation and concern on her face. She clearly didn't know what I wanted.

"I need to talk to you," I told her.

"You couldn't have talked to me while I was eating?" she asked me.

For a moment I hesitated, wondering if I should tell her. But I knew that I needed to. So I shook my head. "No," I said quickly.

The irritation faded from her face and was replaced by a look of concern. "Okay. Tell me what you need to tell me," she said. I took a deep breath. I had to tell her this. I was going to explode if I didn't.

"Alright so I'm having a problem," I told Heather, who nodded at me to continue. She was bouncing up and down with excitement and I rolled my eyes. I knew that she was thrilled to help me through my first problem with her as a friend. "Okay, so last night I was with Eric doing my punishment and it was terrible. We were fighting but then he pinned me down and saw the new tattoo and he started to look at it and everything was just so weird! He didn't kiss me or anything like that, but it was more intimate than I've ever been. And I've been so much more intimate! What the hell is happening to me? I hate him. He hates me! I don't like him."

"Okay," she said and I scoffed.

Was oh the only thing that she could say? "Oh?" I repeated, shocked that she couldn't say anything else.
"You're so priceless. Honestly. Seriously I would never have any fun if you weren't here," she told me.

My jaw dropped. I could kill her right now. She was so useless! "Are you kidding?" I asked her.

Heather began to giggle softly and it was a few moments before her soft giggles had turned into loud laughs that led to her nearly hyperventilating. What was so funny about my misery? Suddenly angry at her, I jumped after her. She was now pushed up against the wall as I shook her.

"This - is - not - funny!" I yelled, accentuating every hit with a punch to the arm. She was still laughing, driving my temper through the roof. "Why are you laughing? Is my misery really that amusing?"

She grinned at me and shook her head wiping a few tears out of her eyes. At least I had given her a good laugh. Although, maybe if the same thing had happened between her and Four I would have laughed like that too. Would I have? Probably. So a small smile turned upwards on the corners of my mouth.

"You're so funny Alex. The boys don't see it, they're clueless. But I do," she told me.

I cocked my head at her, nodding for her to continue. "What are you talking about?" I asked her. I literally had no idea what she was talking about.

"You might not like him but you're definitely attracted to him. And I think that he's attracted to you, too," she told me.

While I stared at her, I groaned. If Heather saw it that meant that it had to be true. Candor's didn't lie. Not even ex-Candor's. Heather still told the truth nearly all of the time. "He is not and I am not," I said.

"Yes, you both are. I don't blame either one of you. You're both hot," Heather said blatantly, making us both laugh loudly.

We quickly sobered and I sighed, dropping against the wall. Heather was good to joke around with but I wanted her advice on this. I really had no idea what to do about my Eric situation. He was driving me up the damn wall. I needed to know what to do about him. Either to put an end to our little back and forth conversations or just get it over with.

"But what do I do?" I asked Heather, who sighed, seemingly lost in deep thought. "I mean Eric won't leave me alone. He seems to just want to see me sleep with him, or something like that, just so that he can say that he can. And then he can embarrass me or something. I don't know. I mean, I'm sure that he'd be amazing in bed. I don't think that he would be a disappointment."

My entire admission was complete honesty. There was no point lying to Heather. She had once been a Candor. She picked out my lies easily. Both Heather and I laughed at my previous statement before sobering once more. It seemed that Heather was about as confused with the situation as I was. But finally her eyes lit up and I knew that she had a solution. Whether or not I would like it was another situation entirely.

"Well there's only one thing that I can see working," she told me.

"Okay. What is it?" I asked her, nodding for her to go on.

"Do it!" she yelped.
Had I not been leaning up against the floor I would have fallen to the floor at her suggestion. She was telling me to sleep with him? She was as useless as he was! Why could no one give me an actual solution to this? I couldn't figure out what to do and I was slowly losing my mind.

"Are you out of your damn mind?" I snapped at her.

"He clearly likes egging you on because he knows that it gets to you. So don't let it get to you anymore! Play back with him. Sleep with him," she told me and I cocked an eyebrow.

Was she right? "Would that work? Do you honestly think that he would leave me alone if I just sleep with him and get it over with?" I asked her.

"There's only one way to find out."

"I just want him to lose interest. He's making me lose my mind," I said.

But in the back of my mind I knew, even though him losing interest would be a good thing, I really didn't want him to. "Do what he wants you to do and if he throws it back to you, you know what to do. Just say that he wasn't that good. Say it was a build up. Hurt his pride. If there's one thing that guys can't stand, it's having that insulted," she told me.

If anything that she had just said was true, it was the last part. She was right. The one thing that men couldn't take was having their manhood brought into question. I could only imagine how angry Eric would be if I slept with him and then began telling everyone that he was no good. Especially considering that he was such a sought after partner.

"So you really think that it will work?" I asked Heather.

"I think that it will," she said.

Part of me knew that Heather was right, this was probably the one thing that would work. Or at least it was the best idea that either of us had. But the one thing that was an unknown was the question of what would happen if I did it and I liked it. I wasn't sure that I could handle that. I couldn't be with him and I couldn't just continue to have a longing for him for the rest of my life here in Dauntless.

Leaning up against Heather I sighed. The two of us sat outside the training room before Cole and the rest of our friends came up to us. They were all talking animatedly and smiled when they saw us. Buck looked like he was going to ask me something about what had happened but one sharp glare from him and he snapped his mouth shut. But Cole didn't seem to get the message.

"What the hell are you two on about? We could hear you from all the way down the hallway," he said as he tossed Heather a muffin. I smiled as she jumped up and kissed him on the cheek. "Alex, are you alright? You ran out of the dining room looking more than a little upset."

At that moment Four and Eric walked up to us and unlocked the doors, allowing us to walk in. "I'm fine. Just needed some girl chat," I said quickly, not wanting to irritate either one of them.

We all went to stand against the back wall in the training room and I tried with all my might to ignore Eric. Even from a distance I could tell that he was looking at me. But I was desperately looking away from the spot where we had found ourselves tangled up together last night. Four and Eric were mumbling to each other and I was almost curious to hear what they had to say when Heather began to speak loudly.

"Oh, you guys will never believe this," she said, shooting me a teasing grin.
In the back of my mind I knew that she wasn't going to say anything, but all rational thought flew out the window. Jumping over to Heather, I knocked her onto the ground and the two of us rolled around for a moment before Four snapped at us to knock it off. Heather was laughing loudly and I rolled my eyes at her.

"Relax I wasn't going to say anything!" she hissed at me.

And I had known that she wasn't going to say anything. But that didn't mean that I hadn't had a momentary moment of panic. I got off of her and helped her up, noticing that Eric was glaring at me out of the corner of his eyes. He knew that I had told her about him and that made my heart leap into my throat. Not good. I knew that I was going to get hell for that later.

"Bitch," I muttered as Heather laughed.

The boys were standing off to the side of us looking completely lost. But that was a good thing. I didn't want them to know anything about the strange relationship between Eric and me. I finally looked to the far corner of the room and grinned. I had been hoping that we would do something like this.

"Hey, it looks like knife throwing today," I called.

"Awesome," Buck grinned happily.

All attention was taken off of Heather and me as people went to observing the knife throwing stations. Each station had a plastic table with five knives laid out on them. They were small and sharp. The targets were shaped like people and they seemed to be made of a synthetic plastic. The panel around the targets were wood. The targets were set back about fifteen or twenty feet from the throwing lines. There were also thirteen targets, one for each of us.

"Initiates!" Four yelled, startling most of us out of our thoughts. "Gather around."

We all nodded and began to cross the room. We went into a slow jog and headed for the other side of the room where Four and Eric were waiting. Eric's arms were crossed over his chest and he was watching with a smirk on his face. Four was standing, flipping a knife of his own in his hands. It was almost hypnotizing to watch.

"I'll be demonstrating how to throw a knife properly. You will follow me once I'm done. I suggest that you pay attention. In a few weeks you'll be throwing them at each other and learning to fight with them," Four told us.

We would be throwing them at each other? A few of the initiates laughed but I didn't. This was Dauntless. They were crazy. They didn't joke about things like that. And judging by the look on Four's face, I knew that he was completely serious. Eric smirked as the laughter died quickly. I could imagine that he was going to want to throw a knife at me. I wasn't sure what would happen. Maybe he'd finally get around to killing me.

We all watched closely as Four took a target in the center of the room. He moved slowly and I knew that it was for our benefit. He probably could have thrown the knife and gotten a bulls-eye without taking more than five seconds. He put his dominant leg behind him but I could tell that the weight was on his non dominant leg, which was slightly behind him. He raised the knife to the side of his head, throwing with his hands wrapped around the handle. His thumb was out and pressing on the handle. His arm was in a ninety degree angle as well.

He took a deep breath before shifting his weight from his dominant to non-dominant leg and swung
the knife downwards. When it was about level with his forehead he released and I watched in wonder as the knife sailed into the middle of the target, burying into the hilt. As Four went to grab the knife I knew that no one would be able to do that. Not for a while at least. But I would have to try my best. I didn't need any more reason for Eric to yell at me.

It was incredible that he could do something like that. Everyone was staring at the target in wonder, probably imagining themselves being able to do that one day. Four probably had perfect aim. But then again, he had been doing this for at least a few years. Chances were that we would have a much harder time today.

"Get to work!" Eric yelled, when he realized that no one was moving.

We didn't need to be told more than once. Everyone went scattering to the stations and I found myself in the middle of the stations. Damn. I had wanted a side spot. But they had been taken first. I was in between Heather on my right and Dante on my left. I had five knives and I knew that I would have to make them count. Eric would be watching my first throws carefully.

A few people were already throwing and I nearly smirked as I heard them all clattering to the floor. Not that I thought that my throws were going to be any better. But hey, a girl can dream. I grabbed my first knife and tested out the balance. It was perfect. Trying as hard as possible to mimic Four's stance, which wasn't easy, considering he had only showed us once, I prepared to throw the first knife. I pulled back and threw the knife as hard as I could.

The knife went sailing towards the target and I watched as it hit the target in the lower stomach at the center. It was a few inches below the center of the target. The only thing was that it hit handle first and went clattering to the floor. Heather grinned at me though. Her first throw hadn't even been close. My second and third throws were about the same. None had stuck in the board yet. I kept hitting it by the handle.

As I threw my fourth knife I grinned. The throw had been way off, lodging in the bicep on the right arm, but it had hit by the blade. It stuck in the target for a moment before it went clattering to the floor. I was still thrilled though. I was the third person to hit the target. Hunter and Jax had hit theirs as well. My second and third throws were about the same. None had stuck in the board yet. I kept hitting it by the handle.

"Nice throw!" Heather yelled at me and I smiled.

Dante was also congratulating me. I knew that it would be laughable to any full Dauntless member, but for only the fourth knife I had ever thrown, I was rather impressed. As time went on I watched the others throwing their knives as well. After the first hour had passed people were already getting much better. Heather had shockingly good aim. Most of her knives were sailing right towards the center of the target but she wasn't throwing hard enough to get them to stick. A few had stuck in the target, but those had been slightly off. Either way, it would be more points for them.

As I looked down the rest of the line I began to judge everyone else. To my displeasure Colt was actually halfway decent with the knives. He was better with guns, but most of us were. His aim wasn't great, I attributed that to the fact that he was moving too quickly and sloppily, it was the same way that he fought. He was throwing hard enough to sink the knives all the way into the hilt of the knife. It made me suck in a breath. They were mostly in the sides, but that was where your ribs were. He probably wouldn't be able to kill you but it would certainly ruin your day.

Looking further down the line I watched Buck. He was doing alright. He was probably better than most people but he certainly wasn't the best. Like with most things, it was Hunter. Buck was only hitting the target about half of the time. Less than me. But he made up for it with his aim. He was
hitting near the center, close to the chest. None had gone directly into the center but a few had been close. Most of his were going in between the stomach and chest. I could tell that the one thing that was throwing his aim off was that his hips weren't in alignment. That was something that Eric had taught me while we were doing shooting lessons.

Next to him, I was more than shocked to see that Draven was not very good with the knives. It seemed that Four and Eric were shocked as well. They were watching him closely and I was fine with that. Four made me nervous, as I hoped that he wasn't disappointed with me, and Eric wasn't yelling at me. I liked Draven but it was better him than me. He was still hitting the target but it wasn't in fatal spots. More places that would just slow a person down. He would have a good chance with stopping a still target, like in a sneak attack. But he would have very little chance against a moving target. Then again, we all would. Draven wasn't very great with guns either. But he was an excellent fighter. That would make up for his lack of skills here.

One spot over from him was Skylar. I sighed at the girl. She was bad with pretty much everything that had to do with Dauntless and she knew that as well. Her aim was good. The knives were mostly towards the center of the target but it made no difference how good her aim was if she was just nicking them or hitting them with the handle. Most of the knives were hitting by the handle, like mine had done earlier, or they would stick for a moment before falling out. Four and Eric had completely written her off. At least they weren't yelling at her though. I knew that if she was a little stronger her knife throwing skills would be pretty damn good.

To my complete displeasure, Jade was very good with the knives. She seemed to know it too as she get a little cockier with each throw that she did. It absolutely thrilled me when she missed. On more than one occasion, when I had gone to get my knives back, Jade had 'missed' her target, coming very close to skinning me a few times. Even though I was a few spots over from her. One had come extremely close to taking off my head and I had fought back a laugh when Four had ripped her a new one. He had also given her the duty of cleaning the training room that night. After that I had noticed that her throws were all directed towards her target. She probably didn't want to tempt fate and get Eric mad with her too. But he was probably enjoying her attempts to flay me.

Just as I had expected, Hunter was very good with the knives. Exactly like he was with everything else. It made me mad but I knew that Hunter worked extremely hard so he probably did deserve it. Although I would hate him a lot less if he weren't friends with Colt and Jade. Despite the fact that he very rarely stooped to their level, I still despised him. His throws were extremely hard and most of them sunk to the hilt in the target, impressing me. A few of his throws had been pretty far off but most of them were going straight to the torso. He had even managed to get a few in the head. Even Eric looked a little impressed at his skills. I silently reminded myself never to get into a fight with Hunter.

To my left I watched Dante throw for a minute. He was decent with the knives. His throws were pretty hard, which made sense considering he was pretty damn strong. The only problem was that his aim wasn't great. That seemed to be the problem for most of us. Although when he did hit the board, usually one of his five shots, they were pretty good. He was clearly copying Four's stance exactly but that wasn't working very well. We had to alter our stances slightly, since none of us were the same size as Four. He was bigger than Dante, which was probably why Dante's aim wasn't that great.

Next to him was Raven and I was more than shocked to see her. She was incredibly good with the knives. Everyone was shocked, having stopped to watch her when she had gotten her first center shot. She had blushed and stopped throwing until everyone had looked away, earning her a few shouts from Eric. Asshole. Her only problem was that she didn't throw that hard. That made a few of her shots not stick to the board. But they were almost all going into the center. A few were stuck in the center of the ring at the moment and I smirked, glad that she was at least good with something.
Four and Eric both looked completely shocked with her. Raven was probably one of the best knife throwers here and that made me happy. At least she had something to her name.

Down a few more spots was Jax, who seemed to have finally found his weakness. He was good at the calisthenics, guns, fighting, and was damn smart too. But knives just didn't seem to be his thing. But it seemed that, for most of us, knife throwing was a weakness. He was throwing pretty hard but they very rarely actually hit the target. Most of them were going to the floor or to the wooden panel around the target. He was the victim of most of Eric's ridicule today and I felt terrible. I knew that it was my fault.

On Heather's other side was Cole and I was glad to see that he was actually pretty good with the knives. He was typically in the middle of the pack with everything but he was one of the better people with knife throwing. More than once I saw Heather shooting him appreciative glances. I had to bite back laughter. They were both so obvious. They needed to kiss already. Although she was probably thinking the same thing about Eric and me. Cole's knife startled me as he hit the area that would have been the center of the heart. I smirked at him. It was the first time that he had made a perfect hit. He seemed thrilled about it. Although a snap from Eric made Cole go back to throwing silently. He would certainly be able to slow someone down, if not kill them.

The last person that I watched was Jet. He was also one of the better knife throwers. Not that I was surprised. Jet was one of the best initiates. Not that his ranking really showed that. Although I wasn't complaining. I wanted to keep my number five spot. Most of his shots were going to vital areas and I had heard Four praise him on a few occasions. His throws were strong, too. Like most of the guys, he threw as hard as he possibly could. I was impressed with him. Besides Hunter he was probably the best. Raven and me were probably the best girls.

For the remaining few minutes of training that we had before lunch I enjoyed my time with the knives. For once I wasn't getting punched in the eyes and receiving only minimal ridicule from Eric. I thought that it was better than most days. Most of my shots were now going towards the center and almost all of them were sticking now. I smirked every time that I made a bulls-eye, knowing that it was driving him up the damn wall. Every time that I did something right it made him angry. He liked seeing me fuck up my training.

More than once over the past four hours Eric had made cruel comments to me that I had tried to brush off. Most were about how I wasn't good enough or he could cut me into little pieces before I even had the chance to pick up the knife. If Eric wasn't here I would have punched myself in the face for thinking that his comments were getting my pulse racing. For whatever reason I liked the threats more than the peace and love that had always been in Amity. They were always been kind to their women, never even stating that their women were being annoying. I loved the way that Eric challenged me and the way that I could challenge him back. It made me feel tough.

I had been about to go get the knives from my target when Four called out to us. "All right. Put down the knives and head to lunch. When you come back you'll be practicing with different kinds of knives. These are standard but there are smaller and larger knives. Heavier and lighter. You will get to know all of them. Go!" he yelled when we didn't move fast enough.

Everyone jumped and we all began to scramble to get to the dining room. Cole, Buck, Heather, Jax, Cole, and Dante were all walking with me as we exited the training room and headed into the dining room. Thankfully Four had let us out a little early so there was no line for food.

"Damn, that was awesome!" Heather yelled and I smiled at her.

She might not have been the best but at least she was having fun. "That was fun. I was waiting for knife throwing," I said.
"And you're pretty good," Buck said.

"Thanks."

"I mean I'm not one to promote unnecessary violence but can you imagine the look's on the people back in our home Factions?" Heather asked.

I scoffed at her. My parents would probably die if they could see me right now. "They'd die," I said.

"The ones that thought that we were nuts coming here! We could kill them without lifting a finger now!" she chirped.

We all laughed as we got into line and picked up our lunches. I settled for a burger and a bottle of water. I wasn't that hungry. Knife throwing was hard but it wasn't draining like fighting or gun shooting. I was sure that I didn't need anything high in protein. Plus the fish really wasn't looking too good.

"Excuse me, did I misunderstand you saying something about unnecessary violence?" Cole asked Heather and we all laughed.

He was right about that. Heather shoved him to the side and I smiled at her. She knew that she was caught. "Well I'm not saying that I would kill them. Just that I could," Heather defended herself.

"But she's right. I mean my family would freak out if they saw me right now. I was never violent and I hardly ever got in trouble. I'm pretty sure that they thought that I was actually slightly insane when I told them that I was going to Dauntless during the Choosing Ceremony," Cole said.

I turned to him with wide eyes. It wasn't just me. Everyone did. Cole had told his parents that he was coming to Dauntless? I thought that people never talked about where they were going to go. Even if it was obvious. It seemed that Buck had the same look on his face.

"You told your parents that you were going to pick Dauntless?" Buck asked.

Cole nodded. "Yeah, man, of course," he said.

Buck laughed and shook his head. "Man I could have never done that. I made my parents think until the last minute that I was going to stay in Candor. I couldn't face the look on their faces if they knew that I wasn't going to stay with them forever," he said.

Nodding at him as we took our seats, I threw my arm over his shoulders. I knew exactly how Buck felt. I would never have dared tell my parents that I wasn't staying in Amity. I couldn't deal with the looks that they would have given me. "I get it Buck," I said and he looked over at me. "I didn't tell my family that I was going to leave either. It was awful, hearing how proud they were of me that their only child was going to stay in Amity. I never really outwardly showed that I was going to leave Amity. For a long time I would have been too afraid to leave. I was safe there. I had a promised life there." They all nodded. I was sure that most of them felt that way about their old homes. "But I wouldn't give it up for anything. I love it here. I love you guys."

Heather pulled me into a hug and I smiled at her. I may have lost Florian and Iris but I had gained so many more good friends. And I hadn't really lost them. They would always be in my heart. And maybe the day would come that I would be able to visit them again. After all, I really didn't want the Choosing Ceremony to be the last time that I saw them.

"We love you, too," Jax told me.
He really was a sweet guy. I wished that I could have been attracted to him, but he was more like a brother. He shoved Heather off of me before grabbing me in a hug as well. Everyone laughed as we rocked together for a moment before he let me go and stole a fry from my plate.

"I told my family but it wasn't a shock. They always knew that I was going to leave," Jax said and I nodded. I was pretty sure that my parents had secretly known it in the back of their minds but they had tried to deny it. "I was smart enough that I could have made it in Erudite but I wouldn't have ever been happy there."

That seemed to be the same with a lot of us. We would have been just fine in our old Factions but we wouldn't have been happy. Even with the risk of being Factionless, trying to be Dauntless was so much better. It was the place that we fit in. Where we didn't have to conform to any rules.

"Same with me in Candor. I was good there. It wasn't hard for me to be able to tell the truth. In fact, I love telling the truth," she stated proudly. Cole snorted loudly and Heather punched him in the arm. Judging from the look on his face I imagined that it had hurt. "I mean it though! I would have been able to make it in Candor, but I can't be diplomatic and truthful. I had too much of a sharp tongue and a bad temper. Dauntless was a much better fit for me."

Candor and Erudite were the most common transfers to Dauntless. The three Factions really weren't all that different. "Me too. It seemed like I was always doing everything against the Amity ways. They don't mind open love but I feel like it should stay behind closed doors," I said and everyone nodded.

"You sound like a Stiff," Jet teased.

I whacked him over the back of the head. "Trust me when I say that I am not a Stiff," I said.

Cole blanched slightly and covered his ears. "Oh gross, can we not talk about that?" he pleaded.

Heather laughed softly as I dug back into my fries. At least I wasn't seeming too prudish. It wasn't that I was against being close with someone - that would make me a damn hypocrite. But I didn't want to see what people were doing. It was all a matter of doing it behind closed doors.

"They recommend always solving things using calm words, but sometimes you need to fight it out. They believe that no one ever needs to be anything but happy, but no one can do that. We all have to be angry, sad, and anxious sometimes. No one can be happy all the time. It just doesn't make any sense," I told my friends.

Cole nodded at me and I watched as he nearly inhaled the entire burger in one bite. That was rather impressive. Although Heather looked repulsed. "It seems to me like a lot of Factions are that way," Cole said. Factions didn't seem to understand that people couldn't always be the one thing that they believed in. "They expect people to always be one way but that isn't the way that it is. We all gave to act in different ways sometimes," he said.

There was something about the way that he spoke... I raised my eyebrows, briefly wondering if Cole was Divergent. He certainly sounded like it at the moment. I wanted to ask him but it was dangerous. Tori had told me to never speak of it. To anyone. The table was silent for a moment before Buck spoke up once more.

"That's the way that the Faction system works. We all have a distinct personality trait about us and we have to act on it. That's the whole point of the Factions," Buck said and I nodded.

He was right. I just didn't think that the Faction system was always the best way to solve things.
“Yeah, but is it really fair to make us act one way for our entire lives?” Cole asked.

"Of course not. But that's also why Erudite are so against Divergent," Buck stated nonchalantly.

Having not expected him to say Divergent, nevertheless know what it was, I choked on the water that I was drinking and spit it out on the table. Everyone dropped their food and looked at me, Heather patting my back gently. I had no idea that anyone even knew what Divergent was beside me.

"Are you alright?" Buck asked me once I had calmed down.

Trying to calm myself down and not sound like I was panicking too much I took a deep breath. I didn't want to draw attention to myself, any more than I already had. I'd already made it obvious enough that Divergent meant something to me. They were my friends but I didn't know if they still would be once they found out what I was.

"I'm fine. First of all, how do you know what Divergent is? And what is it?" I asked him, not wanting to seem like I was already well versed on the subject matter.

"Divergence is rare apparently," he said and I nodded. Not so rare. One was sitting right in front of him. Maybe two. "But those who have it hide it because it's so dangerous. They can't be controlled."

"If it's an Erudite thing, how do you know? You're from Candor," I said.

"Yeah I am from Candor but we had Erudite people visiting all the time. My parents were high up in the chain of command in Candor and I overheard a meeting that I shouldn't have one time," Buck said and I nodded. That actually made sense to me. "My parents found out so they sat me down to explain it."

"I've just heard that word before and heard how bad it was. People told me never to speak of it. I didn't think that anyone else knew what it was," I said softly.

Four was a few tables down and I noticed him perk up at our conversation. We dropped our voices, knowing that it was a bad idea to make this a loud conversation. "It is dangerous. That's why no one talks about it," Buck said.

I was trying extremely hard to suppress a scoff. They couldn't know what I was. Not even Heather. I trusted her but I didn't want to burden her with the knowledge of what I was. "But I don't understand. Why can't they be controlled?" Heather asked.

I was grateful that she did. I wanted to know too but I had to be careful with what I said on this topic. "Think about it," Buck said, trying to egg her on.

But she was no an Erudite. "They're people just like the rest of us. I don't see what's so different about them rather than the rest of us," she said and I couldn't help but smiling.

That was why I loved Heather. Shrugging his shoulders I was a little surprised that Buck wasn't as concerned about the Divergent problem as he had seemed when he had first said the term. Maybe he really didn't care. Maybe he just wanted the conversation to be over with. I almost couldn't blame him.

"What makes them different is that they have more than one aptitude," he said and I heard the gasps of all of the other people at the table. People clearly didn't think that it was possible. "They could actually have all five aptitudes." Everyone's eyebrows raised. Even mine. I had four of the aptitudes. I lacked Candor. "And that means that they are strong. They have control over their own minds and
that means that Erudite can't control what they do. They are also immune to any mind control serums." I smirked softly. That was actually something that could come in handy. "They can go under sims and peace serums but there are certain mind control sims that don't work on them. Easy finds. I hear that they have scanners now too. Shows their aptitudes."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

My heart caught in my throat at his last words. They had a scanner that would tell them whether or not someone was Divergent? That was damn terrifying. They could just point it at me and know that I wasn't normal. "It scans over how much aptitude that the person has for all five Factions," he said.

"Wow," I muttered.

"I didn't know that people like that really existed," Dante said, speaking up for the first time since we had left the training room.

"Do you know about them?" Jet asked.

"Not really. My mom told me a rumor about them once but I didn't really know that they were real. I just thought that it was a story told to kids to make them believe in the one Faction system thing," he said and I smiled. Dante was so clueless. "Do you think those people are really dangerous though?" he asked Buck.

I thought that Buck was going to say something but before he got the chance Cole spoke up. "Anything can be dangerous if put into the wrong hands," he said with a little shrug. That only increased my suspicions that Cole was Divergent as well. He seemed to care free about the Divergent thing. Or maybe he just really didn't care. We lapsed into a short silence for a moment before the conversation spiked back up once more, this time about something much less serious. We were chatting about knife throwing and we all were laughing, deciding who had the most chance of cutting themselves with the knife. Everyone seemed to think that it would be Cole. Poor Cole. Although Heather had been one of the people that had decided it was him.

"Back into the training room initiates! Now!" Four yelled, all too soon.

We all sighed but got up anyways, going back to knife training. At least it was better than having to constantly fight with each other. The second half of knife training had gone much quicker than the first. After putting some fuel into our bodies, people seemed to be getting a lot better with the knives. It lead to a lot less yelling from Eric and Four. We used heavy knives, light ones, and ones that weren't balanced well. I was the best with lighter knives and I was next to miserable with the unweighted ones. I had made some incredible throws to the center of target and had earned some praise from Four. It was nice to hear. Now I just needed a compliment from Eric. Almost all of my knives were sticking into the target now. A few had gone to the floor but most were on target. And I had only missed the target completely a handful of times. I went to throw a knife that wasn't balanced and sighed as it went clattering to the floor, not even nicking the board. Damn.

Sighing at myself, I went to grab it but Eric's voice stopped me in my tracks. It was the first time he had spoken to me since the morning. "That was pathetic," he told me.

I forced myself to ignore him, knowing that he was trying purposely to rile me up. "Thank you," I said.

He had seen that I was pretty good. He knew that this one was only an accident. "Go pick it up why
don't you?" Eric told me in a teasing voice.

"I have more."

Shaking my head, I grabbed my next knife instead. I still had two more. I threw that one and smirked when it hit the center of the target. "Funny how luck seems to come by at the ideal moment," Eric told me.

He had to be joking. Why the hell couldn't he just walk away and leave me alone? I was now shaking with anger. It made it even worse that Eric might have been right. That could have just been luck. I threw my last knife and watched as it sailed into the center of the target and buried itself to the hilt. It was the first time that I had done that. I turned to Eric with a bright smirk on my face.

"Now do that with all of them and you might have a shot at surviving the Factionless district," he told me.

He didn't look impressed with my throw even in the slightest. He walked away from me and I found myself fuming. Had he really just said that to me? What was it with him? Why did he really not think that I could make it here? I had proved myself time and time again, but he still thought that I couldn't do it. Grabbing one of the lighter knives off of Heather's table I could hear her protest but I ignored her. I wasn't seeing anything but red right now. Without thinking of the consequences that were sure to come for me, I did something both very brave and very stupid.

Eric P.O.V.

Eric was walking away from the Amity, glad that he had pushed her buttons. She was so easy. As he walked back over to Four, a happy grin on his face from the knowledge that she was still steaming, he felt something whiz by his head. A tiny strand of hair fell from his head and Eric froze where he was standing. She hadn't just done that. There was no way that she had done something like that. An initiate would never do that. Even a member would never do that.

But the knife that went clattering to the floor a few feet in front of Eric told him that she had. She had gotten so angry that she had thrown a knife at him. The room was silent and Four's face was frozen at something in between fear and shock. It was so silent that Eric could hear his heavy breathing like the grating of metal in the room. His entire body tensed as he turned back to face her. The fury had faded from her face and it was now replaced with fear.

It was so quiet that someone could have heard a pin drop and it would have sounded like the music in the Pit. Seething and forcing himself to resist throwing a knife through her pretty skull, he stood with his entire body completely rigid. She would pay for that. He would kill her. He was going to kill her.

"Get - over - here," Eric said lowly, taking a deep breath with every word he said. He had never been so angry. Not in all of his years. "Now. With me."

She walked over to him and he saw the fear in everyone's eyes, but none of it mattered. None but her. She walked up to him numbly and he grabbed her wrist so hard that he felt it pull from the socket for a moment. She yelped in pain as he dragged her out of the training room. Eric could hear Four yelling to bring her back and let him deal with her but Eric ignored him. He was well in his rights to punish her. She had attacked a Dauntless leader. He had every right to kick her ass right out of Dauntless. And he was seriously debating it.

He had never really been anything other than irritated with her. But right now he was sure that he was going to kill her. He wanted her out of here. He dragged her out to the Chasm and he could feel
her shaking the entire time. She was terrified of him and he could tell. Standing on the middle of the platform he stared down at her. He had never seen her look so small before.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Eric sneered at her, having to resist throwing her over the railing.

She was silent for a moment and Eric could have sworn that he saw tears glistening in the corner of her eyes. He didn't care. He wanted to kill her. He wanted to wring her neck until she stopped twitching. "Eric, I'm so - so sorry. I didn't mean to do it," she told him pathetically.

Her voice was breaking as he sneered at her. "Is that so?" he asked her, his voice devoid of any emotion.

"You were just making me so angry that I couldn't think straight. I didn't really want to hurt you. Please. I'm so sorry. It won't ever happen again," she told him.

Her voice was even weaker than it had been a second ago. He knew that he was terrifying her, and it had never made him happier. She was damn right that it would never happen again. He acted without thinking. For once, he didn't want to drag her into his apartment. He wanted to watch the life leave her eyes.

"No. You aren't sorry. Not yet you aren't," he snarled at her.

Eric pushed her back into the railing, feeling a few of her bones crunch at the rough impact. She cried out in pain as she shrunk away from him. It was taking everything in him not to throw her over the edge of the Chasm. She seemed to know how close he was to doing so as well. She grabbed his shirt but he shoved her off of him, slapping her roughly across the face. She cried out softly and Eric stared at the red hand print forming on her face. He hadn't wanted to hit her but he had. And he didn't regret it. She had to know just how serious what she had done was.

"I'll show you exactly what happens when some smart-mouth initiate thinks that they're better than everyone else. How would you feel getting in a real fight with me? Right here. You want to know just how far that fall is?" he asked her.

Once more he pushed her back into the railing and he could hear the bars groaning in protest at her weight. Despite the fact that she didn't weight much, the bars were creaking loudly. They were old. He could practically feel the panic rising in her chest. He was glad that she was scared. He wanted her to be scared. She had it coming.

"Please," she said, so desperately that for a moment Eric was thrown. He had never heard her plead. He had never thought that she would plead like that. "Eric, I'm sorry. I'll do as many nights of hard work as you want. You can punch me in the face all night long, just let me out of here."

She was begging him. He nearly smirked. He was glad to hear just how frightened she was. Maybe she would stop talking back against him. Maybe it would make it easier to just insult her and then walk away. He wanted her but he never wanted to admit it. And right now he would rather kill her. Maybe this was the perfect ending to their relationship. She looked like she was about to say something else, but before she got the chance, the railing gave way. To Eric's horror, she fell.

"Eric!" she screamed so loudly that he felt his ears ringing.

For how much he wanted to scare her he hadn't actually wanted to kill her. He was angry with her, furious even, but he hadn't really wanted to kill her. The railing caught her around the face and arms as it fell with her. He could already see a bloody cut on her forehead. Eric collapsed to the ground of
the catwalk, just barely catching her. He was caught off guard at the sudden panic that went through his chest. He couldn't let her fall.

He caught her hand but it kept slipping. She was already wet from sweating but now her entire body was wet from the rushing water. He kept losing his grip on her hands and the next time she fell from his grasp, she fell too far. He knew that it was something from the desperation of not wanting to let her go and the pain in his chest from seeing the fear in her eyes that made him so determined to keep her alive. He grabbed out for the only thing that he could reach. Her hair. She screamed in pain and he cringed slightly. He couldn't imagine that it felt good.

But he had to save her. He had to get her up from there. Her screams had subsided slightly as he grabbed the sleeve of her shirt, taking some of the pressure off of her scalp, trying so desperately to lift her back onto the catwalk. But his relief didn't last long. The shirt that she was wearing was loose. It came off of her body and Eric dropped it into the water, almost losing his grip on her as well. He couldn't let her fall. He would never forgive himself. This was his fault in the first place.

He was able to finally grab her hand and she dug her nails into it, refusing to give up. His hand was screaming in pain from her nails but he knew that it was nothing compared to the pain in her skull. He pulled her up finally and was almost shocked when he was able to pull her back onto the walkway. They both collapsed and she fell onto him. They were both panting but he felt her heart hammering in her chest. It was beating so fast that Eric thought that she might go into cardiac arrest at any moment.

They both laid in silence for a moment. He could see her chest heaving as his arm fell over her waist. She was soaked to the bone as her head fell against the catwalk. Eric let her lay there for a moment before pushing her off of him. She hit the railings and he could hear her dry heaving softly. A twinge set in to Eric's chest that was completely unfamiliar. But he knew exactly what it was. Guilt. He had nearly killed her. He actually felt bad. He had wanted to scare her, almost wanted to kill her, but he hadn't really.

"Come here. Get up," he said, offering her a hand up.

There were almost tears in her eyes. He could see how terrified she was. But now she was emotionless. She was still in complete shock from her near-death experience. It probably wouldn't hit her for a while, what had just happened. She was shaking under him and looked like she might collapse at any given moment.

"Are you alright?" Eric asked.

The Amity nodded weakly, probably not up to speaking yet. She wasn't crying and Eric was shocked to see it. Anyone else would have been a bawling mess. Eric nodded at her to follow him and she did so, walking quietly through the compound to Eric's apartment. As he led her into the apartment he realized that she was the first girl that he had ever brought here without the intention of sleeping with her. He walked into his bedroom and grabbed a clean shirt, bringing it out and handing it to her. She was sitting on a kitchen stool when he came back out to her.

"Here," he told her.

She was curled in on herself and Eric knew that position. She was terrified, having just come face to face with death. She slipped the shirt on and Eric realized that she was the first girl to ever wear his clothing. It looked good on her. She grabbed a tea mug that he had given her and he sat on the other stool, not saying anything to her. He wouldn't have even known what to say. She sipped on her drink and they sat there for what must have been hours. They said nothing and neither one of them moved. Not even to go to the bathroom. They didn't even look at each other.
But, finally, a long time after they had first gotten back to Eric's apartment, she moved faster than he had thought was possible. She moved her hand out and slapped him across the face. Normally he would have hit her back, as Dauntless had no problem with hitting women when they had it coming, but he didn't. For once Eric knew he had deserved it. Her knife had only been to startle him. He had almost killed her.

"That was for nearly killing me. And not even saying that you were sorry," she told him. He was shocked to hear how hoarse her voice was. "God I knew you were an ass but I never thought that you were that cruel." But he was impressed.

She still hadn't cried. She looked like she was going strong. He wondered if she ever actually cried. For a moment Eric was actually somewhat hurt that she thought that he wanted to kill her. He would never kill an initiate. Not unless it really came down to it. And he certainly wouldn't kill her. Everything that had happened with them out on the Chasm walkway had been an accident. He hated that she thought that it was on purpose.

"You really think that I meant for you to slip through the bars? I wanted to scare you, not kill you," he explained.

He wasn't sure why he was explaining himself to her. Normally he would have just shrugged it off and sent the initiate on their way. He wouldn't have even brought them back here. He shouldn't have brought her back here. He couldn't explain why he had. He wasn't actually sure why he brought her here and didn't just send her to the infirmary.

"It doesn't matter!" she yelled, startling Eric. "You should have never put me in that position in the first place! I get wanting to scare me into behaving and controlling my emotions a little bit better but for God's sake Eric, I am not your damn punching bag! You nearly killed me today, and it wasn't the first time! You speak to me like I'm less than the dirt on the bottom of your shoe! And then you pretend like you want to sleep with me. Leave me the hell alone! I'm here to earn a place in this damn Faction! I've fought just as hard, if not harder, than the rest of them to be here! Maybe you never had to prove yourself but I do!"

Eric had never liked being shouted at. Not by anyone. And especially not by her. Someone had to put her in her place and it seemed like he was the only one that was willing to do it. He knew just how upset that she was. He knew what it was like to have to prove himself. He knew what she was going through.

"To who? To your parents? They aren't here," he snarled at her, seeing the hurt briefly flash through her eyes at the mention of her parents.

"I know that," she sneered.

"They're back in Amity and they could care less about what happens to your ungrateful ass," he told her harshly. He was not willing to go soft for anyone. Especially not for her. He didn't hate her, but he certainly didn't like her. He was just intrigued by her. "Your friends? They haven't thought about you since you left. I promise you that. The people here? News flash, they don't want you to succeed. Not really. They want your spot. And to yourself? You shouldn't have to. It's pathetic that you think so lowly of yourself that you have to fight for a spot here to notice your self-worth. Pathetic. Even for an Amity."

It was worse than he had said to anyone in a long time. He always liked to say things to get to people but he rarely resorted in saying things like that to hit so low below the belt. He saw the tears build in her eyes once more and he growled. He did not want to see that. He wanted to hate her.
"I hate you," she told him, so softly she had barely spoken.

She once more reached out and slapped him across the face. He was growing tired of this game. He didn't like the way that he felt with her here. He wanted this to end. He saw her raise her hand once more to hit him and for a moment he almost let her. But he was not going to let this little thing but him around. So he grabbed her hand and twisted her wrist slightly. He knew that it was hurting her as he pulled her close to him so that he was sitting and she was now standing, her torso positioned in between his legs. He wanted her. He wanted her so desperately.

"Don't you dare hit me again," he said.

He was grabbing the top of the shirt that she was wearing and pulling her into him. He prided her for not looking away. He was close enough to kiss her and for a fleeting moment, he really wanted to. He almost did. But he refused to do that. He wanted to throw her back onto his bed and have his way with her. He wanted to do all of those things as their heads came closer together. But he couldn't. She had to be the one to come to him. He'd made that clear to her. She was already so close to giving into him. He could tell.

But to her credit, she refused. "No. I won't. You don't deserve me to waste another breath on you," she said harshly.

He couldn't help but to wonder if she really meant it. He hoped that she didn't. She moved back a few steps and Eric simply sat there, watching her. He wanted to see if she would really leave. She looked like she wasn't sure what she should do. But finally she took a few steps forward to him and leaned over to him. Eric thought that she would kiss him. He wanted her to. But she didn't. Not really. She planted a small kiss on his cheek, so soft that it was like a ghost.

"Thank you though. You could have let me fall. Maybe you should have. You saved my life. I guess it's your one redeeming quality. Good night, Eric," she said before turning and leaving.

The door closed softly behind her as her figure disappeared, leaving the air in the room tense. As she left Eric realized that it was the first time that a woman left his room and he was actually sorry to see her go. Some part of him actually hurt at seeing her go. And it wasn't from the slaps. It was also right then that he realized that she was the first woman to ever kiss him on the cheek. Not out of lust, but out of thanks. Some form of love. As close as he had ever felt.

Alex's P.O.V.

After leaving Eric's room I felt something akin to sadness. I hated what had just happened between us. But he had nearly killed me. I had never been as scared as when he had nearly dropped me as I hung over the Chasm. I had nearly died and he couldn't have even said that he was sorry. I hadn't meant to throw the knife at him. I had regretted it the moment that I had done it. I had thought that he understood that. But I was wrong.

He wasn't the man that I had hoped that he would be. I knew what was going to have to happen now. I would have to avoid Eric. I had nearly killed him and he had nearly killed me. But he had saved me. Still, one good deed wasn't enough to to redeem a man from a lifetime of wickedness. I had always wanted to believe that Eric had some good in him but I now knew that he didn't. He couldn't even say two words. I hoped that I had dug the knife into his chest when I had thanked him for at least saving me. I wanted him to know that I didn't hate him. I was only disappointed.

Part of me knew that I should have gone back to the dorms to tell my friends that I was still alive but I didn't think that I could face them just yet. I needed some form of comfort. And words weren't what I wanted right now. Eric only lived a few doors down to Damien so I let my feet drag me down to
his apartment. I knocked gently and stared in shock at a disheveled looking Damien. He was wearing a pair of loose black pajama pants and no shirt. I blushed as I glanced at the clock over his shoulder. It was nearly eleven at night. I must have been brooding for a damned long time. He looked absolutely shocked to see me.

"Alex. What are you doing here? Why are you all wet?" he asked.

Wet? I glanced down and realized that I was still a little wet from my dip in the Chasm. "Uh..." I muttered dumbly.

"Come in," he said.

He ushered me into his room, not wanting anyone to see an initiate about ready to walk into a full Dauntless member's room at almost eleven at night. I walked in and stood awkwardly by his bed, suddenly feeling stupid for coming here. Every time that I had been here before had been for something fun. This wasn't fun. I was terrified and hurt from what had happened.

Damien moved towards me and smiled weakly. "Are you okay?" he asked me.

"Eric. I threw a knife at him in training today," I told Damien. He looked like he was in between passing out and laughing. He managed to do neither. "He brought me out to the Chasm to scare me. He was pressing me back into the railing and all of a sudden it snapped. I fell over the edge and Eric managed to catch me. I nearly died though."

The even look that had been on his face fell and it was replaced with a look of horror. He seemed to be checking for any signs that I was joking but when he saw that he wasn't he held his arms open to me. "My God. Come here," he said. I walked over to him, letting him hug me tightly. "Are you alright though?"

"No. But I'll be okay," I said weakly.

I let Damien lead me into his kitchen. "Would you like me to make you a cup of tea or something?" he asked me.

I shook my head. Not another one. "No, thank you," I said. "So that explains why you're wet," he said with a little laugh.

He was obviously trying to make me smile, but I couldn't. Not with everything that had just happened. So I merely nodded. I supposed that I did look a little funny. I was completely disheveled and soaking wet wearing a shirt that was about three sizes too big for me. It was probably something that I would laugh about in later years.

"Yeah. Look, can I stay here tonight?" I asked him.

He looked a little surprised at my question and I blushed. I had to say something to cover myself. I shouldn't have said anything. "Oh... Well -"

I cut him off quickly, knowing that I had upset him. "I would go back to the dorms but I don't want all of the questions about what happened out there and why I'm all wet. I don't think I can tolerate it. And I didn't want to be alone. But if you don't want me to its fine. I'll go back now," I told him, turning to leave.

He caught my arm before I could go and I smiled. He was so much more gentle than Eric, who would have demanded me to stay. "No, Alex. Don't do that. Of course you can stay here. You're
always more than welcome to be here," he said.

I smiled at him softly. At least he hadn't made me feel like a total fool. "Thank you," I said.

"Of course. Do you want to talk about it? What happened that made you throw the knife at him in the first place?" he asked me.

It probably would have been a good idea for me to say yes but I shook my head. I didn't want to tell him anything about it right now. I didn't want to relive the day already. It was something that I would have been perfectly content with never repeating. I'd had enough of dealing with Eric all of the time.

"Not really. I just want you to be here for me," I told him softly.

He grinned at me and leaned down to kiss me. It was soft and I laughed a little. It was nothing like how I was a moment ago. Tense and full of emotion. Now I was relaxed, but I wasn't happy. It was okay. Damien was nice but I wasn't that interested in him. Not more than friends. Still though, I pushed that thought from my mind as he removed Eric's shirt from my body. I was almost sad to feel it go. But I couldn't tell him that.

"It's Eric's. I don't want it anywhere near me," I said, not really sure if I meant it or not.

"Good. I don't want it near us either," he said.

It made me smile softly. He was a good man. I wished that I cared for him more. Maybe I could, in time. Damien kissed me for a few more minutes before he backed me into the bed. My knees hit the edge of the bed and I collapsed onto it. Damien laughed with me as we rolled together, misplacing the yoga pants I'd had on. His pants went shortly after that and I smiled. I hadn't slept with him yet, but we had basically done everything else.

He seemed to know what I wanted as he broke away from me and glanced into my eyes. It was probably a bad idea to sleep with him right after what had happened with Eric but I needed this right now. I wanted it more than anything. Well, there was one thing that I wanted now but I wasn't admitting it. This was my first step to forgetting about it.

"You're sure?" Damien asked me.

I nodded at him with a small smile. "I'm sure," I whispered.

He easily complied and the last of our clothes were shed quickly as our bodies tangled together in a sweaty mess. Even long after we had both finished and were curled up together, long after Damien had fallen asleep, I laid awake. No matter how hard I wanted to stop thinking about it, I kept wondering what would have happened if I had stayed in Eric's room and it had been him on top of me. I didn't like to think about it, but I knew that I preferred one of them to wrap their body around mine. And it wasn't the man that was currently sleeping next to me.
Chapter Ten

As I woke up, I stretched out, feeling my back pop a few times. I really hated these old mattresses. It was no wonder that I enjoyed the rare nights that I spent in Damien's room. I was pretty sure that everyone knew at this point that I was having an inappropriate relationship with a Dauntless member, but no one said anything. No one had any proof. And the only person that knew for a fact was Heather. And she would never rat me out.

Standing on the cold tile floor I thought back to the first night that I had woken up next to Damien. He had been good, just what I had been expecting, and he had been much better than Florian. But despite the fact that it was what I had wanted, there was still missing something. The passion that I had really wanted. The passion that I had been craving. It fueled me with a burning fire when I had realized that the passion that I wanted was the same thing that I felt when I was with Eric. But I had pushed him out of my mind, or at least attempted, on the few nights that I had visited Damien since.

The morning that I had gotten back to the dorms all of my friends had freaked the hell out. Just like I had thought that they would. I had been dragged out of the training room after throwing a knife at Eric's head, disappeared all night, only to reappear in the early hours of the morning. Heather had looked like she had been crying when I saw them all the next morning. I had felt terrible and had spent the entire night with her and the next day.

Of course it had been one of the best days that I could remember. They had all seemed to think that Eric had killed me and I laughed. He nearly had. I had smartly decided to omit the Chasm incident. I had instead fed them a lie that he had locked me on the roof without dinner, blankets, or any pillows. Hence why I had reappeared many long hours after the incident. They had all nodded and let the conversation drop, clearly noticing that I didn't want to talk about it.

It had been an entire two weeks since the knife throwing incident and I had barely spoken two words to Eric since. Clearly we had both found ourselves out of our comfort zones since that night. Other than the occasional correction to my work or a brief screaming match, Eric and I had said nothing. We hadn't been meeting each other for early breakfasts. I had given them up and he hadn't once given me a punishment with him.

Instead, any time that I made him angry, he made me go with Four. But that hadn't been too bad. Four and I actually got on rather well together. We had fun and liked to talk about ways to kill Eric. Of course I made Eric think that it was a drag. I had been intending on leaving early that morning, two weeks ago, to go and gloat that I had found someone else to sleep with. But I had thought better of it. Although yesterday he had made a cruel comment to me about me being a weak and pathetic Amity that no one would ever want. It had almost made me as furious as I was that he still hadn't apologized to me for the Chasm.

The only somewhat polite thing that Eric had said to me in the past two weeks was to tell me that my meeting was pushed back with Jeanine Matthews. It was the only time that I had smiled in his company over the past few weeks. There had evidently been an attack on Erudite from the Factionless that day and Jeanine had decided it best that she stay there. But I knew that my meeting had been rescheduled for tomorrow, and this time I wasn't getting out of it. Eric would sooner drag me there by my hair then have him look like a fool for the meeting being missed twice. Although it wasn't my fault, Eric seemed to be able to make everything my fault.

Despite the fact that Eric hadn't said much to me since the Chasm incident, he hadn't bothered to keep his distance from me. Not that it shocked me. Whenever we were arguing we got right into each other's space. So much so that a light shove to either one of our backs and we would end up
connected at the mouth. More than once during the past few weeks of training I had found myself pressed up against Eric. I would be able to feel his chest graze my back and his arms gently pass my sides.

When he would speak to me he would speak directly in my ear, more of a hiss than a word. He knew that after everything that had happened, I was still attracted to him. And I hated it. I hated even it more that he knew. So badly I wanted to be interested in Damien the same way that I was with Eric. He was a good guy. But I wasn't that attracted to him. My body betrayed me every time that I found myself close to Eric. He was the one that I wanted.

Walking into the bathroom, I let out a deep breath. I knew that today was going to be an exercising day. About twice a week Four would let us do what we wanted. No strict routine. Although we knew that with physical training coming to an end, it wouldn't be long before we had to start back into the intense routines that we were so used to. They couldn't let us forget everything as we came to the end of physical training.

I pulled on my tight black work out shorts with a loose fitting black shirt before brushing my hair back and tying it up. Walking out of the bathroom quietly I passed by my bed and grabbed an oversized shirt. Eric's. The one that he had given to me two weeks ago. I was going to give it back today. I couldn't deal with keeping it. It just reminded me of what had happened. So I balled it up in my hands and walked out of the dorm room, headed to the dining room, where I knew that he would be.

Just as I had anticipated, Eric was sitting on a bench on the other side of the room. He was facing away from me and I walked up to him as slowly as possible. I didn't need him annoying me yet. He was going to have all day to do that. Coming up behind him where he was sitting at the end of an aisle, I aimed to throw the shirt at him.

"Here," I snapped.

It definitely surprised him as I saw him tense slightly. He hadn't been expecting me. I tossed the shirt at him quickly and, to my pleasure, he seemed too out of it to catch it. The shirt smacked him in the face before falling limply into his lap. He stared at it for a moment, completely confused. He still hadn't looked up at me. He knew who I was.

"I don't want it," I told him harshly.

He finally looked up at me. My heart dropped when I saw what he looked like. His eyes were bloodshot and his hair was mussed from something that had happened to him last night. I couldn't help but to wonder what the hell he had gotten into last night. He looked like he had just crawled out of a ditch. Even his clothes seemed to be dirty.

"Whoa, you look like shit," I said, not bothering to filter my words.

He wasn't going to throw me out. Not before he slept with me. Not after everything that had happened between the two of us. Instead of snapping back at me and telling me to get the hell away from him, Eric merely gave a sound that was between a laugh and a scoff. It shocked me that he hadn't sneered at me.

"Thanks Amity," he said.

Despite myself I couldn't help but to laugh. "You're welcome," I teased.

Slowly I took a seat at the table opposite Eric and sat down. He turned in his seat to face me and I
noticed that, despite his large frame, he was actually extremely graceful. He sat with his legs slightly open and I leaned back, kicking my feet up in between his legs. His fingers went almost immediately down to my boots and I smirked at him. He was pulling the laces apart. We sat in silence for a while, neither of us knowing what to say to the other. Finally, Eric seemed to figure out what he wanted to grille me on this morning.

"You didn't go back to your dorm that night," he stated.

I had to fight to keep my face steady. "No. I didn't," I admitted.

"Where did you go?" he asked me, looking up into my face.

I wanted nothing more than to turn and run but I knew that it would be a bad idea. "It doesn't matter. I just didn't go back," I said softly, hoping that he would drop it.

I was shocked that he had known that I hadn't gone back to the dorms. How the hell had he known? When Four had come to wake us up the next morning I had already been back. He hadn't known. Had one of my friends told him? Of course they hadn't. That would have poked holes in my rooftop story. They would have come asking about that. Had he maybe just come to see for himself? Cameras? Nothing that I came up with gave me an answer that I liked. I knew that this was the chance to rub in what I had done once I had left him but I couldn't bring myself to do it. Maybe it was the slight fear that I felt from him.

"Tell me," Eric said, after a short silence.

"I found another place to go," I told him, hoping that he would let it drop.

But I knew that he wouldn't. He never did. Especially not when it came to me. I had tried to shrug and go to drinking my water, hoping that he would get the sense that the story was boring. It really wasn't that much fun. He already knew about Damien. He just wanted to get me to admit it out loud. But evidently nothing that I did was boring.

"No shit, initiate," Eric said.

We both rolled our eyes at that. Just for two different reasons. "So why did you ask?" I snapped at him.

His hand twitched slightly at his side. I noticed that he had a gun strapped at his hip today and the thought made me nervous. He could kill me right now if he really wanted to. "I know damn well that you weren't in the dorm that night. You weren't in the training room, the dining room, the Pit, the Chasm, the roof, or anywhere near the net," he told me and I gulped.

He had been looking for me that night. Maybe he had been trying to apologize. Or finish what he started. "You went looking for me?" I asked him.

He ignored my question. "Where did you go? And don't lie to me," he hissed.

Like I was under the truth serum, my answer sprung out of my mouth with surprising ease. "Clearly you know where I was last night. So why do you want me to say it? You want a chance to kick me out of Dauntless? You won't," I hissed at him.

Eric looked taken aback for a moment but he recovered quickly. "How are you so sure about that?" he asked.

He obviously wanted me to keep talking and, for once, I was more than happy to. "I threw a knife at
you and slapped you, more than once. Even if you did have it coming, you would have kicked me out by now if you really wanted to. But you won't," I told him, my eyes brightening slightly.

If he was going to be an ass like this, I was going to be sure that he knew that he wasn't the only one who could play this game. "You're playing a dangerous game," he said.

"I think you might finally be starting to like me," I told him.

Figuring that I couldn't make this any worse right now, I straightened up and gave Eric a little wink. He scoffed at me and rearranged his hands so that he was pressing down on a pressure point on my foot. I yelped out in pain and jerked my foot away, scowling at him. Now it was his turn to wear the smirk. It was like a delicate game that we were playing.

"Damn you," I hissed.

He merely smirked at me. "I do not like you. Get that straight right now," he snarled at me. I tried to push the hurt out of my system. "So tell me, initiate, where were you that night?"

"It's none of your goddamn business. You don't like me, so why do you care?" I asked.

He knew. I didn't want to have to tell him. "You're right that I don't like you. But I still want to know. I won't kick you out, I just want to hear you admit it," he said with a shrug.

Even though I doubted that he wasn't going to do anything I figured that I might as well tell him. There was no way that he was letting me go without knowing the truth. "Fine. You're right," I told him and he smirked, thinking that he had won this round. But he hadn't. Not yet. Not by a long shot. "I didn't go back to the dorms that night. I thought about it but I didn't want to have to explain to everyone what had happened. So I walked through the halls before I found a door to a room whose occupant I knew. So I knocked and they let me in." He wasn't getting Damien's name from me. I wasn't going to get him kicked out of Dauntless. "Spent the night with them."

My eyes gave a devious glint. "Is that so?" Eric asked me.

Clearly that wasn't the answer that Eric wanted. "Yes. That is so," I said.

He began to lean forward and I sucked in a breath. I should have known that saying something like that was going to lead me somewhere like this. I should have known that he wasn't going to let this go. He was going to make me say exactly what had happened that night. And I would tell him if he really wanted me to.

"And what did you do when you spent the night there?" he asked me, almost as if he was speaking to a child.

Rolling my eyes at him, I leaned backwards a little bit, trying to put some distance between the two of us. "What are you, my mother?" I snarled at him.

He merely smirked and moved in a little closer to me. "I'm just asking," he said.

"You know what happens when a girl spends the night with a boy. Especially a Dauntless boy. Don't be stupid, Eric. You know exactly what happened when I went to that apartment," I told him.

To my surprise, his eyes darkened. For a moment I hoped that it was because he would have preferred it to be him that I had slept with. That was how I felt. But I wasn't letting him know that any time soon. "So did you enjoy it?" he asked darkly.
"Of course. I'm glad that it happened. You did say that no one would like me right?" I asked him.

"I did," he said through gritted teeth.

"Well I think that I found someone that has taken a big interest in me," I told him, smiling at him and observing my nails like they were the most interesting thing in the world.

He seemed to know exactly what he was doing as he pushed my foot down from the ledge that it had been propped up on. "Do you now?" he asked me.

After a beat I nodded. He grabbed my hand and lowered it from my face, forcing me to look at him. I knew that he was going to press this issue. It made my heart race. He stood from his spot on the bench and walked over to me. I gasped softly as he kneeled in between my legs, pushing them open slightly so that he was kneeling in between them. Too close to where I really wanted him to be. My heart was pounding in my chest as we looked each other in the eye.

"And do tell me what he did to you last night," Eric rasped in a voice so low it made my entire body tremble. I was so thankful in that moment that we were the only people around. "Did he touch you like no one ever has?" Eric's hands made their way to the outside of my thighs. "Were your legs trembling by the end of it?" They were certainly shaking right now. "Were you seeing stars?" I knew that I would see stars if he did what I wanted him to do. "Did you even want to sleep or did you want to pull him back to you and force him to keep going?" I had gone straight to bed. He was right. "Did he make you scream?" Eric was sure as hell destined to make me scream. "Did you look at him the same way that you're looking at me?" Damn it.

His eyes were sparkling as he stared me down. It was one of the rare times that I saw any emotion from him other than rage or amusement. I wasn't quite sure what it was but it sent a bubbling feeling through my stomach. Eric was barely an inch from my face and his hot breath was fanning over my face. We were both panting. His hands were currently wrapped around my leg and the majority of his fingers were splayed on my inner thigh, running too close to where I couldn't stand them being. His other hand had worked its way up my spine, leaving a trail of goosebumps, and it was now splayed over the back of my neck.

He was pressing into all of the pressure points in my neck, but unlike the ones on my foot, these felt good. It was taking me everything in my power not to moan. His dark eyes were filled with lust and I knew that my green ones were reflecting it. He was clearly enjoying this. And that was when I remembered. A few weeks ago Heather had told me to do it. Play along. Sleep with him. Do whatever he wanted to do. So that was what I did. I leaned into his touch slightly and spread my legs a little more. To my shock, Eric came a little closer. I caught the brief look of shock on his face before he grabbed my neck tightly. I brought my hips up and ground them into him, fighting back a blush when I felt something a little lower.

"I don't know," I said with a husk in my voice that seemed like a scream in the silence of the room. "He was good but I have nothing to compare him to other than an Amity. They aren't known for being very intense. Not like you. Training doesn't start for another twenty minutes."

Even though it was an act, I wanted nothing more than for it to be real. I wanted him to take me back to his apartment. Nothing would have made me happier. But this time, if we went back, he wasn't going to throw me off of the Chasm. We weren't going to be in an awkward place. We were going to do everything that I needed from him. I would get it out of my system and so would he and we would never have to be in this awkward position again. Once more I rubbed my hips gently against his, and this time he responded slightly.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked me.
"What I should have done before," I husked.

I saw the resolve dying in his eyes and my heart skipped a beat. He was going to do it. His hands tightened on the back of my neck even more and yanked it gently. I gasped, surprised to find that I enjoyed the feeling. No one had ever done something like that before. His hands were tightening on my thighs and I realized that he was actually pulling me into him. If either one of us moved even a fraction, our lips would be pressed together. It was the only part of us currently not pressed together.

A mix of fury and horror shot through me as a cough came from the back of the room. I immediately jumped away from Eric but he took a few moments to look away from me. Glancing back awkwardly I saw that it was a Dauntless man, clearly a member. He looked to be about the same age as Eric with short brown hair and tattoos covering his arms. I had never seen him before this. Blushing a bright scarlet, I stood from my spot, walking past Eric and refusing to look at him.

As I stormed away from Eric and past the man that seemed to know him, I noticed that he was smirking at me. I sped up slightly, doing anything to avoid looking at either one of the men. As I nearly sprinted down the hall I heard the man saying something to Eric but I couldn't make it out. All I could hear was his laughter. The only thing that I knew right now was that I needed to find Heather and tell her what the hell had just happened. With that, I took off down the hall and sprinted back to the dorms.

Eric P.O.V.

If smoke could have come out of his ears, Eric was absolutely positive there would have been. He was furious. If there was an emotion beyond the anger that he was feeling, it would have been what he was feeling at the very moment. He had been interrupted. Just when he was going to accept her offer, take what he had wanted for months, win their damned bet, someone had walked in. He was shocked enough at her words, but he had been even more shocked that he had been going to accept it. He had been about to bring her back to his apartment, like he had wanted to do for too damn long.

Although if he had gotten her back to his apartment he was sure that he wouldn't have ever gotten her out of there. He would have never let her leave. She was extremely nimble and flexible in training. He knew that it would carry over into the bedroom. And that was everything to him in the bedroom. She had left in a rush though and he knew that he was now back to square one with her. But it wasn't over.

One day he would get her back to his apartment. He was sure of it. He just had to sleep with her once. Just to say that he did. Just to rub it in her face. Just to get to tattoo whatever he wanted on her. He knew that she wanted him but it made no difference until they actually went through with it. That was all that either one of them wanted.

Eric finally calmed down enough to look up to his one true friend in Dauntless. Cameron. He had come from Erudite with Eric so the two had known each other long before they had ever come to Dauntless. They had always been friends. They had always known that they were going to leave Erudite. Eric glanced up and saw that Cameron was leaned up against the walls to the entrance of the dining room. He had finished a few ranks below Eric and was now an Ambassador. That was a good job for someone that wasn't quite good enough for leadership.

Eric had a feeling that the Amity would end up an Ambassador. Being one it meant that Cameron was frequently gone from Dauntless. He got one week a month off of work and he was only home about once or twice a week while he was working. The last time Eric had seen Cameron had been a few days after the incident at the Chasm. Cameron was the only person besides the Amity that knew what had happened that night.
"You have impeccable timing, my friend. But that didn't look like Sarah," Cameron teased. "Bored of her already?"

Cameron was always one of the few people that didn't mind Eric's hobby of bouncing from woman to woman. In fact, Cameron thought of it more as a game. He would always pick out the women that he thought that Eric would sleep with next. Cameron was actually very similar to Eric, finding a woman and only staying with her for a few weeks. At the absolute most. But he was nicer about it than Eric was. But still, Eric appreciated the lack of judgement.

"She's somewhere around here. She'll come if I call her," Eric said with a shrug.

He knew that it was true. Sarah was always willing to please. It was why he had kept her so long. Eric knew that the moment that Cameron left, he was going to go find Sarah to take out some frustration. It was going to make him late for his meeting with the other leaders but Eric could have cared less.

Having moved back into his previous seat, Cameron took a spot across the table from him and smirked as he placed two water bottles down in front of both Eric and himself. "Thanks," Eric muttered.

"No problem. Man, I don't get it. If you don't like her just send her on her way," he said, referring to Sarah.

And Eric couldn't blame him. He probably should leave her. But he wouldn't. "There's no point in getting rid of a good lay. Not until I find something better," Eric said.

Cameron smiled at his best friend. "Of course you won't. Because you wouldn't dare go looking for a girl that you actually like," he said flippantly.

Eric's chest rose in a sudden burst of anger. He had never cared for a woman before. He never would either. The closest thing he had ever felt to a woman was when he thought that the Amity would die. And that was only guilt racking him at the thought that if she died, it would have been his fault. Eric was not the type of man for a relationship and Cameron knew that.

"There's no girl that I like," Eric sneered.

"So I've seen," Cameron said, brushing off Eric's comment. They were silent for a few moments before Cameron spoke again. "So who is she? Never seen her around."

Shrugging his shoulders, Eric leaned back on the table and took a big drink of the water. "She's an initiate," he said nonchalantly.

Cameron's mouth dropped and Eric had to repress the sudden urge to sneer. Cameron knew as well as anyone else that Eric always hated the initiates. Transfers or Dauntless born, he couldn't stand them. And it was clear that she was a transfer, having never seen her before. Eric sighed and shook his head. He had been hoping that Cameron would let it go. Although it now seemed that he knew how the Amity felt.

"You like a transfer?" Cameron asked.

"I do not like her. She's the Amity transfer," Eric told his friend, knowing that it was going to earn a good response.

It turned out that Eric was completely right. His mouth dropped open and hung limply for a moment. Eric rolled his eyes at his friend. Cameron was just as bad a womanizer as he was. And right now he
knew that Cameron was thinking unsavory thought about the Amity. And that made Eric's blood boil. She was his to fuck with.

He already couldn't stand the thought of the Dauntless man that she claimed to be with. More than likely Roberts. If he ever got proof that it was him, he would be sure to kick the man straight out of Dauntless. Until Eric had his way with her, she was his. Whether or not she knew that made no difference. Besides, he knew that she would much prefer him over the Dauntless born man. He saw it in her eyes every time that he got close to her. Which seemed to be happening more and more frequently.

"That's the Amity?" Cameron asked, bringing Eric out of his reverie.

"That's her."

"Damn. If I had known that they made them like that I might have gone there instead of here," he laughed.

Despite himself, Eric couldn't help but to laugh. Cameron had always been one of the few people that could accomplish that feat. The Amity was one of the other few. Amity's had always been considered some of the prettiest people. Naturally, at least. And Eric had to agree with that. They all had natural tans, splattering of freckles, and typically small frames. But with her, she had all of that and the edge from a Dauntless member. She was the best of both Factions.

"Yeah, that's her. A damned pain in the ass but I'm betting she'd be a good lay," Eric told Cameron, who laughed loudly.

"She looks like she'd be a good lay," Cameron said.

Both men smiled. Eric had already laid claim on her, so Eric knew that anything that Cameron said would be more teasing than anything else. "I hear Amity's are flexible," Eric said with a little waggle of his eyebrows.

He knew that she was. He had told her to use it against her opponent. This time it was Cameron's turn to laugh at his friend. Eric missed speaking with Cameron. He was the one person that Eric told almost all of his secrets too. Not many friends spoke to each other the way that Cameron and Eric did. Eric had other friends in Dauntless, plenty of them, but none were like his oldest friend. The others were more little forms of amusement.

But lately he wanted to see less of them and more of the transfer that had captivated him so. "Ah so that's why," Cameron said.

"Come again?" Eric asked, glancing up at him.

"Why you've been speaking with her so much. I've heard rumors that an initiate attracted your attention but I thought it was a bunch of bullshit. I see now that it's the truth," Cameron said.

It made Eric roll his eyes. "It is not the truth," Eric snapped.

Cameron knew not to push the subject too much, but he did anyways. "Of course, I've seen you with girls that you think will be good lays. But I've never seen you with one like that," he said, motioning to where she had run past them a few minutes ago.

Shrugging his shoulders, Eric wanted Cameron to stop pushing the subject. Even more than he wanted the Amity to cave. She had, but they had been interrupted. And it wasn't something that he would so easily forgive Cameron for. Once he was through with her he could push her out of his
mind. But, for now, he would still be working at her.

"She's a tough sell. She pretends like she doesn't want it, but I know that she does. I see it in her eyes. So I'm gonna keep working at her," Eric said. Cameron nodded. Eric had always been persistent. "She'll come around eventually, whether or not she wants to."

Eric had a bad feeling that after this morning she was going to retreat into herself. That meant that they were going to have to start over from square one. But it meant nothing. He could be patient when he wanted to be. Cameron was smirking at Eric, knowing exactly what he was thinking. He also knew that Eric was more into her than he let on. But Cameron wouldn't tell his friend that. He would find out in his own time that it was more than the attraction of lust that was plaguing him. Cameron had a feeling that it stemmed from the way that she talked back to him. No one had ever done that before.

They both stood from the table and began to walk back to the apartments. "They're doing Capture the Flag tonight, right?" Cameron asked.

Eric nodded with a smirk. "Of course they are," he said excitedly. He already had a plan. Not for the game, but for a wake-up call.

"They still don't let them know that it's happening?" Cameron continued.

Smirking once more, Eric shook his head. The Dauntless born usually had an idea of when it was coming, but it was a different night every year. They probably knew that it would be soon. On the other hand, the transfers would have no idea what hit them. Eric had the perfect plan to wake up the Amity, since he had thought of it in the middle of the night last week. He was itching with excitement for when he could finally execute his plan. After two weeks it would be the perfect payback for hitting him in the face and throwing the knife. Even though he had certainly had them coming.

"Yeah. Four and I are going to wake them up at two in the morning," he said.

Cameron scoffed at the timing. That was a hell of a lot later than it normally was. Typically it was around midnight that they would grab the initiates. But Four and Eric had both decided to make it a little trickier this year. It was harder to focus after being woken from REM sleep.

"I intend to give her a good wake up call," Eric said with a smirk.

Both men laughed, knowing that when either one of them had a plan it was never anything good. "And how do you intend to do that?" Cameron asked.

"Trust me, if it works out, you'll know what I was planning," Eric said.

If it worked out the way that he was hoping, everyone in Dauntless would know just how he intended to wake her up. Cameron stopped at his apartment, right across the way from Eric's, and went to walk in. Eric wasn't planning on going back to his apartment just yet. He had to go pay Sarah a visit. Anything to forget about the Amity.

"Oh, before I go," Cameron called after him. Eric stopped, turning to look at his friend. "Tomorrow we're visiting Amity."

Eric immediately tensed. "Did you say Amity?" he asked.

They never visited Amity. There was never any need. They were peaceful. They didn't need soldiers. "Yes," Cameron confirmed.
Why the hell were they going there? Immediately his mind snapped to the Amity. Just as he had been getting her out of his head too. Immediately Eric felt himself stiffen. Partially at the thought of the Amity once more rolling through his mind and the other part because of why they were going. Dauntless rarely visited Amity. There was a reason for that. The two Factions were as far apart as possible. Johanna, the leader of Amity, was always polite to Dauntless but usually asked them to stay away. They apparently disrupted the peace. If they were going to Amity, it wasn't for anything good.

"Why?" Eric asked, raising a pierced eyebrow.

Cameron noticed Eric's sudden change in demeanor and he knew that it wasn't just because of what he had told his oldest friend. It was because she was from Amity. "There was an attack from the Factionless last night," Cameron told Eric.

The leader immediately stiffened, a slight panic rising in his chest as he thought about her home. He knew that, as much as he hated his family, he would still want to ensure that they were safe. They were family. Maybe. But he would panic if it was Cameron's family. They were like his own. And he could only imagine what she would feel if her parents were hurt. Eric hadn't loved his family but they were family. She really had loved her family. He was sure that she still did.

"What happened?" Eric asked.

"No one was injured or killed, thankfully. Her last name is Freesia, right?" Cameron asked.

"Yeah."

Cameron nodded. Despite the fact that Eric would never admit it, Cameron knew that Eric was curious as to whether or not her family was okay. "Her family is fine. They were helping out the ones that were scared," he said.

Eric almost smiled. Perhaps she had gotten some Dauntless traits from her family. "So nothing happened?" Eric asked.

"Dauntless guards were able to get there before anything could get out of hand. They're scared to hell though," Cameron explained and Eric nodded. At least there had been no casualties. "Four, Zeke, Max, you, and me are going. Max and I are going to take care of the Amity's, reassure them of their safety. You are all going to go and check out the house that they caught a Factionless perusing. He seemed to know that he wanted to go there. We still have him but he hasn't said anything."

It sucked that he would have to spend his entire day in close quarters with Four, but he didn't have a choice. That was part of the job. At least Zeke wasn't too bad. But something was still bothering Eric. "An attack on Amity? Why?" he asked.

Cameron simply shrugged his shoulders. "So far we don't have a motive," Cameron explained.

Eric figured that he didn't know why. It didn't make sense. Amity never got themselves involved in fights. So why now? They were peaceful. Factionless usually attacked Erudite or Candor. But never Amity. No one ever attacked Amity. "Maybe there was someone in there that they wanted," Eric attempted.

"We're hoping that the man that they captured is going to be able to tell us something. So far we've got nothing more than the fact that it was a Factionless attack on Amity," Cameron said.

"So when do we go?" Eric asked, knowing that there was no way out of this fight.

The last thing that he wanted to do was waste a day at the hippie Faction but he knew that no one
would let him out of it. As a leader of Dauntless he had to deal with situations like this. "Tomorrow," Cameron said.

Eric raised his eyebrows. He would have thought that they would go today. "We're waiting?" Eric asked.

"Train the initiates today and let them play Capture the Flag later. We need as few people knowing about this as possible. The Factionless are making more and more noise these days. We have to keep that quiet," Cameron said.

They had done a good job keeping it quiet over the past few months, but he was sure that the attack on Amity would not be kept silent. "Alright," Eric said.

"Max has a request though," Cameron continued. Eric's heart picked up its pace. A request from Max was not always a good thing. "Your little friend?"

Eric's eyebrows immediately came together. The way that Cameron had said it, he knew that he meant her. But she wasn't a friend. Not really. Or was she? He wasn't quite sure what she was. "The Amity?" Eric asked.

Cameron nodded and Eric narrowed his eyes. He didn't like the fact that they were bringing her into it. It was better that she didn't know. "Yeah. He wants her to go with us tomorrow," Cameron said.

Eric couldn't help the shocked look that crossed his face. What the hell did Max want her there for? She wasn't ready. And even worse, she had a connection with the attack. Even a full Dauntless member wouldn't be allowed to go if they had a close connection to what they were taking care of. Cameron seemed to notice Eric's hesitation and shifted slightly.

"Why are we bringing her?" Eric finally asked.

"You aren't doing anything new in training and her rank stands strong. She can afford to miss a day. We'll have Four say that she was requested. Her parents were sick or something," Cameron said with a shrug.

Everyone would know that it was a blatant lie. Once you left your Faction, only a select few things would be allowed to visit original Factions. Like a birth or death. "Why the hell does Max want her going?" Eric sneered, a little more harshly than he had meant to.

He didn't like the uncomfortable feeling he got knowing that she would be going with them. She would slow them down and he didn't need to see her turn into a blubbering mess at the sight of her family. Plus they would have to watch out for her. She knew how to defend herself, but only when she knew it was coming. She had never been in a real life or death situation before.

Sighing at Eric, Cameron shook his head. He had known that his friend would not like hearing that she would be coming along with them. "It isn't just Max. It's Jeanine too," he said.

Eric tensed at his words. "What the hell does Jeanine want her there for?" Eric asked snappily.

He didn't like the interest that Jeanine was showing in her. It wouldn't mean anything good for her. He hated Jeanine. He didn't want the Amity to have to deal with her, too. It wasn't something that he wished on anyone. Not even Four. "They both want someone that is an insider with Dauntless training. She's the only person that we have. There isn't going to be fighting. It's a relatively peaceful visit. We just need to know why the attack was on Amity. She's the perfect person to bring. She knows Amity. She knows these people. She can help bring to light whatever they're hiding," Cameron tried to explain why she was being brought along. "She will be with you and the others, for
"And if there is some fighting?" Eric asked him.

"She'll manage herself if something does happen. I doubt she'll need it though. Anyone that goes toe to toe with you and comes out alive is doing just fine themselves."

Both men laughed softly. It was true. Eric was no ruthless killer but he had taken more than one life before. Mostly Factionless idiots but he had taken care of an Abnegation official that had gotten too mouthy. Eric couldn't help but to wonder what the Amity would think of him if she could see what he had done.

"Alright. When do we go?" Eric asked. "And when do I tell her?"

He couldn't just tell her that there was an attack. If she tried knife training today she might take her hand off in a panic. Although that might be funny. "An Amity truck will be here tomorrow morning at five," Cameron said. "Get an early start, no questions. Don't tell her tonight. Not before the game. Best not to worry her."

"I'll tell her later tonight," Eric said.

They didn't need her panicking all day. "Just tell her to meet you here at a little before five. Explain to her then what's going on. Go to Max tonight, after the initiates go to bed and before you go to wake them up. He'll tell you more. By the way, are you going to put her on your team tonight?"

Eric hesitated for a moment. "I'm not sure. Might be fun to shoot her," he said through a laugh.

Giving the man a brief bear hug, Eric broke away and said goodbye. Cameron had this upcoming week off so that meant that he would be seeing much more of his old friend. As Eric walked down the hall, his head was racing with thoughts on the attack on Amity. Even without her in his life he would have been concerned. No one ever attacked Amity. There was no need.

Wanting to push both the attack on Amity and his initiate out of his mind, he stormed down the hallway. There was one place that he knew he could get a good release from. He came up on Sarah's apartment in a hurry and barged in without bothering to knock. He never did. And she never minded. She was cooking in her kitchen, looking to be making bacon, with an apron tied around her front to protect her work clothes. She smiled at him, obviously slightly surprised to see him in her apartment. "Breakfast?" she asked.

Eric wanted nothing to do with food. He was hungry. But it sure as hell wasn't bacon he was hungry for. He didn't want to talk. He just wanted to get the stupid fucking Amity out of his head. She had consumed his thoughts lately and the attack on Amity wasn't helping. He stormed up to Sarah and knocked a few pots and pans that she had been cleaning away from the counter. They went clattering to the floor and he was sure that he had broken a few. Not that either one cared. He threw Sarah up on the counter, rougher than needed, and shoved her back. She provided him the release he needed, but the entire time he had been thinking about what it would have been like if it was the Amity underneath him. He knew the answer. It would have been better.

Alex's P.O.V.

Thankfully the day had gone by quickly. They had been good with us the past few weeks. We had been perfecting skills that we had learned over the past few months. It had been a free day today and those were the days that I liked the best. It meant that we didn't have to fight each other and we didn't get raked over the coals by Eric and Four. To my pleasure, and slight confusion, I hadn't seen Eric
since breakfast. And the training day was almost over. That had clearly let up the tension in the room
tenfold. Everyone enjoyed the days that Eric wasn't around. Four yelled too, but his was a little more
constructive.

During the day I had done almost everything. Most people had stuck to the things that they were the
worst at but I had decided to try and perfect everything. I didn't have anything that I was weak with
so that meant that I had to perfect my best moves. I had started with the calisthenic training that we
had started with three months ago. As I had done them all I realized how much better I had gotten at
them.

It was startling. I used to barely be able to get through any of the moves without keeling over and
dying. The one hour run had gotten much easier. I could now do a dead sprint for the entire hour. I
was still exhausted by the end of it. My pull ups had gotten much better recently too. I could do
almost twenty now. My hands had become nearly immune to peeling. I was pretty sure that I had
peeled off all of the excess skin. They would shake while I was doing the pull ups but it was a vast
improvement. My pushups were better too. I could do those easily. I had even started to be able to do
one handed ones. But I could only do two or three at a time. Everything was so much easier. But I
was still dead tired once it was over.

After running through the calisthenic training I had gone over to the knife throwing stations. This
time I thankfully hadn't had Eric around. I wasn't sure how another knife being chucked at his head
would go. Over the past two weeks we had mostly focused on knife throwing so I had gotten
immensely better. About half of my throws now went into the center of the target. The rest went
somewhere towards the middle and I rarely had strays. I had even managed to get a few knives in the
head of the target. Those were much harder throws to make since the head was so small compared to
the torso. Today I had finally tried the moving targets for the first time and found that I was
completely lousy with them. I only hit the target about once in every five throws.

Besides knife throwing I had also done some fighting training. That was what I considered was the
most important. I would have done some gun training as well, but Four had told us that guns were
off limits for the day. Once we were members we would have as much practice time as we wanted. I
intended to take him up on that. While I was fighting with my friends I realized that my movements
were much more fluid and tighter than they had been at first. My hits were getting stronger and my
hands were bleeding by the time that I had finished fighting against the bags. I had fought against
Heather, Cole, Buck, Dante, Jax, Jet, and Draven during training and had won almost all of them. I
had only lost my fight with Draven and nearly lost against Jax and Jet.

Four had convinced me to fight with him once and I had eventually caved. Needless to say I had lost.
Miserably. I had managed to fight him off for a few minutes and I had gotten a few good hits to his
eyes. None had left any serious marks but he did have a nice bruise forming on his cheek from a hit
that I had gotten in. It had been an accidental hit. I had meant to hit his chest. But the face was better.
He had gotten me back for it. My foot was currently throbbing from where he had stomped on it to
get out of a hold that Eric had once taught me. He had been the one to tell me that I stood too close to
him when I had him in the lock. Turned out that he was right. Not that I was going to tell him that.

Training was finally over and I was so thankful that it was six. I was thrilled that dinner had gone
quickly. I was exhausted and all I wanted to do was lay down. It seemed that everyone felt that way.
We had gone all out during training today. There was only another month of physical training left
and everyone was pumped for it to be over. Our bodies were bruised and beaten to hell. We were
ready for a few months of relaxing.

But we were also nervous about the mental part. We really had no idea what was coming to us. I had
asked Damien a few days ago and he had apologized, telling me that to know in advance would be
cheating. He had told me that even the Dauntless born didn't know much about the second phase of initiation. We would all be on the same level. Damien told me that it was something about our fears. I didn't like the sound of that. I also knew that once physical training was over we would be seeing less of Eric. That made me happier than anything else. I would finally be able to completely separate myself from Eric.

We were close enough to the end of physical training that I could almost be a complete failure and still guarantee myself a spot in Dauntless. I was at the number four spot right now. Only Hunter was ranked higher than me from the transfers. My last fight was coming up quickly. Unless I was picked to sit out. I was hoping that it would be Jade. I had never sparred with her and I was itching to get a few good hits in. I was hoping that Heather got an easy fight too. She had risen up a few ranks from her spot right above the red line but a loss might push her below it. Maybe she would get lucky and fight either Skylar or Raven.

We all walked into the dorms and, without bothering to see who was watching, I got changed out of my sweaty clothing. I should have showered but I wasn't quite feeling up to it yet. Instead I grabbed a long tank top and laid down on my bed. Heather changed and dropped into my bed as well. The two of us laid together for a few minutes. It wasn't long before Cole and Buck joined us and we made room for them. To my pleasure Colt and Jade had both left to go help Hunter with a tattoo or something so that meant that the rest of us could talk freely. Cole was currently laying in Heather's lap and I smirked at the two of them. They were so obvious. Buck was laying in my lap and I was running my fingers through his hair, my nails occasionally scraping his head. He looked like he was about to fall asleep.

Heather and Cole were currently absorbed in their own conversation that I took as a sign to bother Buck and see if he knew anything about their budding relationship. It was killing me that Heather had yet to do anything with Cole, despite telling me frequently that she wanted to. Although I knew exactly what that was like.

"So how long do you think that it will be until they get together?" I asked Buck quietly.

The last thing that I wanted was for Cole and Heather to realize that I was talking about them. I had sworn to Heather that I would keep it quiet. "I don't think that it'll be long now," Buck said. "I agree."

He was curled slightly in my lap and I smirked at him. All men were the same. They loved a girl running her nails along their scalp. I couldn't help but to briefly wonder if Eric liked it too. "Oh I forgot to tell you!" Buck whisper-yelled.

I started slightly, looking back down at him. "What?" I asked softly.

"Cole made me swear that I wouldn't because Heather wanted a chance to get to tell you first. But I guess she hasn't," he muttered.

I cocked an eyebrow at him. He had officially captured my attention. "Go on," I urged.

"I walked in on them kissing down in the Pit the night that you threw the knife at Eric. They made me swear I wouldn't say anything," Buck said softly.

A sudden jolt went down my spine at his words. They had kissed? And they hadn't told me? Of course I hadn't told her everything that had happened with Eric. But that was different! Initiates could have relationships with each other. They just couldn't have relationships with members. That made their relationship perfectly acceptable. Mine, whatever it was, was dangerous.
"What the hell? How could you have made me wait this long before you told me? It's been two weeks!" I yelled.

I smacked him a few times, angry that he hadn't told me, even though Heather should have been the one to do it. Buck curled in on himself as he cringed at my hits. Finally the two people in question seemed to notice that something was happening as they both glanced over at us. But was hissing at me to stop hitting him but I ignored him.

"Um, Alex, not that I don't enjoy watching you assault Buck, but what are you doing?" Heather asked me.

I finally stopped my assault on Buck to glance up at Heather. She looked extremely concerned for both my well-being and Buck's. But it was herself that she needed to worry about. "He was just telling me a story," I hissed.

"About? I didn't think that he had anything coming to him this time," she said with a little laugh. But that laugh quickly died when my bewildered expression turned into an angry one. "What did I do? Buck? What the hell did you say to her?"

She seemed to be piecing the story together. Pure horror crossed over her face as I snarled at her. She knew exactly what had happened as she opened her mouth to chew Buck out. But before she could I cut her off. "You. Come here. Now!" I yelled.

All eyes were on us as I jumped from the bed and grabbed Heather's arm and began to pull her from the room. Now everyone had completely stopped what they were doing to stare at us. Cole opened his mouth to say something to me but before he could I cut him off. "You say nothing! I'm coming for you next!" I yelled back to him.

He paled slightly as I grabbed Heather's arm tighter and dragged her away from the dorm. I hadn't been sure where I was heading but once we hit the Pit I decided to stop. This was a better place to talk than the Chasm. The Chasm held bad memories and it was a little too loud to talk anyways.

"Now tell me something," I told her and she nodded, already looking guilty. "Why did I have to find out that you and Cole kissed from Buck?"

My hands were placed irritably on my hips. Apparently she hadn't known what I was going insane over. Her face paled the same way that Cole's had. Although it was quickly replaced with anger. "Oh my God, he told you! Cole and I told him to not say anything before I got the chance. I wanted to be the one to tell you about it but I hadn't gotten a chance yet," she said sadly and I scoffed. It had been two weeks. "Remind me to kill him."

Under any normal situation I would have laughed but I said nothing. I merely gave her a sharp stare. "Remind me to kill you. Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"It's a long story," she said guiltily.

"So explain. Come on. You didn't think that two weeks was enough time for you to tell me?" I asked her. The anger faded and was replaced with guilt. "I mean, I get that it took me forever to tell you about Eric, but that was because I was uncomfortable with the thought of feeling anything for him other than complete hatred." It wasn't even a real relationship. Just sexual frustration. "But you and Cole like each other, you always have. Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

All of my emotions were mirrored in Heather's eyes. She dropped her eyes towards the ground before looking back up. "I'm sorry. I should have told you," she said.
"Well we agree on that."

She smiled slightly. "I wanted you to know but I thought that the minute that I told someone about it, it would make the whole thing real. I like him a lot but I've never really been with anyone before. I just never thought that I wanted it. But Cole is so different than any guy I've ever met. I really like him," she said, her cheeks tinting a slight red.

The anger that was in my system disappeared at her words and I couldn't help but to smile. She must have really liked him if she was saying that she wasn't sure that it was real. I wished that it was the type of thing that I could have. She had no idea how lucky she was. And I was going to tell her that.

"That's good though, Heather! Liking someone isn't something that you should be ashamed of. You should be happy that he wants to be with you. I wish that I had something like that. A guy that wanted to be with me and wasn't afraid of saying something about it," I told her and she smiled.

Without having to say anything she knew exactly what I was talking about. She knew how upset I was about the whole Eric thing. That was the kind of bond that we had formed. Closer than friends. We were almost like sisters. We walked over to the bar and took a seat, ordering a few drinks.

"So tell me all about it!" I laughed girlishly.

Heather laughed and smiled at me. It was killing me to not know what had happened between them. If something ever happened between Eric and me, she would be the first person that I would tell. And in excruciating detail. "Well I was all upset about what had happened with you and Eric once you guys left and didn't come back. And later we all found out that a few railings in the Chasm had been broken and I panicked. I thought you were dead," she said.

Almost giving away the secret, I very nearly sucked in a breath. That part of the Chasm had been closed. No one had ever found out what had happened other than Eric and me. There had simply been a sign placed about how dangerous that part of the Chasm currently was. Heather certainly didn't need to know what had really happened that night.

"But Cole brought me to a secluded part of the Pit and comforted me. We were talking about our old lives and how we were so glad that we hadn't come here by ourselves. And then it just happened. We kissed. And we kissed. And kissed," Heather laughed. I was currently on my fifth shot and beginning to feel the slight haze of the alcohol as I laughed. "We were kissing for nearly an hour when Buck found us and we begged him not to say anything."

I nodded and cheered to another shot with her. I knew that I was going to regret it. But we didn't have enough nights like this. "And how was it?" I asked her, leaning into the bar.

She had clearly been expecting that question. She laughed loudly. I could tell that Heather was feeling the effects of the drinks too. "Amazing!" she yelled and we laughed once more.

I nearly slipped off of the chair. "Don't leave out details!" I called.

"I mean I've kissed a few guys and even a few Dauntless but never someone that I really had a connection. But I had a connection with Cole and it was so great. He knew what he was doing and he knows how to use that tongue," she told me and I laughed once more. It seemed like every guy in Dauntless knew how to use their tongues. Every guy I had kissed here certainly had. I threw back another shot when the little voice quietly asked if Eric would know how to use his tongue. "So you aren't mad?"

She had sobered slightly. Shaking my head at her I grabbed her hand and pulled her into me slightly.
She was my best friend. There was no way that I could ever really be mad at her. Not for more than a few hours. And right now with the alcohol, I loved her more than ever.

"Heather, I could never be mad at you. I love you. You're my best friend," I told her and Heather smiled.

"You're mine, too," she replied.

She brought me into a hug and for a moment I felt a pang of hurt when I thought about the words I had just told her. Besides my family, Iris was the only other person that I had ever said that to. "Just let me know how great he is in bed when it happens," I told her with a little wink. She laughed loudly. "And no waiting two weeks to tell me!"

We laughed and drank together at the bar for a while talking about nothing and everything. With the inhibitor of the alcohol I told her in detail about every encounter that Eric and I had had. She had smirked and told me that we just needed to do it. And do it. And do it. She evidently thought that once we got each other into bed we would never leave. Not wanting to talk about Eric, I had grabbed her by the hand and pulled her onto the dance floor.

We were drinking, dancing, and laughing together for hours. It was the most fun that I had had in weeks. Clearly Heather thought so too. We were dancing so closely together that, in Amity, it would have been considered a scandal. We would have been locked up and given enough peace serums to kill us. I couldn't have cared less. As I danced I risked a quick glance up to the perch and noticed that a few Dauntless leaders and ambassadors were standing together. Eric was up there with the man that had interrupted us only a few hours before. We would have been locked up and given enough peace serums to kill us. I couldn't have cared less. As I danced I risked a quick glance up to the perch and noticed that a few Dauntless leaders and ambassadors were standing together. Eric was up there with the man that had interrupted us only a few hours before. The man was watching me and gave me a quick wink before turning back to Eric.

Eric was watching my every move. Even when his friend and other people tried to talk to him he never once looked away. So I decided to take matters into my own hands. I put on a show that I hoped would stay in his mind long into the night. As I danced I made sure to show off for him. My tank top had essentially become a dress and on more than one occasion either I or a man that I was dancing with would slip it a little too high. More than once I had purposely shown Eric something. No matter how many people I danced with a kept eye contact with him. If he wanted a show he was damn well going to get one. Even from the distance that we were at I could tell that he was pissed. His normally light eyes were near black as they watched me and would burn red when another man would come to dance. It made a tingling joy shoot down my spine. Long after we had first gotten to the Pit, Heather nudged me to leave. I was actually sad to go. I'd been having a good time here. As we turned to leave I flashed Eric a quick smirk and knew that, as we were leaving the room, his eyes followed me until they no longer could.

Heather and I wobbled back to the dorms, slipping and falling a few times. It was a good thing that we didn't have to pass the Chasm on the way back to the dorms. I was pretty sure that we would have fallen over the part that was missing. We finally made it back to the dorms and collapsed into the beds. I wasn't sure what time it was or if I was even in the right place but it didn't matter. I passed out on the bed after only a second of lying there.

What seemed like barely two hours later I was awoken by a searing pain in my side. Thinking that it might have just been a hangover I pushed it off. But after a few moments the pain seemed to only increase. The pain had now spread to my entire torso and it was getting hard to breathe. This was bad. It wasn't just a hangover. This was something much worse. I had done plenty of hangovers before. This was something entirely new. I panicked slightly, wondering of Colt or Jade had finally caved and stabbed me.
Tears from both panic and pain rose in my eyes and a sudden flash of light burned in my eyes. Was I dying? I cried out softly in pain, hoping that someone would hear me. I fell out of the bed and hit the ground on my knees. I needed to get to the infirmary. Now. I needed to wake up Heather. She would help me. But just as I went to waking her up I realized that Eric was standing at my feet, a gun in hand.

Suddenly a white hot rage shot through me and the pain vanished. He hadn't. Had he really? I knew that he had been mad at me earlier but had he really shot me? I should fucking kill him. "You - You shot me. You fucking shot me?" I asked him, not really believing it.

He was one of the biggest assholes that I'd ever met, but would he really shoot me? I couldn't believe that he would. He was just smirking at me and I nearly throttled him where he stood. The pain was finally fading from my stomach and I assumed that the adrenaline had finally kicked in.

"What the fuck? I'll kill you!" I yelled before jumping up.

Eric was faster than me as he grabbed me by my shirt and threw me back into my bed, pressing his hands down on my throat and leaning over me, keeping me pressed into the bed and away from him. I was well aware that my hips were pressed against his. Really? Even when he had just shot me? What the hell was wrong with me? Eric merely pressed a little harder into my throat and I coughed. My vision was beginning to go black. Fuck being in bed with him. I was going to kill him.

"Relax, it isn't a bullet," he told me.

He reached down to my abdomen and I tensed as his fingers stroked my midsection for a moment before pulling out a dart. He held it up to my eyes, releasing me, and I blushed. Oh. It hadn't been a bullet. It was some type of pain simulation. My cheeks were burning and I coughed awkwardly as I stood, well aware that all eyes in the room were on me. Everyone was awake but they all looked completely lost at the change of events.

"What is that?" I asked weakly.

"Get on the train. Now!" Eric snapped.

He wasn't alone. Four was with him. The man was looking over to me with a sorry glance and I shrugged my shoulders at him. He probably hadn't been expecting him to do that. "What damn time is it?" Colt sneered.

For once I agreed with him. He clearly wasn't happy with being woken so early. I wasn't either. It felt like I had only been asleep for a few minutes. I was grateful as all eyes moved from me to Colt. Well, Heather and Buck were still staring at me but they eventually followed the line of sight back to our leader and trainer.

"It's two in the morning," Four said.

Why the hell was he waking us up at two in the morning? I had only been asleep for an hour. "Why two?" I asked, shoving Eric off of me.

"Get the hell up and on the train now. If you miss it I promise that you will be out of Dauntless," Four said. I immediately straightened up. It seemed that Four's words had snapped everyone out of their sleep filled hazes. "You're about to participate in an old Dauntless tradition."

That was all that he said before turning and walking out of the room. Straightening up as Eric moved out of the room I grabbed a pair of tight black jogging pants and my boots before tying up my hair. I could still feel the haze of alcohol in my brain and I sighed. This was going to be fun. Heather
seemed to be feeling it as well as she grabbed her clothes and slipped them on. We were both changed and out of the room in no time. The boys were walking with us but they were saying nothing. After all, they had been asleep for a long time. They had been in a deep sleep. But at least they hadn't been shot awake.

"Are you alright?" Heather asked me.

Shrugging at her I walked with her to the train station for the second time since I had gotten to Dauntless. It was so strange. Amity was so open that even though you never left the Faction it felt like you had room to roam. Dauntless, although large, felt so confining in comparison.

"Yeah I'm fine. I don't know what the hell Eric did to me but it hurt like hell. And this is why you're lucky that you have Cole. At least he would never shoot you," I said and she smiled abashedly.

Cole loved Heather. Eric just wanted to watch me roll around in pain. "Was it a dart?" she asked.

"That's what it looked like."

"He shot you?" Buck asked.

"I think so. Eric, on the other hand, probably gets pleasure out of shooting me," I muttered, knowing it was the truth.

He had probably been planning that for weeks. Or at least since I had shown off in front of him tonight. The train whistle sounded in the background and I knew that it wouldn't be long before it got here. A figure walked up next to me and I turned to tell Eric to buzz off. But it wasn't Eric. It was a guilty looking Four.

"You're alright?" he asked me.

Other than my pride, nothing was hurt. The pain in my stomach had long since died. "I'm fine, thanks," I said.

"Didn't know that he was going to do that. I would have tried to stop him but it probably wouldn't have worked. He does what he wants," Four told me.

"It's no big deal, Four. At least it wasn't a real bullet," I said, earning a laugh from the tough trainer.

At least now I knew that it was only Eric's idea. Although I would have never thought that Four was in on it. The train whistle sounded once more and we all glanced up to watch the train round the corner. As we watched I noticed that the Dauntless born were actually with us. I knitted my eyebrows in confusion. What were they doing here? And without Lauren? The only members I saw were Four and Eric.

The Dauntless born ran for the train first and threw themselves on effortlessly. Eric went on next and grabbed a hold of the bars with a surprising grace. The transfers went next and I was the first person on the train. My landings were slowly getting more graceful. Other than a slight stumble I mostly walked into the car. Where we were all pressed together. It was extremely uncomfortable. These cars were designed for about fifteen people. Once Four jumped in there were about twice as many people as it should have held. Although there was still a little room.

Eric and Four both made their way to the center of the car and all of the initiates smartly backed away. We were all standing against the wall and I found myself in between Dante and Jax. "All right. We've brought you out here for a Dauntless tradition. We do it every year. It's the only time that you'll be physically training with both Dauntless born and transfers," Eric announced. I didn't
miss the way that he said physically. After this stage it meant that we were all training together. "It's like Capture the Flag. Weapon of choice."

He held out a strange looking gun. I immediately recognized it as the gun that he had shot me with earlier and scowled. He seemed to be maneuvering it right in my line of sight and I scoffed. Give me one and I'll shoot that stupid smirk off of your face. Across the train car I heard someone scoff and I followed the noise along with everyone else. A few Dauntless born had shifted so that now Jade was standing in full view. She had her arms crossed over her chest and I sneered at her.

Clearly she missed the part where Eric had fucking shot me with it as a wake-up call. "You call that a gun?" she asked haughtily.

Once more I pressed my hands together in fury. It hurt. I hoped that she would find out soon enough. Almost like Eric could read my mind he held up the gun without even looking at her and shot her in the leg. She fell to the ground crying out in pain and I scoffed. Why the hell hadn't he shot her in the chest or something? Why did she get less of a punishment than I did? I had been sleeping, not insulting him! Although I did enjoy watching Jade writhe in pain.

It seemed that even Colt enjoyed watching her in pain. He was smirking down at her and I sneered at him. He was supposed to be her friend. I hated him, but still. They were supposed to be friends. They were supposed to support each other not laugh at their pain.

"Neuro-stim dart. Simulates the pain of a real gunshot wound," Eric finally announced. At least now I knew why it had hurt so damn bad. Mental note to self; do not get shot. "Only lasts a couple minutes. Two teams. Four and I are captains." Of course. I had heard of Capture the Flag. Basically you did just that, capture the other team's flag. But this was Dauntless style. We were shooting each other. "Oh and we take this very seriously here in Dauntless. I suggest you take it seriously as well. The team that wins gets a huge amount of points. If you are below the red line this is a good chance to bump yourself up."

I noticed Heather, Skylar, and Raven perk up. So did a few of the Dauntless born. Even I perked up. This was a chance for me to nab the number one spot. "You pick first," Four instructed Eric, who nodded back at him.

So they were doing this schoolyard style. I just didn't want to be picked last. I knew immediately that Eric was going to pick the strongest. Best shooters and fighters. Fastest runners. Four on the other hand was going to pick people that would make a good strategy. It made for two very different teams. But that was what would make the game interesting.

"Okay." Eric looked at me for a moment and my heart skipped a beat. Was he really going to pick me? I would have been utterly shocked. And I wasn't. "Aaron," Eric said.

I nodded as the boy I had once spoken to on the Fence trip walked over to him. I should have figured that he was going to pick him. He was the number one ranked initiate. For a moment Four looked over the small train car. His eyes flitted over everyone and I knew that despite his easy demeanor he was scrutinizing each and every one of us. Finally he shrugged and motioned towards me and my friends.

"I'll take the Amity," Four said.

My heart did a little start. Had he really just called me to be on his team? And first. I was good but I wasn't the best or the smartest. There were better people than me. There were better shots. But still I went to stand next to Four, looking to him to see if I could find any hint of emotion in his eyes. But I saw nothing. He was simply staring at Eric. Speaking of the leader, he had a fury blazing in his eyes.
I wondered if maybe he was thinking that he was going to pick me. In a way I was glad that I wasn't on his team. I wanted to get a chance to get him back for shooting me in the dorm.

He quickly regained his composure and he smirked at both Four and me. "Oh. Picking the weak ones so you've got someone to blame when you lose," he said with a scoff.

My anger bubbled in my chest and I scowled at him. I was one of the highest ranked initiates. I wasn't weak. Four's passive face finally turned to a smirk and I wondered if he had a plan.

"Something like that," Four said with a little laugh.

For a moment I would have sworn that they were actually friends. The teams went quickly after that. Eric had chosen Aaron, Jackson, Hunter, Michael, Draven, Greg, Colt, Dante, Lisa, Jade, Jason, Darren, Ezra, Raven, and Allison. Four had chosen me, Jax, Cole, Buck, Heather, Jason, Mike, Jessica, Serena, Jet, Sarah, Aria, Skylar, and Cara. Eric had one more initiate since there were an uneven number of us and he had gone first. But he had also had to take the lowest ranked initiate. Even Four hadn't wanted them. On Four's team we had seven transfers and seven Dauntless born. Eric had nine Dauntless born and six transfers. I was thrilled to see that he had both Jade and Colt. I was itching to shoot both of them.

We all shifted slightly feeling the uncomfortable air, knowing that both team leaders were willing to do anything to win the game. "We'll be getting off first. Four's team will follow. You will have ten minutes to hide the flags. Four and I are the leaders but we are only here to assist and supervise. The actual strategy will be done by the initiates," he said. That made sense. We had to prove that we could take charge of a situation, not just follow orders. "These are the flags. You grab the other's flag and its game over. There is only one rule. The flags have to be out for enough for the other team to see. They cannot be hidden completely or buried, or anything of the sort."

Glancing at the flags I saw that Eric's was a bright green and ours was a brilliant yellow. After he had finished explaining to us the rules he jumped off with his team and they were quickly out of earshot. Four had waited a minute before having us jump off. A few people had flashlights shining and Heather walked beside me as Four led us straight back through the old amusement park. I'd heard of this place before but no one ever came here. It was forbidden. We headed straight back for the docks and I took a look around at the people on my team. They were scattered among the ranking board. Eric had taken the majority of the higher ranked initiates. We were all standing together as I looked for a place to hide the flag in plain sight.

Once we had come to the edge of the docks Four stopped us and we all came together in a circle. "All right. Lights off," Four instructed.

The lights were immediately turned off plunging us into darkness. I was glad that I wasn't afraid of the dark. I couldn't hear anyone other than the breathing of my fellow team members. As for where Eric's team had gone, I was totally in the dark. Literally. I had no idea where they had gone. But I knew that they were to the north of us.

"Gather around. Come on. Okay. What's your strategy?" Four asked.

They were serious about not helping us. I had thought that he might at least give us a few ideas about what we should be doing. I hadn't thought that he would just watch and listen. Although this would be a good way to figure out who deserved the most amount of points on each team. I had to say something but I hadn't thought of anything yet. To my surprise it was Heather that spoke up first.

"We can hide the flag well enough so they can't find it. Let's send out a team to scout their location. See if we can find their flag. They will be wanting to attack. It's Eric," she said with a little shrug.
She was right about that. He was going to want to charge after us. We had to move fast. But no one spoke. Communication seemed like it was going to be the hardest obstacle to get over here. "I say we blitz them," Jason spoke up and I rolled my eyes. That was a great way to waste ammo. "Just -"

Cole thankfully was siding with me on this one as he cut across Jason's words. "Yeah, that's the best way to lose quickly. We go and attack them and all of a sudden they're going to be on us," he said. They were going to be waiting on us. They knew that we would only wait so long before going to grab their flag. This was probably the only time that Eric was going to be patient. "I guarantee they already have people all around us."

Cole clearly thought that we were going to lose this game and that made my blood boil. If it was the last thing that I would do I was going to beat Eric at his own game. He was not going to keep calling me the weak little Amity for long. "That's a good thing though!" a Dauntless born named Mike chipped in. "We take them out. Let's make them come to us."

We were backing ourselves into a corner doing that. And no one would be looking for their flag. Even if we could defend ours we wouldn't win until we got their flag. It was a stupid plan. "End this quickly, they won't expect it," Jason spoke up.

A few people were murmuring in the background, trying to come up with their own plan, but I could tell that they weren't going to work. Essentially every plan was one of two options. Attack them and hide the flag somewhere that they might find it or wait here and defend the flag. Neither was going to work. We had to split up. It made us more susceptible to attack but it was the only way that we were going to be able to get the flag and defend our own.

"We don't know where they are," Jax said.

We couldn't just wander around this place. They would spot us. They had the advantage of being here first. And Eric had the advantage of having more Dauntless born. People that were born and bred for this sort of thing. But we had a bigger variety of upbringings. I hoped that somewhere it would help.

"Okay, we split into two groups, defense and offense," Buck said.

It was the most sensible thing that I had heard anyone say all night. But the Dauntless born didn't seem to like that a transfer had a better idea than they did. "Who put you in charge?" Mike asked angrily.

I smirked as Heather made Mike back off slightly. He was a big guy but he wasn't that tall. Heather was certainly one of the tallest girls. "Someone has to make a decision," she snarled at him, defending her friend.

It was the most that I had ever seen her take charge. But we weren't getting anywhere and we had been out here for nearly five minutes. It wasn't going to be long before we drew Eric's team right to us. Once more Jason stepped forward to defend his friend.

"We need to be more aggressive," he hissed at Heather.

That was such a Dauntless way of thinking. It was going to get us caught. "We need to be smart about it," Cold defended Heather from Jason.

Once more I rolled my eyes and headed away from them. They weren't going to get anything done sitting here and arguing about it. I headed back across the docks and was thankful for my good eyesight as I looked out over the pier. I would have missed it had I not been paying attention.
up in the bell tower hung Eric's team's flag. There for the taking. It had to be a way to lure us in. There was an attack waiting for us somewhere. But there was no way that I was going to see it from here.

Knowing that I needed more height, I slipped past my arguing team once more and walked through the rides. Weaving in and out of them I glanced back to see that Four was now following me. He was probably curious what I was doing. I finally saw an old ride that had swings hanging from a circular platform. That was lame. They just raised the swings up in the air? Catching the ladder on the side, I climbed up, praying that I didn't lose my footing.

Once I was about thirty feet from the ground I stopped climbing and sighed as I pulled myself onto the top of the structure. It was angled downwards and I had to kneel with my knees on the roof to make sure that I didn't slip off. I might die if I fell wrong. It made my stomach churn. I wasn't afraid of heights or dying but I certainly wasn't comfortable with being up here.

How the hell did people once have fun on this thing? Glancing around I finally saw what Eric had been planning. An ambush. He was anticipating us to go for the flag and when we did we would be ambushed at the carousel. It was right in the middle of the amusement park. We would have been attacked. And there were bad sight lines down there too. I scoffed and shook my head. It was actually a good plan.

"Seeing anything?" I heard Four ask.

I jumped slightly, nearly slipping off the roof of the old ride. It creaked at my sudden shift. This was not the way that I wanted to die. "I've got something," I said, nodding at him with a smirk.

"Jump. I got you."

I was more than a little skeptical that he would actually catch me but I decided to give him a chance. I slid off of the edge of the ride, forcing myself to not scream. Four did as he said, catching me around the waist and slowly brought me to the ground. He had nail marks where I had latched onto him.

"Sometimes it's a good idea to walk away from them. Let them hash it out and figure things out on your own. It's smart. Even if we lose, I'll be sure to give you points for that," Four told me.

Grinning wickedly, I nodded at him. That was a good thing to hear. But I was going to ensure that we did not lose. I didn't need another thing for Eric to throw in my face. "Thanks Four. But I have something akin to an idea," I told him.

"Let me hear it," he said, nodding for me to continue.

"Up in the bell tower, where Eric's team set up the flag?" I asked.

"Yeah."

I wondered if he knew that they always kept the flag up there. "How do you get up there?" I asked him.

For a moment I wondered if he didn't know but it seemed like he had been up there before. "There's two ways. There's a normal staircase and another ladder that brings you straight up to the top of the tower," he told me. I smirked. So far I had a good plan forming. I just hoped that they would listen to me. "Right where the flag is hidden." He was now smirking as well. I could tell that he knew where my mind was going. "Got a plan?"
My smirk only widened. "Something like one," I said.

The two of us walked back over to my teammates. They were in a full out fight now, yelling and shouting at each other. We were practically broadcasting our location. "Hey, shut up! You're being so damn loud, we're practically drawing them to us," I told everyone.

They all quieted down and looked over to me. I had been silent until now. I suppose the floor was mine now. I had a chance to give my plan. "Figure something out?" Heather asked.

"Look if there's one thing that I know, it's that water slows everyone down. See that buoy out there?" I motioned to the object floating a few meters off shore. "It's only a few meters out from shore but it will slow them down if they come for it. We keep some people out here, up in the trees, hiding under the docks, maybe even a person behind the buoy. The water will keep them away. We go for their flag.

"They have some people waiting near the carousel. We send a group out there to attack. Pretend like we think the flag is there. It will draw more of them into the fight. They already have people out there. They're working on a diversion. But we have the leg up. We can see them. It will be a diversion for us.

"They have their flag out on show for us. It's up in the old bell tower. We send our best shots there. Some people can go in from the front. Make a sneak attack. It will draw most of them out to protect the flag. Two people, maybe three or four, can sneak in the back doors and head up to the top. The worse shooter out of the pair goes up into the tower. Someone will be waiting to defend the flag. Presumably Eric," I said, knowing that I was right. "Unfortunately they'll probably get shot. But the other person, or pair, can go rush to get the flag while the shooter is distracted. We get the flag and we win."

It was the most profound plan that anyone had had so far. Most people were nodding and my friends were all smirking at me. They knew that it was a good plan. It was defense, offense, and everything in between. "And why the hell should we listen to you?" a blonde haired Dauntless born girl sneered at me. I was pretty sure that her name was Serena. "You're from Amity. It should be the Dauntless born that handle this. We're the ones that were trained for things like this."

I was about to snap back at her but before I could Four spoke up. "Is that why none of you have come up with a good plan yet?" he barked at her.

Trying to grin down at the ground, I gave Four a grateful nod. I noticed Serena immediately backed down. Even though Four was nicer than Eric, no one ever wanted to piss him off. Not even a Dauntless born. They all knew not to fuck with Eric and Four. I smiled at Four and thanked him softly.

"She's right. This is the best course of action. It's a good plan. Now we figure out where to station everyone. Is anyone a good swimmer? Strong in the water? Someone small would be the best," Four said.

Everyone looked around for a minute before I saw a small hand pop up in the background. I sucked in a breath, not really sure if I liked the volunteer or not. "That would probably be me," Skylar said. Even Four looked a little doubtful. "I can handle it Four." If she was confident in herself, so was I. "It's a good plan Alex. It will work."

I smiled at her gratefully. This was good. We had the beginning of the plan worked out. Sensing that Four wasn't going to offer me any more help I decided to take the rest of the assignments into my own hands. "Alright good. Now how about people hiding under the docks? We should only need
two," I said softly. Two Dauntless born girls, Aria and Cara elected to stay hidden under the docks. "And in the woods? Again, two will be good." Sarah and Mike, both Dauntless born, volunteered for that duty. Mike seemed to have warmed up to me after hearing my plan.

"Good. How about for the diversion? Five should be about right. You might be outnumbered so we need good shots." That determined that Jax, Cole, and three Dauntless born, Jason, Jessica, and Serena were going to go to the fight. Serena looked less than thrilled that she wasn't going to be retrieving the flag. "Alright so that leaves Four, Heather, Buck, Jet, and myself to get the flag. Buck, Jet, Four, you guys should be the ones to distract them." I wanted the smallest person, Heather, to be with me. "Heather, that leaves you and me to get the flag. I hate to say it but -"

She already knew exactly what I was going to say. "Hey girl, I know. You're the better shot. I'll go up first. No worries," Heather interrupted me and I smiled. I was glad that she wasn't thinking that I just wanted to make her the bait. "But make sure to shoot Eric for me." I laughed. I was already shooting him for myself. "So what the hell are we all waiting for? Let's go!"

We all immediately separated and I watched as the majority of our group headed to hiding and the others began to head with us for the diversion. We had walked about ten minutes before we came up on the carousel area. Four had given me my gun and I was weighing it out. It was much different than a real gun. But all of the functions were the same.

"This might actually work you know!" Cole hissed.

I smiled at him. It damn well better. "Thanks for the faith," I said.

"We've got faith in you. Win the game. Give us a few minutes to start the fight and draw as many of them off as we can," Cole said.

We nodded. I gave him a quick hug before moving to the side. I caught Heather giving him a quick kiss and I smiled at her. Four, Buck, and Jet walked with us as we headed for the bell tower. We were hiding across the yard from them when I finally heard the yelling. Immediately four members of Eric's team tore off to help them and I smirked. It was working. There were still five guards standing in front of the tower. Draven and Dante were two of them.

We stood in wait for a few minutes and I could still hear the screaming of our teammates. One more of the guards in front of the tower headed off to help with the defense and I smirked. One down, four to go. We would actually be able to make this work if we were careful enough.

"Get that flag," Four told me.

I nodded at him as we separated. This was it. I shoved Heather off to the side, forcing her around the back of the bell tower. I could heard Four and the others attacking the guards but I didn't look back to see what was happening. We had to get the hell out of here. We only had a few minutes before the rest of Eric's team realized the carousel was only a diversion and we were outnumbered.

As we made a mad dash for the back entrance to the bell tower and rounded a corner I noticed that two figures were headed straight towards us. Dante and Draven. Dante immediately shot at us and thankfully missed. I missed him on two shots as well but my third went into his chest. He screamed as he fell and Heather managed a hit to Draven's neck. I knew how badly these things hurt and I felt terrible, but we had to win this. Eric was not going to rake me over the coals for losing to him.

Both boys were howling in pain on the ground and Heather shoved me roughly forward, accidentally right into Jade's waiting arms. But Jade hadn't seen me coming. I smirked and immediately shot her in the stomach. She dropped and I got another one into her leg. She was down
on the ground for the count but I couldn't resist sending another one into her chest. She screamed loudly and I smirked. She totally had that coming.

Bolting to the back of the bell tower we pushed our way through the doors and I was slightly surprised to see that no one was on guard. Glancing straight up I saw that it was a ladder straight up to the top. That was at least a ten story climb. Heather went up first and I went directly behind her. We climbed quickly, stumbling over ourselves. We had to get to their flag before they figured out where ours was. We finally made it to a landing just below where the flag was hidden. A man was running up behind us and I turned to shoot, smirking when I got him in the cheek. It was Colt. Heather turned back and shot him the chest again.

It definitely made me laugh. Once we were sure that he wasn't going to be bothering us for the rest of the game I shoved Heather up the second ladder and held my gun out as she popped through the hidden opening in the floor. She screamed and fell almost immediately after popping through. I had to force myself to stay silent as she went crashing back to the platform. Instead I scurried up the ladder and shot out blindly. Once I pulled myself through the floor I saw that it was indeed Eric. To his credit he never even staggered. But he clearly was furious. He shot me immediately in the thigh and I stumbled as I ran over to him.

He looked absolutely furious that I was here and so close to getting his flag. I ran after him and coughed loudly as he barreled into me. It sent us sprawling to the floor together. He was sitting on top of me and I had so far managed to keep his gun away from me. I blindly shot twice more and luckily one went into his chest. The other went sideways into his arm. I could tell that he was in pain but he continued to fight.

Briefly I wondered if he had ever been shot before. Probably, if he was still managing himself. He shot me in the arm once more and I cried out as he wrestled the gun away from me and threw it across the floor. Kicking out, I caught his leg and he tripped over me. We were locked completely together, punching and kicking each other. His foot had gone into my gut and I'd coughed up a little bit of my dinner.

I was tiring quickly and I wanted nothing more than to stop this. Eric grabbed my hair and yanked it back as I cried out in pain. He was pulling me to the ground as I kicked him in the stomach. It only made his grip on my hair constrict more. To my pleasure though, Heather seemed to have finally made it up here. She shot Eric in the chest and I took his moment of weakness to punch him in the eye. He stumbled back for a moment and I wiggled out from underneath him.

Once I jumped back to my feet I saw that Heather was holding the flag high in the air, yelling to our team below us. Shoving Eric slightly out of my way I ran up and grabbed the flag with her, whooping down to the celebrating, and moping, initiates below. Heather and I remained in the tower for a moment before heading out to celebrate with the rest of our team.

Eric looked like he might throw us off of the tower but he did nothing. Instead he just blew past us, tripping me. I nearly went sprawling to the floor but managed to stay steady. Eric was already long gone by the time I regained my footing and ran down the main stairs with Heather. I couldn't believe that we had actually done it. And all because of my plan. We had won! As we got back to the first floor and outside I saw that everyone was running around and congratulating us.

Even Four looked thrilled that we had won. A few members of Eric's team were even telling me what a great plan it was. The train was once more approaching and I headed over to it with Heather and Dante. Eric was watching me with a seething anger in his eyes that I tried to avoid. I assumed that he was not a good loser. But I was so thrilled to see how angry he was. He deserved it. He had to know that I wasn't here for him to walk all over. He stormed over to the train and jumped
I had been about to follow him onto the train when two Aaron and Jackson stopped me. I remembered them from the Fence trip. They actually looked happy to see me. I would have thought that they were furious that I had beaten their team at Capture the Flag. But they were laughing and smiling.

"Hey, Alex!" Aaron yelled after me.

I turned back, giving them a wide grin. They weren't the only ones that knew how to be Dauntless. Smiling at the boys I stepped back from the train. I noticed Heather and Cole getting ready to jump into one of the front cars and I sighed. There went riding with my friends.

"Aaron and Jackson, right?" I asked, making sure that I wasn't mistaking the two boys. "I remember you guys from the Fence trip."

The three of us all smiled at each other. He grinned back at me and shifted to the side slightly so that I could see the rest of his friends. I recognized Jackson, Jason, Sarah, and Serena but the rest weren't familiar to me. The rest of them must have been on Eric's team.

"Yep. Glad to see that we made an impression," he told me with a little wink and I smiled. "Look, this is Michael, Greg, Lisa, Sarah, Jason, Serena, and Darren." They were all smiling at me. All but Serena, anyways. She was scowling at me. "We were gonna do a little - uh - Dauntless initiation ritual and we wanted you to come with us."

I cocked an eyebrow at them, not really sure if I trusted them enough to go with them. "A tradition?" I asked disbelievingly.

But if Serena looked pissed that I was going I assumed that it was real. "An old one," Jackson said.

I hadn't seen any reason not to trust the Dauntless born. They had me curious. "Even though it's supposed to be reserved for Dauntless born," Serena scoffed.

"Anyways, we usually only reserve this for Dauntless born, but girl, you earned it. Hell of a plan you had back there. And you shot Eric. Anyone that has the balls to do that can call themselves a true Dauntless," she told me and I smiled.

"Well he woke me up by shooting me. It was my payback," I told her and she laughed loudly.

Everyone seemed a little shocked that Eric had actually shot me. I didn't see why though. That was the type of person that he was. "Eric shot you?" Aaron asked.

"Yeah. To wake me up," I explained.


"Thank you. I just wanted to win more than anything. Eric seems hell bent that I won't make it on.\"
through initiation so I really want that top ranking," I told them.

My eyes darted over to where Aaron was standing. He was smirking at me and shaking his head. I knew that he was in the number one spot and he would probably never give it up for me. "Well sweetie you can pry it from my cold, dead hands," he said seriously. "But if you do, I'll be sure to congratulate you."

A grin was once more gracing his features. I couldn't help but to laugh. They seemed to like me a lot more than I had thought that they would. We walked a little further from the train and I turned back, sucking in a breath. The last of the cars were coming by now and I knew that if we didn't get a move on in the next minute or so we were going to be stuck running back to the compound. And it was a long way from here. I didn't want to run more after this. I was exhausted and still a little drunk.

"Uh, the train is coming. We should probably get going," I told them, turning back to the train. Before I could make it a step though, Jackson reached out and grabbed my arm, pulling me away from the train. "No, we don't need to take the train. We have another way to get back. A better one," he told me with a wink. I wasn't sure how much I liked that. "Come on!"

They all immediately began running away from the train as the last car finally disappeared. I ran besides them as we dashed out of the old amusement park and through Chicago. I was glad to see that I could still keep up with them. That would have been mortifying if I had fallen behind. We were nearing the Erudite sector when Jackson finally let go of my hand and Lisa fell into step with me. The quiet night was interrupted by the whooping and cheering of the Dauntless kids.

Our small group slowed as we approached a huge, dilapidated building that I recognized as the Hancock Building. This place was long abandoned. I had never seen anyone coming anywhere near this place. It made my legs shake slightly. What the hell were we doing out here? Lisa noticed my hesitation and she grabbed my hand, continuing to pull me forward and up the stairs. We were heading straight up towards the roof. The Hancock Building was incredibly tall and I was panting as we ran up the stairs. I was glad to see that the others were, too.

"We aren't gonna throw you off the top if that's what you're thinking," Lisa told me as we came to the halfway point of the stairs.

"That's reassuring," I joked.

The two of us laughed as we accelerated slightly. Now I wanted nothing more than to be at the top. "It's a zip line to the Dauntless compound. The top ranked Dauntless born do it after Capture the Flag," she told me.

"That's awesome!" I cheered.

How had I never seen this thing before? It must have been way up in the air since I had never seen it before. I'd been out here a number of times. We came out onto the roof and I saw that the harness was already set up and ready to go. A few Dauntless members seemed to be manning it.

"Winning team gets the honors of going first! That means you!" Lisa said. My heart skipped a beat. I wasn't afraid of heights but I had never done something like this. "You aren't scared of heights are you?"

"No. But I've never been this high," I admitted.

Lisa dragged me a little closer to the edge of the building and I glanced down. The zip line was steep and we were probably a mile or so out from the Dauntless compound. It would be like falling right
off of the edge of the building. But I had to be brave here. I was Dauntless for a reason. I had to do this. I was sure that Eric and Four would have done this, so I sure as hell was going to do this. I shook my head that I wasn't afraid of height and Lisa smiled at me.

"Well Amity, looks like you get to go first. Try not to smash into the wall at the end, they just cleaned up the blood from the last transfer that fucked up," Serena snarled at me.

Scoffing at her, I rolled my eyes and stepped up to the harness. Making me even more nervous than the impending drop, everyone was watching me. "Shut up Serena," Aaron said, repeating Lisa's earlier words to the girl. "You're just mad because Alex thought of the plan when you didn't."

I smirked back at her as Aaron led me over to the zip line and began to strap me in. I would be going down head first. "This is safe, right?" I asked him.

"You'll be fine. We promise," an older Dauntless member told me.

"Alright so we're going to strap you in," Aaron said as he finished tightening the strap over my back so that I wouldn't go flying out. "This is the brake. Pull it when you start to see the Dauntless compound." He was pointing to a black chord hanging by my side. "This is the release. Pull it when you stop. They'll catch you. Ready?"

"I think so," I said, nodding hesitantly at Aaron.

"See you at the bottom!" he yelled.

His hands pushed off of my thighs and the drop came faster than I was expecting. My body weight propelled me down the giant drop at the beginning and I yelled loudly. But once I got used to the falling feeling it was actually rather fun. My eyes were watering with the wind hitting my face but I had a huge smile across my lips. This was amazing. I spread my hands out to the side and imagined that I was flying.

It was the most amazing thing that I'd ever done. I passed the Erudite compound and flipped the bird to Jeanine Matthews. Even though she couldn't see me. Abnegation came up next and I had to suppress the urge to spit on Marcus Eaton's house. Not that I knew which one it was. Candor came up next and I yelled out to Iris and Florian. Not that they could hear me. Amity was last and set far off to the side of the zip line. I made no noise but I made a soft smile as I passed it.

Too soon the Dauntless compound came into view and I sighed. I wasn't sure that I was ready to get off of this thing. But that wasn't a choice. "Pull the brakes!" a girl at the bottom yelled to me.

Brakes? Where the hell were the stupid brakes? It was almost too late that I remembered the rip-cord. I followed her directions and yanked the brakes, jolting with the sudden stop. I stopped about ten feet from the wall and sucked in a breath as she yelled at me to release myself from the line. I did as told and fell into the waiting arms on a few Dauntless members. They caught me and congratulated me with smiles before dropping me to the ground.

Part of me wondered if I should wait for the rest of the Dauntless members, or go and head back to the dorms, but as I heard Lisa's scream from the zip line I decided to wait for her to say thank you. She was dropping quickly and I smiled at the look on her face. She looked totally at ease.

"Whoo!" she yelled as she yanked on the brakes. She stopped a few feet shorter of the brick wall than I had. "Thanks guys."

The Dauntless members that caught her all stayed and chatted with her for a few minutes. She was completely at ease with them and it was almost nice to watch. They were like family. They caught
her and lowered her to the ground. She caught my eyes quickly and smiled at me, rushing over.

"Hey, girl, you did great! How did you like it?" she asked me.

Lisa was very similar to Heather. It was nice to know that I had friends outside of the transfers that I had grown so close to. "It was so much fun! I've never done something like that before," I told her.

She smiled and laughed softly. That was stupid of me to say. Of course I hadn't. I was from Amity. "Glad that you liked it," she said.

"Thanks for inviting me up here. I don't think I ever would have found out about this otherwise," I told her.

Aaron dropped off next to us and I smiled at him. After me they had all come down quickly. "You wouldn't. It's a pretty well hidden Dauntless secret," he said. I had been out there in broad daylight before and never seen it. "Or at least Dauntless born. It's the one thing that we usually like to keep to ourselves. Tell your friends you were in another train car, will you?"

I was already keeping one secret from them, well maybe not Heather, but I could keep this one. "Not a problem," I said.

"Thanks. Alright, go on and head back. Got another damn day of training ahead of us," he groaned and I smiled.

Maybe they were a little more like the transfers than we thought. I gave Aaron, Jackson, and Lisa hugs as they left and waved to the rest of the Dauntless born. Serena was the only one to ignore me. They departed from me quickly and headed to wherever it was that the Dauntless born lived. I began to head back to the dorms when I was cut off by Eric on the edge of the Pit. I scowled at him, expecting him to chew me out, but he didn't. He was merely examining me like I was some creature that he had never seen me before.

"They invited you to go zip lining, huh?" Eric asked me.

"They sure did," I said.

"Pretty impressive, there's only a few transfers I've ever seen get to go up there," he said.

I had figured that I wasn't the first transfer to ever get to go up on the zip line but I was certain that not many got to do it. It was like Aaron said, it was a Dauntless born tradition. Apparently I had really impressed them. "Thanks. It was fun," I said and he nodded.

"They were impressed with you."

"I appreciate that. I hoped that the plan would work," I said.

"Well, it did."

Eric looked like he was waiting for something and I scowled at him. "I'm not apologizing for shooting you if that's what you're waiting for," I sneered.

To my surprise he actually scoffed at me and shook his head. "I don't give a damn that you shot me," he told me.

My eyebrows quirked up. I had thought that he would be furious at me for shooting him. I couldn't have blamed him for that. I was still pretty pissed at him for shooting me. The adrenaline had kept me
from really being in any pain but I was still angry that he had gotten me.

"I'm actually impressed. They said that it was you that came up with the strategy to get our flag. Was it?" he asked me.

"Mostly," I said.

"Don't be shy about it."

So I decided that I might as well admit it. "Yeah. It was my plan," I said.

His smirk twitched a little bit and I nearly laughed. He clearly didn't like that. "Not bad, initiate, not bad at all," he told me and I scoffed.

He had to be kidding. I had fought so hard to win this stupid thing and get the flag back. He couldn't even say that I had done a good job? Or say my damn name? "Come on, Eric. I beat your team, shot you, and grabbed the flag out from under your nose. Shouldn't I have earned you saying my name now?" I asked him, standing with my hip cocked out to the side.

His eyes brightened a little bit and I knew that this wasn't going to be anything good. Nothing from Eric was ever good. "Tell you what. Your ranking is going to go up after that win tonight. Especially because you were the one that orchestrated it," he told me and I nodded at him. "So if, at the end of initiation, I see your name in the number one spot, I'll say your name all you want."

His eyes were lidded as my heart began to thunder in my chest. My pulse raced and I nodded at him. I didn't miss the hidden meaning in his words. Deciding to play it up a little I listened to Heather. Make him think that I really wanted it. Go for it and then knock him down a few pegs. Exactly what he needed.

"Then I can't wait to hear you say it," I purred at him.

Eric's eyes flashed dangerously and we smirked at each other. It was like a little dance that we were doing. "Ensure that you earn it," he growled.

"I will." We stared at each other for a moment before I crossed my arms. "And even though that wasn't really a compliment, thanks," I told him. We stood in silence for a moment before I decided that I had had enough of actually functioning today. "Alright, I've had a long night so I'm going to bed. I'll see you tomorrow."

I waved him off as I turned around and headed for the dorms. Before I had even made it two steps I heard Eric call back to me and I rolled my eyes. "Initiate -"

"Yes, yes, I know," I spoke over him. He narrowed his eyes at me when I cut him off and I rolled my eyes. All I wanted was my rock hard bed and musty pillows. "I have a meeting with Jeanine Matthews tomorrow. Be there and don't be late. You've told me this already."

He really was such a brat about everything. He was a major pain in the ass. He loved to order me around. He rolled his eyes at me and took a step closer, dropping his voice. His eyes had hardened and I didn't like the look of it. There was something here that I wasn't going to like.

"Not the meeting. You are receiving tomorrow off from training," he told me and I immediately
brightened.

That was a perfect day for me to get off! Right after I had been drinking so much. "Fantastic," I chirped.

"By personal request of Max," Eric told me.

My heart dropped into my stomach. No part of me wanted Max to be giving me a personal request. "Excuse me?" I asked. He seemed nice enough but he also seemed to be one for the rules.

I was currently breaking a big rule of Dauntless right now with Damien. Maybe one day with Eric too. "You are going with Four, Zeke, Max, myself and another Dauntless member on a mission tomorrow. You will be briefed on it in the morning," he said and my jaw dropped.

They wanted me on a mission. Why? What the hell was it? I wasn't even a member yet. "What do you want me on a mission for?" I asked Eric.

"I don't want you on the mission," he hissed at me.


"You'll hear later. We leave at five. You will be in the same area with the net, ready to go. Do I make myself clear?" he asked.

I wanted to ask him about the mission but I knew that I wasn't going to find out anything until we left. "Crystal. Alright, as long as I don't have to be stuck next to you all day," I teased him.

Eric pulled out a pistol version of the dart gun from earlier and I sucked in a breath. I had no doubt that he would shoot me with it again. He merely laughed and rolled his eyes at me. I sighed and turned slightly, catching sight of one of the clocks in the Pit. It was already four in the morning! I had to be up for the mission in an hour. So much for a day off.

"But - What the hell? It's four already! I might as well not go to sleep," I said with a little scoff.

So much for sleeping off that hangover. Eric looked nonplussed. I wondered if he ever actually slept. "Then you can come with me. I have a few things I need done," he told me and I sighed.

I wasn't sure that I wanted to be with Eric right now. Even for an hour. "Wonderful," I growled.

"Watch that mouth," Eric snarled.

"Yes, Sir," I teased.

Eric's eyes briefly darkened and I blushed softly. That wasn't what I meant. He turned back and snarled when he saw that Heather, and a few of my other friends, were standing and watching us. "Go send them to bed. And tell them nothing about tomorrow. The only reason you are being involved is because you have insight that we may need," he told me.

I nodded at him, still not really liking his words. I wanted to know what he meant by that but I knew that he wasn't going to answer me. Not yet. Nodding at him and turning away I headed over to where Heather was standing. She was smiling at me but looked a little concerned. They all did. After all, they hadn't seen me since we won Capture the Flag. They probably thought that I had been lost there.

"Hey, where were you?" Heather asked as I walked up to her.
I knew that I couldn't take long. Eric was not a patient man. "Sorry, I got held up by a few Dauntless born asking about my plan," I told her.

I felt bad about lying to Heather but I had promised Aaron and the rest of the Dauntless born that I was going to keep the zip line a secret. And I would definitely do that. It wasn't the worst of the secrets that I had. And maybe Heather would get to find out one day. Eric snarled behind me and I rolled my eyes.

"Listen, apparently Max needs me tomorrow. Something that I have 'insight' on. I won't be in training tomorrow," I told Heather.

Her eyes widened. It sounded so strange. Max, and the other Dauntless leaders, never want to consult initiates. Especially transfers. They thought that we were completely useless until we had some time in Dauntless and took that time to adjust. I wouldn't have thought that I'd be useful in Dauntless for at least another year or so.

"And I have to be ready to go in an hour anyways so I'm going to hang down at the Pit," I lied to her. I'd tell her the whole story later. "See you for dinner tomorrow though, right?"

She nodded at me, looking extremely suspicious. Not that I blamed her. I would be too if I were in her spot. "Do you know what's going on?" she asked me.

I shook my head, not wanting Eric to be able to tell that I was going to recount everything that happened to her later. "No," I whispered, barely moving my jaw.

"Will you tell me later?"

I nodded at her with a little laugh. "Everything," I whispered.

Her suspicious look dropped and was replaced with a little smile. "Then we're all good. I'll save you a spot at the table," she told me.

She was a good friend. "Thanks. I'll see you tomorrow," I said, walking out of the small hallway.

Giving Heather a quick hug, I waved to my other friends before turning back to where Eric was waiting for me. "Ready to go?" he asked me.

"Sure."

It was all that I could bring myself to say. He didn't say anything as he turned away from the Pit and walked through the halls. My heart skipped a beat as we walked through a place that I had been once before. We were going back to Eric's apartment. And we had an hour before we had to be anywhere. This time we hadn't just tried to kill each other. We were sound of mind. What the hell was going to happen between the two of us? My blood was pounding in my ears as we passed Damien's apartment and came to a stop in front of Eric's door. He turned back to me quickly, clearly noticing my discomfort and smirked at me. As he opened the door I felt like a lamb being led to slaughter. I was at his mercy here.
Chapter Eleven

As Eric opened the door and let me into his apartment, I felt my heart beating out of my chest. The last time that I had been in his apartment had been under completely different circumstances. He had just accidentally thrown me off of the Chasm. There was also the fact that I hadn't even bothered to look around the last time that I was here. I had been so caught up in the fact that he had nearly killed me. This was so different. This time we were merely waiting to go on the mission that I was apparently so needed for. I walked slowly into the room and, behind me, Eric immediately walked into his kitchen, rummaging through the drawers.

Unable to pry open my mouth and say anything to him, I merely stood near the door and looked through the rest of the apartment. I thought that I might have known what it would look like, but I was wrong. It was much different than Damien's. For one, it was much larger. I guessed that it was one of the perks that came with being a leader. They must have gotten the largest apartments that were set farther into the compound - the quietest area.

The main hall was reasonably empty. It was all grey with stone walls. The room had no paint and there were no pictures up on the walls. Back home in Amity there were pictures all over my walls. Eric's place looked a tiny bit like I imagined a home in Abnegation would. His kitchen was like the rest of the room. Plain. There were the typical appliances; a refrigerator, stove, microwave, and an oven. It was small and sat on the left side of the apartment. Across from the kitchen was probably the living room. It was pretty bare except for two chairs and a couch. They were all black and didn't look very comfortable.

Right next to the living room was the bedroom. It seemed that Eric didn't have an actual bedroom with a door. Although with only one person living there, he didn't need a separate room. The bed was low to the ground and completely made. Just as I had expected, the sheets were black and silk. They looked much more comfortable than the scratchy sheets and rock hard cot that I currently slept on. Of course he was treated so much better than the initiates were.

There was a dresser to the side of the bed that was also black. At the end of the apartment were two doors that were both closed. I assumed that one of them was an office and the other one was a bathroom. It would have been a similar layout to Damien's if they were. I had been through his apartment enough times to have easily learned the layout.

Eric's apartment had no decoration in it whatsoever and I frowned. There wasn't even a picture of himself or a certificate or anything. The whole place was more like a showroom than an actual apartment that was currently occupied. Even Damien had a few paintings and pictures up in his. Eric's apartment was bare and immaculately clean. Damien's was a bit of a mess. Eric's clean apartment was a good sight. I hated messes.

The only other thing that was in the room, and anything close to decoration, was an old bookcase that was filled to the brim. It was the only thing in the room that had any color. I had always loved reading and I was glad to see that Eric held the same love. As I approached the bookcase I realized that there must have been well over a hundred books. I knew some of them, but most I didn't. A number of them were philosophical books and I smirked. Although I didn't like him knowing it, I always thought that Eric was rather intelligent. The bottom rows were all Dauntless manuals. At least he had put those on the bottom.

The books on the top were all from famous authors. Eric had good taste in books. As my fingers traced the spines of the old books I nearly laughed. There was one of the authors in the large collection that brought a smile to my face almost immediately. Edgar Allan Poe. I was immediately
brought back to the time where Eric had seen the quote on my hip and I blushed, forcing myself to push the thought from my mind. He must have known immediately what the quote was and he must have appreciated it.

Other authors included Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Oscar Wilde, Jane Austen, Agatha Christie, Leo Tolstoy, J.R.R. Tolkien and so many more. It was like they never ended. I smiled at the books that I had already read. The Old Man and the Sea, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Great Expectations, As I Lay Dying, The Great Gatsby, The Picture of Dorian Grey, Pride and Prejudice, And Then There Were None, War and Peace, The Lord of the Rings, and The Hobbit.

Many of the books were banned in Amity but I had snuck them out of the restricted section. The books that we were allowed to read were terribly boring. And so many of the Amity members thought that reading was less fun than talking to each other and laughing. My eyes settled on a book of William Shakespeare stories. I wasn't particularly fond of his work but I did appreciate his writing. It was better than anything that I could have done. And there was one quote from A Midsummer Night's Dream that I had always been fond of.

"And though she be but little, she is fierce," I whispered quietly, knowing that Eric was watching me closely as I looked over his prized possessions. To my surprise he had said the last half of the quote with me. "You read," I commented softly.

He must have recognized most of these books. "I do," he muttered.

His voice was right in my ear. Smiling at him, I turned back to see that Eric was almost directly behind me. His chest was pressed against my back and he was looking down at me. My heart was beating loudly in my chest as I tried to push it down. Nothing was happening. We just happened to be standing close together.

"You like reading?" I asked.

"Always have."

"Me, too," I whispered.

We stood in silence for a moment before Eric placed a hand around my body and laid it on the Shakespeare book. "I always used to think that he was full of shit," he told me.

My eyebrow went up and I turned back fully to look at him. If anything I had thought that Eric would like Shakespeare. He was very fond of writing stories about powerful leaders. And that was exactly what Eric was. But then I realized that he hadn't said, he did. He had said that he used to. Or had I misheard him?

"Used to?" I asked.

"Yes."

"What changed that?" I asked, hoping that he would actually answer me.

He merely stared at me for a moment with his eyebrows quirking up towards his forehead. I blushed slightly under his scrutinizing stare. It was never something that I would be comfortable with. It made me feel like he knew everything about me. Like he could completely see through me. I knew that he could.

"You did," he told me.
There was a little twinkle in his eyes. "That might be the nicest thing that you've ever said to me," I chirped. He smiled at me before walking away.

It definitely was the nicest thing that he had ever said to me. I couldn't help but to smile and blush slightly. I knew one thing for sure. It was certainly the most emotion I'd ever gotten from him. As he turned and headed back to the kitchen I couldn't help but to sigh. Some part of me had actually been hoping that he would kiss me. I quickly shook that thought off.

Eric had gone back into the kitchen and any hint of pride he's held in his eyes a moment ago was gone. It surprised me that he could so quickly change personalities. I glanced over and saw that he was staring down at the pot of coffee he was currently brewing. Smirking at him, I shook my head. He probably drank more coffee than was healthy. He had to have had at least ten cups currently brewed.

"That's quite the reading collection that you have over there," I said.

He nodded without looking up. "It's just a small piece of it," he told me.

"Really?"

Once more, he nodded. "Small piece of everything that I've read," he continued.

"Aren't you intelligent?"


We both chuckled as I looked back towards the bookcase. "I didn't think that many Dauntless read that much," I muttered, running my fingers over the spines.

"Most Dauntless never read. They're all about acting first and thinking second. But sometimes it helps to take a break and look at the world through another person's eyes. Even if they aren't real," he said.

My jaw nearly dropped at his words. "Where's Eric and what have you done with him?" I asked teasingly.

Every once in a while Eric said something so profound that I had to do a double take to make sure that it really was him. "Don't look so shocked that I read, Amity. I might actually be a little smarter than you are," he told me with a smirk.

"I actually believe you," I said begrudgingly. We smiled at each other as I shifted away from the bookcase slightly. "I didn't think that Dauntless even had a library," I said more to myself than him.

"It doesn't," he said.

I sighed at the loss of something that I would have genuinely enjoyed. There went that thought.
"That's too bad. Having a library would have made me so happy. I'd love to be able to read again. I left all of my books back in Amity. But it's so dark in here. I'd want to do it in the sunlight. I used to love to lay out in the fields and hide from my chores, getting lost in some old book from way back before the world changed," I said dreamily.

All of my thoughts were locked onto my memories of reading in the Amity fields. "You wonder why I call you Amity," Eric said, drawing me out of my thoughts.

Despite myself I actually laughed. There were moments that I was just like an Amity. But that was
part of me. And I was certainly still partially an Amity from what the Aptitude Test said. Not that I would tell Eric that. It was one of the few things that he never needed to know about.

Done with the bookshelf, I moved to walk through the room. As I passed the black sheets I couldn't help but to wonder just how soft Eric's bed actually was. He was currently leaning over a mug of coffee and watching me with a piercing stare. I might as well have a little bit of fun. I dropped into Eric's bed and melted into the sheets. I couldn't help but to sigh. It was so soft. It was like laying on a cloud. I briefly thought about what Eric had done in this bed but I shook it off. I didn't want to think about that right now. Or ever, actually. Definitely not because I was jealous. Never.

"This is blasphemy. Your bed is like sleeping on a cloud," I said.

My voice echoed throughout the room as I slipped my eyes closed. Maybe I would just take a little five minute nap. I hadn't slept at all. I was sure that Eric wouldn't mind. Besides there was a number of hours before it was actually time for the two of us to leave and go on our mission. Five minutes wouldn't kill me.

Naturally I had been wrong to think that Eric might leave me alone for more than a minute. The bed shifted under a sudden weight and I knew that Eric had gotten into the bed. It was his. There wasn't much that I could say. But when I opened my eyes I gasped when I saw where he was. Eric was currently hovering over me and I had to push back a blush. We had been in this position before, more than once as a matter of fact, but it had always been while we were sitting on a bench or laying on the training room floor. It had never been in a bed.

The only time we had been together like this near a bed was earlier tonight after he had shot me and held me down in my bed. That was much different. And being here made it feel so much different. This was Eric's turf. He made the rules here. There was nothing that I could say or do to change it. And I wasn't sure whether or not I liked the power that he held over me right now. He was leaning down close to my ear and my heart was pounding in my chest. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't slow it down. All I wanted was him.

And he knew it. "You know that all you have to do is ask. You could ask me right now," he said.

The breath left my lungs. "What?" I asked, my voice shaking slightly.

"We still have forty five minutes until we have to go," he told me.

"You don't mean that."

"I do."

I was running out of things to say to him. The only thing that I wanted was to try and run out the clock until it was time for the two of us to leave. But that was a long time from now and I knew that there was nothing that would stop Eric from getting what he wanted. Clearly I was the thing that he really wanted.

So I decided to run with it. "Prove it," I hissed softly.

It was probably something that I shouldn't have said. But nothing was working. My mind wasn't telling me to stop. My heart wasn't telling me that Eric wasn't the type to ever want me more than once or as more than a bed warmer. And my privates certainly weren't helping. I knew that my face was a bright red as Eric's hand ghosted up my side, leaving a trail of goosebumps behind. My shirt was coming up as his hands ran over my body and I shivered, allowing him to pull it up. I knew that once my bearings were back together I would hate myself, but I couldn't stop him. I wanted my shirt
off. I wanted his off. I wanted everything off.

My shirt was pulled up so that it was laying at the base of my chest. He leaned down, and for a moment I thought that he might kiss me. But he didn't. His lips went over my chin, across my jaw, and down my neck, eliciting a little groan that I had never heard come from me before. His fingers were digging roughly into my back, nearly tearing the skin. I said nothing. It felt good.

His mouth ran down my neck, along the path of my jugular vein and I groaned once more. No one had ever done anything like that to me before. I let out a small moan and felt him smirk into my skin. His teeth grazed over my jugular once more and I let out a high pitched whine, cringing immediately. As if he wasn't confident enough in what he could do to me. He knew I wanted this. I had never wanted someone as much as I wanted Eric right now. I couldn't tolerate this anymore.

Screw the mission. Screw the ban on Dauntless member and initiate relationships. I wanted to be with Eric. I wanted him to take me. He pushed my shirt up past my chest and didn't bother to try and pretend that he wasn't blatantly staring. He was about to pull it over my head when I smelled something funny. What the hell was that? I tried to sit up but Eric immediately pushed me back onto the bed. Normally I would have liked it but right now I was actually concerned. It smelled like something was burning. Eric looked furious with me but I ignored him.

"Is something burning?" I asked him.

He stared at me for a moment, our connection completely broken. He was sitting back on his knees, staring at me but clearly not actually comprehending what I was saying. I realized quickly that he was trying to smell whatever was burning. I could see the boiling fury in his eyes. He was pissed that I had interrupted us. But finally he seemed to realize what I was talking about as his eyes widened and he turned back to look at the kitchen. I followed his gaze and saw that a small fire was coming from a pot on top of the stove.

"Damn it!" he yelled, jumping off of the bed to put out the fire.

The previous mood gone, I merely blushed and dropped back onto the bed. Why the hell did I say anything? We were so damn close. I shouldn't have said anything. I would have rather burned to death than be stuck with this stupid burning desire in my core. It was worse than I had ever felt it.

Deciding that I should get up and pretend that nothing had happened I walked off of the bed and pulled my shirt back down. I was definitely more than a little bothered that Eric hadn't even looked at me. So I sighed and ruffled my hair back into place. Eric was trying to salvage what was left of the hard boiled eggs. I smiled, taking a seat at the counter.

He handed me the plate without speaking and I nearly laughed. They were rock hard. I supposed that we had gotten carried away. We ate together in silence and I was easily shocked at how normal this was. It was so mundane compared to what we were normally doing. Either trying to seduce or kill each other. There was no in between.

"You're a terrible cook," I said, finishing the egg off.

"I had something to distract me," he shot back.

That was enough to completely silence me. I wasn't sure what I could say. My mind was racing as I stared at the ruffled sheets on the bed. We had been so close. I blushed as I began to wonder what might have happened if the eggs hadn't started to burn. Eric stood and went into the top drawer of the dresser. I cocked my head as he grabbed some clothes and walked back over to me. They looked like
female clothes.

Annoyingly, I bristled at the thought of someone else being in Eric's bed. I forced myself to shake it off. I certainly wasn't the first, and wouldn't be the last, girl in Eric's bed. That was just the type of guy that he was. Looking closer at the clothing in Eric's hands I realized that they were indeed female clothing. There was a pair of shorts and a shirt along with a dress. I couldn't help but to laugh softly. He looked so funny holding a dress in his hands.

"Those are gorgeous, Eric. But that dress might be a little low cut for you," I teased.

He smirked and threw the clothing onto the bed. He walked back over to me and grabbed me by the shoulders, making a little nerve bundle build in my core. What the hell was wrong with me? He was going to kill me, not sleep with me. Actually, maybe both. He threw me back into the wall, keeping me pressed against himself. We found ourselves in this position more than I would have liked. All I needed was to sleep with him. If I did that then this would all be over. But he would also win.

"Excuse me, did you say something?" he asked me with a playful grin.

I thought about making another snide comment but decided better of it. I wanted to tease Eric but I also didn't want to make him mad. "No," I muttered.

"I thought not. The clothes are for you."

"They're not Sarah's?" I asked before I could stop myself.

You moron! Why would I have said something like that? "Would that bother you?" Eric asked, pushing up against me.

My heart was racing. "No."

"Liar."

"I don't give a damn what you do with her or who keeps you company in here," I hissed. Liar.

"Liar," Eric repeated.

His hand went to my hip and squeezed it, making something in between pain and pleasure shoot through my waist. "Don't touch me," I snapped, shoving his hand off. "What are they for?"

To my surprise, Eric didn't push. "The top layer is what you will wear on the mission. The dress on the bottom is for the meeting with Jeanine tonight," he said.

He walked away from me and I sighed. He always made me want to sleep with him and then go back to normal. It made me so angry. He couldn't just be one way or the other. "Two questions. Number one, why can't I just wear this? It works for normal training and it worked for Capture the Flag. Number two, why do I need to wear a dress? I thought she just wanted to talk," I said, scoffing softly.

I hated dresses. I had worn them all the time growing up. I didn't want to wear one ever again. "Why do you have to be difficult?" Eric snarled.

"You're just as bratty as I am. You just don't want to admit it," I said.

He merely rolled his eyes at me. "When we go out on missions you have to wear gear. You need holsters. You won't be carrying like the rest of us but you won't be empty handed either. Just wear
"Okay."

"As for the dress, Jeanine has insisted a dinner after we finish the mission. She will be there. It's a formal event," he said.

That was just great. Two of my favorite things. Wearing dresses at formal events with people that I didn't like, and having to deal with Eric all day with no break. And he seemed to be heavy on the teasing me today. "My day gets better and better," I sneered.

"Would you like to lose the points that you just got from Capture the Flag?" Eric asked.

"No," I muttered quickly.

"Get changed."

"Alright. Can I use your bathroom?" I asked.

He watched me as I gathered the shorts and shirt in my hands. Marching up to him, I tried to shove him out of the way but I only knocked myself off balance. He was watching me with an amused smirk. Was there really something funny about this? I was already upset that I'd been awoken, but now I wasn't going to be able to sleep at all, I had to deal with Eric and Jeanine, and I was still upset that we had been interrupted.

"I have to get changed Eric. Let me use your damned bathroom," I snarled.

"Oh, right," he said teasingly. He wasn't done quite yet. "The bathroom. It's being redone right now. How inconvenient. Don't you agree?"

I knew for a fact that he was not having his bathroom redone. He just wanted to mess with me. "Extremely," I replied, crossing my arms over my chest and glaring at him.

"Don't worry. I'm not going to do anything," he said seriously. Somehow I trusted him. "Remember, you have to be the one to come to me."

And there went any hope I had for him. At this point I knew that I was going to lose the bet between us but I wasn't concerned. After all, what would he really do to me? I didn't think that he would tattoo anything too bad on me. I didn't really care what he wanted to do to me. I just wanted to be with him.

"I won't come to you," I said.

"You will."

The two of us glared at each other as I waited for him to turn. He never did. Rolling my eyes, I grabbed my tank top and pulled it over my head. I was well aware that Eric was watching my every move. My leggings went next and my boots after that. The breath went out of Eric's chest and I turned to see him watching me with dark eyes. I glanced down and nearly screamed at myself.

I was mortified. I hadn't gotten around to doing laundry yet so I had worn my spare set of underwear. Bought only for Heather's amusement. My bra was bright red and lace with a slight push up to it that I certainly didn't need. My underwear was red with black lace around the edges and it showed the majority of my ass. I knew that my face was currently the same shade as my bra.
"Planning on someone seeing you like that?" Eric asked me.

"What if I am?" I shot back.

"Who?" he asked.

"Not you. This is the only time that you'll ever see me like this."

He didn't even bother to hide the fact that he was staring right at my chest. If I had thought that I'd seen Eric's eyes dark before I was dead wrong. They were black right now. Instead of grabbing my clothes and putting them on I decided to have a bit of fun. He enjoyed teasing me so much. It was my turn. I walked into his kitchen and grabbed a water bottle off of the counter. Popping the cap off I took a small sip and purposely let a little drop down onto my chest.

"What are you doing?" Eric asked me as he walked over to me.

He sounded like he could barely breathe. I felt the same way. "Nothing," I whispered.

"You dress like that for Roberts?" Eric asked.

No. "None of your damn business."

To my absolute surprise Eric grabbed me by my arms and shoved me back into the wall. I gasped slightly but it wasn't out of fear. It was only a burning desire. My head smacked the stone wall and I saw stars for a moment. I grabbed the bottom of his shirt and bundled it in my hands. He shoved my back roughly into the wall and grabbed my thighs.

He yanked on them and brought me in between his legs. He was trapping me completely. We both yanked the shirt over his head and he tossed it to the floor. I let my nails softly rake down his chest, leaving bright red marks as reminders. His hands wound around my back and one of them grabbed my hair, tilting my head back, while the other went to my bra. His fingers easily snapped the clasp off. My heart was thundering. It was really happening.

He grabbed the front of the bra and was about to pull it off when a loud knock sounded at the door. I let out a soft shriek and jumped back from Eric, panting heavily. Who the fuck was that? They either had perfect or terrible timing. Currently I was leaning towards terrible.

"You have got to fucking be kidding me," I snarled. I was pissed. We were almost there.

Eric was seething from the interruption. "I'll kill him," Eric snarled to himself.

I couldn't help but to wonder if he knew who it was at the door. The poor person who was about to get Eric's wrath was smart if they decided to run. My heart felt like it might burst from my chest as I clasped my bra back together and grabbed my clothes from the bed, leaving my other set of clothes on the floor. I pulled on both the shirt and shorts and looked down at my body.

The top was tight and was a little bit short on my torso. It showed part of both the quote and angel wing tattoo. The sides of the shirt were ribbed. It was tougher material to protect from knife and bullet wounds. The shorts were capri's that fell just above the knee. The shorts had two built in holsters on them. One was built to hold a knife and the other was for a gun. There was a small hook on the side of the pants that I assumed would be used to keep a rifle in place. I grabbed my boots and pulled them on before pulling up my hair once more. Eric had almost completely pulled it out of its hold. Eric looked extremely similar to me. But he was wearing full length pants.

He had been waiting for me to change. He walked over to the door and threw it open. I glanced up at
the man. It was the same man that had actually interrupted us at breakfast yesterday. He had a knack for timing. I blushed and looked away from him. He had to have known what was going to happen. I merely ignored his smirk and grabbed a cup of coffee. We weren't exactly subtle. My face was bright red and Eric looked angrier than normal.

"Hey, man. Max sent me to give you this. It's for her. He also said to get you to tell her what's going on now," he said, handing Eric a file, who nodded curtly. The man turned to me and smiled. "Alex, I'm Cameron." I grabbed his outstretched hand and shook it. "I'm an Ambassador here in Dauntless. I'll be going with you on the mission."

Cameron seemed nice enough but I was still pissed that he had interrupted us. For a moment I wondered if these apartments had cameras and I panicked. Had he known what was happening between us? No. That was stupid. If that was the case, Eric would have had a reason to throw Damien and I out of Dauntless weeks ago.

"Nice to meet you," I told him softly.

He turned back to Eric. They seemed to be friends but Eric looked anything but friendly right now. "I have a few other things to attend to but I'll see you guys soon. Try not to be too late, Eric," he told the leader.

He sent the two of us a wink and I immediately felt sick. So he had known what was happening between us. That was not good. This was against Dauntless code, everything that we were doing. It was even worse that Eric was a leader. We had to be careful. We could both get in a ton of trouble. Cameron took his leave of us and we both waved him off carelessly. We were still angry that he had interrupted what would have been a fantastic way to start the morning. The door shut behind him as he left and I blanched as I heard him laughing in the hallway. At least he wasn't going to rat us out.

Eric was at the counter in his kitchen, sitting on one of the bar-stools and leaning over the paperwork. He was in full leader mode. "Over here, initiate," Eric called to me.

I rolled my eyes. Just once I would have liked for him to call me by my name. I walked over to the kitchen and took a seat in the chair next to him. "That's not my name," I said.

He didn't even bother to look up at me. "I don't care. We'll be going to Amity today," he told me.

I nearly fell off of the stool from shock. What the hell had he just said? Of all the things that he could have said we were doing, going to Amity was not one of them. I didn't want to go back to my home Faction. Amity was the last place that I had ever thought that I would set foot in.

"Why?" I asked Eric.

He still didn't bother looking up at me but I could tell that he was gauging my reaction carefully. He wanted to make sure that I was as loyal to Dauntless as I should be. "Amity was attacked by Factionless two days ago," he said.

That time I knew that my reaction was more than he was expecting. "What?" I shouted in a higher voice than I meant to.

He turned to look at me with a sneer but I didn't bother to react. My home, well my ex-home, had been attacked by the Factionless. Why? What would make them want to attack Amity? What about my parents? Were they safe? Were the people that I had grown up with safe? What about Johanna?

It made absolutely no sense to me. Of all of the Factions to attack, why Amity? Obviously they held a bit of a grudge against them but they were stupid to attack. Especially when Dauntless were
around. As far as I knew the Factionless had never attacked Dauntless. They would be stupid to do so. A thousand guns would be aimed at them in seconds. Candor and Erudite made no sense either. They were in the center of Chicago. They would be surrounded on all sides with a long trip back to the Factionless sectors. Abnegation would be a stupid choice too. Don't bite the hand that feeds you. But Amity made no sense either. They stayed out of fights.

Eric's voice finally snapped me out of my frantic thoughts. "No one was hurt, no one was killed," Eric said.

I let out a breath that I hadn't realized that I had been holding. Thank God. My family and friends were still safe. Even though they might hate me I wanted to make sure that they were still safe. I would always want to protect them.

"Next time you might want to lead with the fact that no one was killed," I snapped at him.

He merely turned and glared at me. "Actually I think two Factionless were killed during the attack but that doesn't matter," Eric said with a little shrug. Some part of me was a little bothered that Eric thought so little of someone's life, but then I remembered that they had attacked Amity.

"At least no Amity," I added quietly. "But that doesn't make any sense. Why would someone attack Amity? There's literally no reason."

"That's exactly what we're all trying to figure out," Eric told me. It unnerved me that even Dauntless leaders had no idea why there had been an attack at Amity. "There's one man that we captured, a Factionless guard that is still there. He hasn't said much. We're hoping to get something out of him. All that we know right now is that a few houses were raided. Seemed like they were looking for something. We aren't thinking that they found it."

A sudden urge shot through me. I had to know which of the houses it was. If they were anyone's homes that I, or any of my friends, had once lived in. "Do you know which houses it was that were being searched?" I asked Eric.

He looked up at me and shook his head. I had been hoping that he might know. "No. Not yet. But we'll find out when we go there. You are being brought because you have the insight of Amity without their attitude," Eric said.

It wasn't like Dauntless didn't have stupid attitudes at times too. "They aren't that bad," I snapped.

"Which brings me to my next point. You will say nothing unless instructed. You will only go where Four and I order you. If we tell you to do something you will do it without issue. Understood?" Eric asked.

"Yes." I knew that they were going to only speak to me when I was needed. It would make a boring day for me.

"Good." Eric grabbed a piece of black metal and handed it to me. "This is a real gun. Don't shoot yourself with it," he told me and I rolled my eyes at him.

"Thanks, asshole," I hissed.

Eric jammed the gun into my hands. "The magazine is empty. I have a full one with me. If I feel that you need it I will give it to you," he said.

Grabbing the gun from him I slipped it into the holster on my thigh. It was lighter without the bullets in it but it still felt lethal. All I had to do was put a bullet in it and I could take a life. The thought sent
an uncomfortable shiver through me. "Are we going to war?" I asked.

Eric finally looked up at me. Surprise was covering his face. "What was that?" he asked.

"I mean you said that there was only one Factionless man that was still there," I said with a shrug.

He simply shrugged his shoulders and loaded his own gun before shoving it into his holster. I noticed that he had knives in his other holster as well, while mine were empty. "It should be a peaceful visit but you never know with the Factionless. The guns are precautions," he told me and I nodded.

He glanced up at me and I stared awkwardly at him for a minute. He was scrutinizing me like he could read my mind and it unsettled me. "Okay," I muttered, unsure if he was waiting for me to say something.

"Can you do this without being impartial?" he asked.

For a moment I was floored. Could I? "Of course I can," I snapped.

"If you fall apart at the sight of your old home I'll make damn sure that we leave you there," he snarled at me.

Any thought that I might not be able to hold myself together while we were in Amity went out the door with his last comment. They were not leaving me in Amity. "I don't miss Amity, Eric," I snarled his name. "There are some people there that I will always love but I don't miss it. It's not my home. It never was. But that doesn't mean that I want to hear that it was attacked. My family still lives there. Most of my friends still live there."

Maybe Eric never had friends or a family that he cared about or anything like that but I did. There were people in Amity that I loved and wanted to watch out for. "I don't care," Eric hissed.

I scowled at him. "Trust me, I know that," I muttered.

He might be the only person in Chicago that could live without a heart. "You're Dauntless now. Act like it. Faction before blood. Remember that?" he asked.

Of course I remembered that. It wasn't like I could forget something like that. It was drilled into us from birth. "God, you're an ass," I snarled at him.

I stood up to turn and leave out to where the trucks would be waiting for us. I didn't need Eric grilling me any more than he already did. One of the trucks would more than likely be picking us up. For a brief moment Derrick's face flitted through my mind and I smiled. It would be good to see him again after all of this time. He was one of the few people that I really missed.

Startling me from my thoughts, Eric grabbed my arm and threw me back into the kitchen counter, nearly making me topple over. The counter was digging roughly into my back and I hissed at the pain that was shooting through my spine. He was leaning over me and I was halfway in between being scared of him and turned on. Why did I always react to him like this? Why couldn't I just hate him? It would be so much easier.

"What was that, initiate?" Eric asked me.

I shook my head, not wanting to say anything and make him mad. "Nothing," I muttered.

"I thought not. You didn't seem to have a problem with me being an ass when you were in my bed just a few minutes ago," he said.
I scowled as he once more leaned over me. "Get over yourself. I don't want you, Eric. I never will. I was bored and you were something to amuse me," I hissed.

"I don't think so, Amity," Eric teased.

He was right. It was just a lie that I was telling him. I knew that he wanted me in his bed just as much as I wanted to be there. I was sure of it. Eric’s hand squeezed my hip roughly and let his hand brush across my lower stomach as he backed away from me. He had better self-control than I thought that he did.

"Come on, time to go," he said.

Rolling my eyes at how fast he could switch gears, I nodded and followed him out into the hallways. We walked through the Dauntless compound quickly and quietly. I noticed that no one was awake yet. There were a few guards milling around but no one else was out. Even the Pit was empty. It was the only time that I had seen it empty. We walked into the loading bay that I had first come into Dauntless through and I noticed that the net was still hanging. It wasn't just a trick for the new kids.

The whole room looked less intimidating than the first time that I had seen it. It was probably because I had gotten used to the dark and dingy look of Dauntless. As we walked over to the loading bay I saw a few men waiting on the Amity truck. It was only two minutes before five. I recognized Max, Four, and Cameron. There was also a dark skinned man that I had never seen before. He was standing with Four and they looked to be about the same age.

Four turned and smiled when he saw me and I smiled back at him. Why couldn't I like Four? He was a nice guy compared to Eric. The man that was with him turned and gave me a friendly smile. "Ah, so this much be the Amity transfer," he said. I rolled my eyes but grabbed his outstretched hand to shake anyways. I was so sick of people knowing me as the Amity transfer.

"That's me, I suppose," I muttered. "Nice to meet you. Alex, right?" he asked.

"That's right."

"My name's Ezekiel. Call me Zeke though," he said.

Smiling softly, I nodded. I'd heard people talking about him before. "Nice to meet you," I said sweetly.

"I was in the same initiation class as Four and Eric here. Finished a few spots below them." I had thought that they were the same age. "You ready for this?" he asked.

Was I ready for this? Not really. I wanted to know what had happened and why the Factionless had attacked Amity. I nodded at him with what I hoped was a friendly smile. He was actually a rather pleasant guy to be around. Even though I knew nothing about him I liked him already. He reminded me of the boys that I had grown so close to. He was the only person that had ever bothered to ask me if I was doing alright besides my friends.

Four and Eric were both now talking with Max, while Cameron was swiping through his tablet. It left me to speak freely with Zeke. "Thanks for asking. You're the only one who has bothered to do so," I said.

"I'm not surprised. Dauntless tend not to care about how the others are doing," Zeke said, looking a little guilty.
"I'm used to it by now. But, yeah, I'm good," I said, making Zeke smile. "Honestly I'm not so nervous about going back to Amity as I am on why the Factionless were there in the first place. It doesn't bother me to see my old friends again. My family, they're another matter," I said. He gave me an understanding nod. "But I'm here to deal with the Factionless. I want to know why they were there. They have no reason. At least, I don't think that they do."

Zeke was the only person in Dauntless that looked at me like I was more than just an initiate. It made me fond of him. "Spoken like a true Dauntless," he told me.

I smiled at him. "I'd certainly like to be one," I said, making Zeke smile.

"You will be. You know, I'm Dauntless born but I can see that this probably isn't the most comfortable thing for you to be doing. Don't worry about it. We all understand that this might be weird for you," he told me.

Laughing softly, I gave him a grateful smile. "I'm not so sure about that," I said, shooting a look over to Eric.

"Well, maybe not Eric, but you seem to be able to handle yourself around him," he told me with a wink.

He had no idea how wrong he was. "Oh, I'm not so sure about that," I said, making us both laugh.

"As for dealing with the Factionless, the first thing that we're doing is interrogating the man," he told me and I nodded.

A stupid thought shot through my head. I didn't want to sound like a pathetic Amity pretending to be Dauntless but I had to know. "Are we all going to be walking around Amity together?" I asked him.

Part of me wanted to keep away from Eric while we were in Amity. I knew that he was going to keep a close eye on me. Zeke clearly understood my question as he nodded and turned back to motion to the others. "Max and Cameron will start out with us. We're meeting Johanna first so she can give us a little more insight to what happened," he said.

Seeing Johanna again would be good. I liked her well enough. She was always like a motherly figure. "It'll be interesting for Johanna to see me again after so long," I said, making Zeke laugh.

"That's right, you must known her. Max and Cameron are going to split off and try to reassure the Amity members. The rest of us are going to talk with the Factionless man and figure out what the hell they were doing there in the first place," he explained.

That unfortunately meant that I would be stuck with Eric all day. Just as I was about to ask Zeke if I could stick near him for the day, a loud engine roared in the loading bay. We looked down and I sucked in a deep breath. I had to be ready for this. But I wasn't. I had never thought that I would go back to Amity after choosing to go to Dauntless. But here I was, four months later, heading back to my old home.

Max walked onto the truck first and spoke with the driver before heading to the back of the truck. Cameron, Zeke, and Four followed him. Eric was watching me and I sighed, knowing that he wanted me to get on first. He moved to the side so that I could get on and I stopped short when I saw Derrick sitting in the driver's seat. I hadn't really thought that he would be the driver. It had been more of a joke with myself.

Derrick stared at me for a moment. "Am -" He stopped himself. "Well I'm sure that it's something else now, isn't it?" he asked.
Derrick was giving me the same smile that I had grown accustomed to over the years. It was the same smile that he would always give Iris and I when we were doing something that wasn't Amity. He was amused. "Uh yeah, Derrick. It's Alex now actually," I said somewhat awkwardly, knowing that Eric was glaring at me.

"Alex. It suits you better," he said.

"Thank you."

"It was nothing too drastic of a change. You look very Dauntless. It works," he continued.

Once more I smiled at him. Derrick was always the perfect Amity. He was the kindest person you could meet, but not sickeningly so. And he had always respected the other Factions, even if he didn't agree with them. "I'm glad that you think so," I said.

"Some of us always knew that you weren't destined to be an Amity."

"It's good to see you," I said softly, taking a seat behind him.

My joy didn't last long as Eric took the seat next to me. Derrick was smiling at me through the rear view mirror as he began to rumble down the pathway back to Amity. I knew that the Amity compound was only about ten minutes away from Dauntless. Eric was watching us with narrowed eyes but I tried to focus on Damien. After all, this might be the last few minutes I would ever spend with I had thought that same thing just a few months ago.

"These are your friends I suppose? Other Dauntless members?" Derrick asked, motioning around us.

For a moment I was floored. He must not have known them. Now I had to awkwardly tell him that they weren't my friends. They sort of were. Some of them, at least. "Oh, I thought that you would have already known who they were. I guess Johanna just asked you to come out here though," I said more to myself than him.

Derrick nodded at me anyways. "I just do whatever she tells me," he said, making me smile.

Four was sitting across from me and I noticed that he was keeping a close ear on the conversation as well. I blushed and tried to shut them out to focus on the conversation. I was trying as hard as possible to keep my voice steady and void of emotion but so many memories were flooding back to me.

"I'm not actually a member yet. Initiation lasts eight months," I said and Derrick's jaw nearly dropped. "But I'm doing well." Next to me Eric snorted and I scowled at him. "Back there is Max. He's the Head Leader in Dauntless. This is Eric, another leader. That's Cameron, an Ambassador. Four is currently working as my trainer. And Zeke is..." I trailed off, realizing that I didn't know what it was the man did. "What is it that you do, Zeke?"

Like everyone else, he had been listening in on the conversation. He leaned forward so that I could hear him over the roar of the truck. They had never been good for conversation unless you were sitting right next to the person that you were talking with. "I work in the Control Room. Intelligence. Just like Four here. The only difference is that I don't train the initiates. Four gets the pleasure of doing that," he said with a little laugh.

Four merely rolled his eyes but he had a slight smile on his lips. "Yeah. It's a real pleasure," Four groaned.

He sent me a friendly smile and I rolled my eyes. "You know that you enjoy us," I chirped at Four.
He and Zeke both laughed. I could tell that they were friends here. I remembered seeing them sitting together. "I hate all of you," he said, shooting me a look that told me that he didn't really hate us.

"No one ever really hates the initiates. They're the future of Dauntless," Zeke said.

He gave me a little wink and I smiled. He was definitely the fondest of the initiates of anyone that I had met. I was fairly confident that I had seen Zeke before but I had just never known his name. He had been walking with a boy that looked a little younger than me the last time that I had seen him. Probably his brother. I was even relatively certain that I had seen him the night that we had gone on the zip line.

"Whoa," Cameron gasped. I looked over at him to see that he was leaning over the back of the truck. "This is Amity?"

Were we already there? I glanced out of the truck and saw that we were, indeed, back in Amity. I guessed for someone that had never seen it before, Amity was probably pretty impressive. It was certainly much different than Dauntless. Though to me, it was just like coming home after an extended vacation. Amity looked no different than I had ever seen it before.

The huge oak tree, my favorite part of the Faction, still sat in the center. It was the heart of the Faction. All of the homes were pastel colors with paintings on them. They surrounded the tree in a circular pattern. My home was somewhere in there. It was right in the middle, pressed towards the center of the Faction. The dome that held the dining room and large mansion that was part of Johanna's home was still standing there as well.

Everyone in the truck was staring at Amity curiously. Even Eric looked a little curious about the Faction that had once been my home. As I saw a brief flash of my home I sucked in a breath. I wasn't ready for this. Not as ready as I had thought that I might have been. What if I saw my parents? What the hell would I say to them? Sorry for breaking your hearts but I'm super happy! No way. I would just stare at them like an idiot.

Looking around the truck I saw that everyone was staring at Amity like it was an alien planet. I knew that it looked a little funny but I wasn't sure that it deserved all of those looks. The only people that looked even remotely carefree were Max and Derrick. They were looking around but neither looked fascinated by the bright-colored Faction.

"Have none of you ever been to Amity?" I asked.

They all looked surprised to hear me speak. Eric didn't bother to look away from Amity but he was the one to answer me. Four, Zeke, and Cameron looked too caught up in the new Faction. "Few Dauntless soldiers ever have to come to Amity. There's no reason for us to ever come," Eric said.

"So you've never been in Amity?" I asked.

Finally Eric broke eye contact with the Faction and looked over at me. "Not yet," he said.

It made my toes curl at the way that he'd said it and the way that he'd looked at me. I knew exactly what he meant. The way that his eyes were sparkling and the way that there was almost a laugh in his voice. He knew that he would eventually be in Amity, and he didn't mean the Faction. My face must have been as red as the shirt that Derrick was wearing.

Eric recovered from the comment first. "This is the first attack that I've ever seen on Amity," he told me.

It took away all of the thoughts of Eric's previous comment. Why attack Amity now? This time it
was Max that spoke up. "I've never actually heard of an attack on Amity," he said.

I glanced over at him. That was one of the first times that I had ever heard him speak outside of when he would address the entire Faction. "Never?" I asked.

"Never. That's why we've brought you here, Alex," Max said. I nodded blankly. Max had never spoken directly to me and I found myself startled by how serious he looked. "We need someone here to tell us as much about the Faction and its inhabitants as you can. Anything you know of can be helpful."

The truck stopped and we all quickly disembarked from the truck. Before departing from the truck, Derrick gave me a sweet smile that I made sure to return. I had missed his smile. It was always something to make you feel better, even when you were having the worst day. And it seemed so pure compared to the sleazy and teasing grins that I got in Dauntless. I followed the men to Johanna's mansion and awkwardly brushed through the crowd.

We were getting odd looks from the Amity members and I forced my gaze to stay fixed directly ahead of me. I didn't want to look at them. I didn't want to hear them. I was, however, discreetly checking for my parents. Some part of me wanted to see them. Even if it was just a glimpse. But I was afraid to see them after everything that I had done to them during the Choosing Ceremony and leading them on beforehand.

We walked into the main room and I spotted Johanna standing at the back wall. She was wearing the same purple robes that she always had on. She looked as calm as ever. A man, clearly Factionless, was on his knees in the middle of the room. Johanna was staring at us with a small smile on her face. Johanna was one of the few people that could always be tolerant of everyone and not seem overwhelming. She was the true meaning of Amity. I supposed that it was the reason that she was the leader. "Gentlemen," she greeted. She must not have been able to see me. "Welcome to Amity. It's a pleasure to have you with us. I just wish that it was under different circumstances."

She always had been cordial. Unsurprisingly, Max was the first person to walk up to her. "As do we Johanna. We are sorry about the disruption to your Faction. But we are glad to hear that there were no casualties on the Amity side," he told her.

"I appreciate that," she said through a smile.

Max grabbed her hand, but instead of shaking it, he leaned down and kissed it. He was much better at the diplomacy than I had thought that he would be. Of course he had to deal with other people politely. He was a leader after all. She shook her head as Johanna released Max's hand and stood with her hands clasped in front of her torso.

"There were casualties. Just not from Amity," she said with her head high. She hated the fact that people had died. She wanted peace in all of the Factions. "We wish for this to be over. Please do what needs to be done so we can all settle down for dinner."

Max nodded and backed away and I watched closely as he introduced the others. Four shook her hand as did Cameron and Zeke. Eric, like Max, kissed her hand. I couldn't help but to wonder if it was a leader thing. Max motioned for me to step out and I did so. Max was about to introduce me but Johanna spoke over him.

"Oh, I don't need an introduction here. Amarantha!" she cried. I cringed at the use of my real name. "How lovely it is to see you again. We miss you here."
Smiling at her, I moved forward a few steps so that I was standing directly in front of her. "Thank you, Johanna. It's good to see you, too," I said.

My chest tightened as Johanna grabbed me and pulled me into a hug. It was so strange to be hugging her again. I couldn't see the men behind me but I knew that they were all staring at me closely. Johanna released me and smiled down on me. She was taller than me but the look was motherly. Comforting. More than I had thought that I would ever get again, considering what I had done to my own mother before leaving for Dauntless.

"But I did change my name when I went into Dauntless. It's Alex now," I told her softly.

Somehow I felt that acting like a stuck up Dauntless soldier wouldn't look good on me here, so I decided to keep my words quiet. "Fitting. But you will always be Amarantha to me," she said sweetly.

At least she was keeping her voice quiet. "I understand," I said.

"Now, come with me if you will," she called back to everyone else, before leading us away.

For a moment I hesitated. But Eric grabbed me behind the back and shoved me forward. So I fell into step between Eric and Four. We were standing at the back of the group and watching everyone in front of us. Four and Eric were both standing tall and proud. They were in Dauntless soldier mode. Johanna led us to the Factionless man and he turned to look at us.

"We have discovered that his name is James. He says that he was here on a mission from his leader. Do what you need. Cameron and Max, if you'd like you can come with me now," she said.

The two men nodded. I watched them leave silently and stared after them dumbly. This mission made me feel like I really was just pretending to be Dauntless. Everyone else seemed to know exactly what they were doing and I was just following them around like a lost puppy. Max whispered something to Eric and he nodded before turning to leave. Eric then turned to tell both Four and Zeke what was going on. I was being completely left out of the loop here. Not that I expected anything different. James was watching me with a curious smile and I shook my head, looking away from him. I didn't like his stare. Eric seemed to notice it as well as he came to stand in front of me with Four at his side. Zeke took a spot next to me as we all faced the man.

He looked something in between bored and amused. My blood boiled. This wasn't a joke. It was serious. "What were you and your friends doing here in Amity?" Eric asked James, authority clear in his voice. Cold and calculating. "You said you were under orders. Who did you get your orders from?"

The man merely shrugged and I scowled at him. "My leader. You have your own leader and I have mine," James told us, a small smirk adorning his face.

"Who did you get your orders from?" Eric repeated.

"We were here to retrieve something from a specific house of residence. I only had a number. The orders were spread out so that we didn't all know the entire reason that we were here," he explained. I scowled at him. "Your men shot the only person that knew what we were looking for," he explained.

Something in his face looked almost victorious. How Eric was staying calm was beyond me. He was normally furious with anyone that talked to him like James currently was, but he was keeping a calm head right now. "I somehow doubt that." James shrugged at us. "What were you here looking for?" Eric tried, asking a new question.
It got just about the same reaction that the first question had gotten. "I just told you. I don't know," he said.

There was no way that it was the truth. Why go on a mission if you didn't even know what you were going for? "He's lying," I muttered to Four, who nodded at me. "We went to the house that I was told to go to. Family wasn't there. We searched but before we could figure out why we were there your men stepped in and killed my friends. Never knew why we were there."

"My heart bleeds for you," Eric sneered at James. I had to stop myself from laughing. He did have a good way of putting things. "You and your friends attacked a Faction that doesn't know how to defend itself and now you tell me that you don't even know why you were here." James nodded. The whole thing just sounded stupid. He had to know more than he was letting on. "I think you do. So go on and tell me."

James remained quiet. Eric gave James about a minute before he got sick of waiting for an answer. He brought out his gun and I tensed as he put it to the man's forehead. But I was the only one to change stance. Both Four and Zeke were staring with cold gazes. They had clearly known that it was going to go down like this. This probably wasn't the first time that this had ever happened. But still, I had to do something. There was one thing that he could tell me that could help me.

"Wait," I said. I pushed my hand on Eric's arm and pushed him to lower the gun.

"What are you doing?" Eric asked me softly.

It was quiet enough that no one else could hear me. "Please. Trust me," I whispered.

He stared at me for a long time and said nothing. "Okay," Eric finally conceded.

I stepped past him and noticed that Four and Zeke were watching me closely. They both had their guns trained on James as I approached him. I kneeled in front of him, noticing that he was watching me with curious eyes. "Which house was it that you were sent to?" I asked.

It was obvious that I wasn't intimidating him. He was merely staring at me like I was the devil beside him. Although, I was certainly with them. "Why does that matter to you?" James asked curiously.

Patience was wearing out around the room though. "Tell her," Four snapped.

His voice had startled me and I almost looked back. But I had to keep my eyes on this guy. It was an intimidation tactic. Eric had used it on me enough times. I was surprised to hear Four cock his gun from behind me. They were all in defense mode but it was strange. I'd never seen any of them act like this before. They had almost always had some humor in their eyes. But they were dead serious right now. James still stayed quiet. I nearly screamed when Four fired a bullet. It went right into James's left shin.

My ears rattled and I cringed as he let out a piercing scream. They waited a moment for him to quiet down and reduce his sobs to loud gasps for air. "He warned you," Eric said carelessly. "Now answer her. Which house was it that you were sent to?"

To his credit, James was loyal. He still didn't answer. Eric scoffed and leaned forward. He dug his thumb into the bullet wound on James's leg and I cringed at the splitting scream that emanated from him. He silenced himself once more and I jumped again when Eric fired a bullet into James's right shin. Same damn spot. He screamed loudly as Eric stared him down. I had backed off and now I stood pressed against Zeke.

"That's two bullets. These magazines hold fifteen each. Four of us. That's fifty eight bullets left.
"Ready to tell us?" Eric asked James. I didn't like the glint of humor that had returned in Eric's eyes.

James had stopped screaming and was now looking at us like the monsters that we were acting as. I didn't feel bad for him. He had attacked my home Faction. He could have killed people that I cared about. He had this coming to him. "You gonna let me live if I tell you?" James asked.

I was shocked to see how fast James had sold out his friends. I would have always protected the people that were mine. Even if it was Eric. James turned back to Zeke and Four and both men nodded at him. I raised my eyebrows, a little surprised that they were actually going to let him live.

"Depends on how well you cooperate." James nodded. "Tell us everything that you were told," Eric demanded.

James shifted on the floor for a moment before launching into his story. "I meant what I said before about only being told part of the mission here. I know that we were sent here to recover a file," he said. We all nodded. At least we knew what they were looking for. "I don't know what it was or what was in it. I was never told. Only one man was told. Your people killed him." The snappiness of his voice told me that James had been friends with the man that had been killed. "We were all told different houses; to go and check out these houses. They told us the damn rooms too. Find any files and recover them."

They even knew the rooms to search? This whole story was getting creepier by the second. Were the Factionless watching Amity? Maybe even while I had been living here. "And you don't know what was in these files?" Eric clarified and James shook his head. "Alright now answer us. Which house were you sent to?"

James let out a long sigh before finally telling us. "22B. Second floor, third door on the right," he admitted.

The breath that I had taken in felt like it had been vacuumed from my lungs as I fought to stay standing. If I'd eaten anything more than an egg at breakfast it would be all over the floor right now. I must have imagined it. 22B. That was my home. My parent's home. Second floor, third door on the right. I knew that room. I had spent sixteen years there. It was my room. What the fuck were they in my room for? What did they want to find? My companions all turned to me and upon noticing my current state they all gave me concerned stares.

"So are you going to let me go now?" James asked, turning the attention back to him. He looked bored.

Eric took another step towards the man and for a moment I thought that he might cut the binds on his feet and hands. Four moved over to me and I looked over at him. "Look away," he told me. The words didn't register with me soon enough so I merely stared stupidly at Four. He tried to get me to turn but it was too late. Eric grabbed his gun and before James could scream or I could turn, he shot the Factionless man in the forehead. James fell to the ground, now a corpse. I knew that my face had gone ashen, staring at the man's body. I knew that Dauntless soldiers killed people, that one day I might have to kill someone, but I had never thought that I would see it so soon.

"You didn't cooperate well enough," Eric said to the corpse before turning to me, probably noticing the sick look in my eyes. "Welcome to Dauntless, little Amity."

Normally I would have been pissed that Eric was making fun of me, but today it didn't quite register with me. Right now I was thinking about too many things. I had just watched Eric kill someone. I was back in my home Faction. These people had been searching my home for a file. My room. I
didn't understand any of it.

"Alex, do you know whose house that is?" Four asked me, bringing me from my thoughts.

I took a moment to compose myself before nodding at Four. Once more, I would have to be careful what I said here. "Yeah. It's my - my parents' home," I told them softly. If I had called it my home, it wouldn't have gone unnoticed by Eric.

Every face in the room dropped at my words. I didn't want to admit that it was my room yet. "Do you have any idea why they would want anything in your house? Any important files that your parents might have in there?" Zeke asked.

I shook my head. "I can't imagine why they would have been there," I muttered.

I should have told him that it was my room that James was talking about, not my parents' but I couldn't bring myself to say it. "Can you bring us there?" Zeke asked.


For once I was glad that they said nothing else to me. They merely led me out of Johanna's mansion and I watched as they disposed of James's body. I had watched it be loaded onto a truck and I couldn't help but to be curious what they were going to do with him. Maybe just drop him at the Factionless doorstep? That's what I would do. Once the body was rid of, we had been forced to sit with Johanna and other high up members of Amity for hours, debating God-knows-what and talking about things that I didn't understand.

Needless to say, it was a very boring day. The most exciting part of the entire thing was when I had been asked to sign a confidentiality report. We were listening to eyewitness reports, and even though I should have been paying attention, I tuned out. I was shocked to see how civil Eric was being. His tone was clipped and short but he was being respectful enough. I imagined that it was painful for Eric to have to speak with people this way. Especially Amity members.

Finally, at four in the afternoon, hours after we had first been led back into the office, we were permitted to leave and go to investigate my home. There were a number of people standing about. The work day was ending so plenty of people were just sitting in the grass and talking. The gunshot must have set them all on edge. They looked nervous.

Slowly leading our group, I noticed that many people were pointing and whispering about me. They must have all been shocked to see me back here. Many of the faces looked familiar to me and I sent a few old friends weak smiles. Very few returned them. And no matter where I looked I couldn't find my parents. Maybe someone had told them that I was back and they had left.

We finally arrived at my house and I motioned for the men to stop walking. It looked absolutely no different than the last time that I had been here. I couldn't help but to wonder if they had gotten rid of my bedroom. I wasn't sure how I'd tolerate that. Even with everything that had happened, I wanted them to still love me.

"This is it?" Eric asked.

"Yes."

All of them were carefully scrutinizing my house and I couldn't help but to wonder if it was because of what James had told them or if it was because this had once been my home. "It's a two story house?" Eric asked.
"Yes."

"What's on each floor?" he asked.

It shocked me how fast the layout to my home came back to me. It was like I had just been here yesterday, not like it had been four months since I had last seen it. "The bottom floor has the kitchen, dining room, and living room. They're all together. There's a storage room and a bathroom too. It's in the back of the house. The second floor has three bedrooms and two bathrooms," I told them. I immediately thought of my room and repressed a shiver. Why had they been here?

Eric nodded and turned back to look at us. "Alright. Four, you and Zeke take the first floor. We'll go up to the second," Eric said. I nodded blankly. I had been hoping to be with either Four or Zeke. "Check everything. Look to see if anything looks out of place."

Everyone nodded and I watched as Eric tried the door. It was locked. He knocked but after two minutes and no one answered he got frustrated. He raised his leg to kick the door down but I immediately jumped in to stop him. I didn't want him destroying my childhood home. He glared at me as I pulled him back from the door but I ignored him. This was my territory. For once, they were the strangers.

"Please. I've got it," I whispered.

He nodded as I dropped down to the welcome mat that I had knitted when I was a child and ignored the pang in my chest, grabbing the key that was underneath. It had been there ever since I was a kid. I could never remember my key. I went to put it in the lock but hesitated. Could I really come back here? Four wrapped his hand around mine and pulled the key from my grip, opening the door for me. I smiled gratefully up at him. As Eric pushed the door open I sucked in a breath and walked back into the home that I had thought that I would never see again.

Eric's P.O.V.

Miles away from where Eric was the most comfortable, the Dauntless compound, he walked into the old home of the girl that occupied too much of his thoughts and time. Four and Zeke went to the back of the home first and Eric heard her call out a few times. He cringed at her use of voice for the first time in a while. She sounded so pained as she called for her mother and father.

After a few moments of no one answering her calls they all deemed the home empty. He noticed that the home was decorated in pastel colors and many pictures were strewn throughout the rooms. Some were on walls, others were on furniture, and many were just sitting in piles. The first picture that Eric noticed was of a young couple that looked exactly like her. Bright blonde hair and brilliant green eyes. Eric almost smiled. Almost. They looked happier than most couples he had ever seen. In one picture, Eric could tell that her mother was pregnant with her. Next to them were pictures of ultrasounds. Clearly they loved her.

As Eric made his way through the home, carefully following her, he noticed more pictures splayed out on the walls. They were well organized, but they were everywhere. When they walked through the hall towards the back of the house he finally spotted the first one of her. She was a baby, laughing in her mother's arms. She couldn't have even been a year old. There were a few of her in infancy and one of her in the bathtub. He smirked and shook his head.

He glanced up and saw that she was dragging her hands over the pictures slowly, in between blushing and crying. He knew that it was difficult for her to be back here. He didn't like her weakness, but decided to let it go. Just this once he would forgive her. She motioned him up a staircase and behind the banisters he saw pictures of her aging. One was a rather large picture where
she was with a large group of friends. Eric's heart gave a little twinge at the thought that even after she left her parents they had left all of these pictures of her up. They really loved her. A feeling that Eric would never know. Not from a parent or another person.

His own family never took pictures and his parents never smiled at him the way that hers were smiling at her in the pictures. It made him slightly jealous of her. Even though he never wanted to see his parents again, he wondered what it would have been like to be raised by parents like hers.

They finally reached the landing on the stairs and walked down the hall. Right to the room that James had told them about. Her hand hesitated on the knob and Eric wondered for a brief moment if it was her room. But why would they be looking through her room? He grabbed her arm and pushed her to the side, entering the room himself. It was her room and it looked like it hadn't been touched since she left. He could hear her let out a little sniff behind him and he immediately felt uncomfortable. Even though her face was steady, he knew that she was close to tears. He didn't like it and that bothered him. He shouldn't care.

She walked through the room and Eric watched as her hands trailed over her old things. He was watching her closely but she was ignoring him. Her face lit up slightly at the sight of her old things and he knew that she was happy to be back. He chose to ignore it. He didn't want to see her glad to be anywhere but Dauntless. Or perhaps in his bed more specifically. Her childhood room seemed to not fit her personality in the slightest. It had white paint on the walls but there were a few drawings on them. Mostly of nature scenes. He couldn't help but to wonder if she had done them. They were beautiful.

He couldn't help but to admit that Amity was the prettiest of the Factions. The bed was in the corner of the room and it had a large wooden frame. It looked incredibly soft. The sheets were bright red with yellow sparkles on them and Eric snorted. Very Amity. There were a few white dressers and cabinets scattered throughout the room too. Nothing looked like it had been moved in the room but Eric found himself unable to leave. He wanted to see what her old room was like.

There was one drawing that Eric found himself staring at. It was a waterfall that covered the piece of the bedroom behind her headboard. "Did you draw this?" Eric asked her.

She barely glanced up. "Yes," she muttered.

And it really was. The painting was something stunning. It almost looked real. "Thank you. Being in Amity, we have to be good at something creative. I didn't like having to sing in front of people and I didn't like having to have chit-chat with them. So I would paint. I could use concentration as my excuse to not speak. I guess I got good at it," she explained.

"Do you still paint?" he asked her.

"No."

"Why not?" Eric asked.

She finally glanced up and stared him in the eyes. "It reminds me of being here," she whispered, going back to her things.

Eric found himself unsure of what to say after that. So he went back to looking at her things. The only thing in the room that Eric hadn't noticed at first sight was a vanity with a mirror and pictures stuck all on it. He gave a quick smirk before walking over to it and grabbing a few of the pictures
that were stuck on.

The first one was a picture of her running through a field of flowers and smiling brightly. There was another of her up in a large oak tree, smiling down at the camera. There was another picture of her taken probably just a few weeks before the Choosing Ceremony. She looked the right age. She was surrounded by friends.

Eric noticed two people that popped up in nearly all of her pictures and figured that they must have been her best friends. There was a girl with long dark hair and tanned skin. Eric had seen her once before when he had been accompanying the Dauntless to their Aptitude Test. She had been sitting right next to his initiate. There was another picture where she was with a boy with dark hair that Eric immediately scowled at. He had been in many of her pictures.

Another was of her in a long red dress and Eric smirked. His favorite color was red. If only she's known that this morning. She would have known how happy he was to see her without the dull training clothes. And she looked damn good in the dress. There was another picture of the same boy that he had seen in the other picture and Eric growled when he realized that they were kissing in the picture. Laughing, too.

He hated seeing another man with his hands on her. That was his initiate. Until he was done with her, he hated having to share with anyone else. He hated the fact that she had spent the night with Roberts. He wasn't stupid. He knew that she had gone there. Eric turned back to her and saw that she was currently digging through a drawer in her nightstand.

"This was your boyfriend?" he asked, holding out the picture for her to see.

She blushed a slight shade of red before looking up at him with a little smirk. He hated that smirk. "Are you jealous?" she asked.

There was a teasing lilt to her voice. "No," Eric scoffed, shoving her hard enough to knock her onto the bed.

She laughed softly before standing back up and smoothing out her shirt. "Liar," she hissed.

And now he knew how she felt. "Answer my question," he said, trying to push away the topic.

"No. I've never had a boyfriend before," she admitted.

His head whipped back to her. That had not been what he was expecting to hear her say. She had never had a boyfriend before? "Never?" Eric asked, forcing himself not to laugh.

She shook her head again. "No one ever interested me enough. That's my best friend. Florian," she said. Eric nearly laughed. Amarantha and Florian. Alex and Eric sounded better. "She's my other best friend. Iris." She pointed to the dark haired girl. "They both transferred to Candor this year."

He stared at her for a moment before shaking his head. He wanted her to stop giving that pathetic look. A girl that had lost everything. "You have a shitty taste in men," he told her.

She laughed loudly and turned towards him. "Yes. I do," she said, giving him a very pointed look.

Eric grinned sideways at her before tossing the photo out of his hands and onto the floor. She scowled at him before leaning over to retrieve the photo. While she was preoccupied putting the photo back in its rightful place Eric grabbed the photo of her in the red dress and tucked it into his pocket. He wasn't quite sure why, but he wanted it. Perhaps because as far as he was concerned, for now, she was his. Unfortunately she caught him out of the corner of her eyes.
She stood with her hands on her hips as she stared him down. Eric didn't falter. "Did you just take that picture of me?" she asked.

Eric merely shook his head, knowing that she wasn't going to buy the obvious lie. "Of course not," he told her.

She laughed and shook her head once more. "Eric come on, put that back," she said softly.

He pulled the photo out of his pocket and held it just out of her reach. She pressed herself into him, trying to reach the picture, but she couldn't. Eric smirked. She was too short. He had always liked shorter girls. They had worse tempers and tended to be bolder. Something had to make up for the lack of height. He laughed as he realized that the top of her head only came up to his chin. She couldn't grab the photo but she didn't back off so Eric decided to tease her once more.

"Just so I can remind you of how Amity you really are," he told her, slipping the photo into his pocket.

She merely rolled her eyes at him. "Is that what you're going to use the picture for?" she asked, a suggestive tone to her voice.

He knew exactly what she meant. "Wouldn't you like to know?" he asked her. She merely smiled and walked away from him. Not a damn thing was out of place in this room. "Does anything look like it's been moved around?"

She thought for a moment before shaking her head. "No," she said.

Eric rolled his eyes and groaned. He had stayed up all night and hadn't even been able to sleep for two hours for this? To go to another Faction without even a clue what they were looking for. Had James even come in here? He just wanted to leave and go to sleep. Or maybe sleep with her. Something other than being here.

"A few papers in my desk were shuffled around but that's the only thing in this house that's been moved," she said. Eric nodded. That might not have even been James. "Why would he want something of mine?"

Eric merely shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not sure," he said honestly. He had no idea why James would want something of hers. She wasn't important. She wasn't even a real member of society. It made no sense.

"With James. Was that the first man that you've ever killed?" she asked softly.

Eric turned back to her quickly. He was actually surprised that she had said something like that. He would have thought that she would want to forget about something like that. He walked up to her slowly and pushed her back into the dresser. He wanted to know if she really was afraid of him. If she was more afraid of him now that she saw what he could do. If only she knew that killing James wasn't nearly the worst thing that he had ever done.

"Did I scare you?" he asked her.

She shook her head but Eric knew that she was lying. "No," she snapped, sounding a little more determined.

But it was still a lie. It wasn't easy to watch a man die for the first time. He knew that. "Tell me the truth," he hissed at her.
There was a burning desire in him to know whether or not she was afraid of him. She stood for a moment, probably thinking about whether or not she was. "You killed him, Eric," she said softly.

Not once had she looked away from his eyes. He liked the way that she said his name but he would have much rather heard her moan it. She would. Soon. "Yes. So?" he asked her harshly.

"I know what he did was wrong but he was following orders. You could have interrogated him more. He could have brought you to the person that leads the Factionless," she reasoned.

And there she went opening her mouth and infuriating him. A bubbling anger rose in his chest and he snapped. That was a cowardly way to think. No real Dauntless would say something like that. "And that is why I say that you won't be Dauntless. You're weak," he sneered at her.

He saw the hurt briefly flashed through her eyes but he didn't stop. "Fuck you," she snapped.

It wasn't enough to stop him. If she was going to be Dauntless she had to be strong. "Saying things like that are weak. You have to be able to do something that you might not want to do. Could you have killed him? Pulled the trigger and watched the life go from his eyes? Could you listen to a woman with a young child, begging for their lives, and kill them. Look them in the eye and end their lives?" he asked her.

She would never know that he had done those things. He wasn't sure he wanted her to know. To her credit, she didn't back down from him. It was more than he could say for any other Dauntless. "I can do more than you think I can," she snapped back at him.

He was almost proud that she snapped at him, but he didn't like people talking back against him. Especially not little girls like her. He pushed her back roughly against the dresser and heard it creak slightly. At least this time it wasn't bars on the Chasm. She wasn't going to fall. He wasn't going to hurt her. Not again.

He let his head fall to just an inch away from hers. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted it more than he ever had. But he couldn't. What would happen if he did? No one had ever crawled into his mind the way that she had. He wasn't ready to go down that path. But he didn't want to resist her any more. One kiss wouldn't hurt... Her eyes slipped closed and Eric found himself wanting nothing more than to throw her down on the bed as her lips parted the tiniest bit.

"Four and Zeke," she whispered.

Eric was thrown by her words and nearly stumbled back from her. What the hell had she just said? "What?" he asked blankly.

"They're coming," she said softly.

Her eyes were still closed as Eric heard their footsteps coming up the stairs. He growled deep in his throat, angry that once more they had been interrupted. Eric backed off of her begrudgingly and went to stand by her desk while she waited by the walls. As Four stepped in to the room, Zeke right behind him, Eric looked over a few old papers. Average grades. Not an average girl.

"Find anything out of place?" Four asked as he walked in.

She beat him to saying what they had found. "A few papers. That's it," she said.

Four nodded. "We didn't find anything out of place either," he said as Zeke walked in.

"I don't know what they were looking for except for maybe some papers. Whatever they were
looking for doesn't make any sense to me. I don't keep anything in here that would mean anything to them," she said, motioning back to her drawers.

Zeke nodded at them. "All right. Don't worry. We'll get this sorted," he said more to her than anyone else. She nodded. "Come on. We're going. Johanna is going to have dinner set up soon and you'll be meeting Jeanine Matthews."

Eric did feel bad for her. She looked extremely unhappy that she had to meet Jeanine Matthews and Eric couldn't blame her. The leader of Erudite certainly didn't bring any joy to the dinner table. She had become exceptionally pale over the past few minutes and Eric wondered if something was wrong.

"Can you bring us to the old dining halls?" Zeke asked.

She nodded weakly. "Sure," she said.

Her feet were moving slowly and Eric pushed her ahead. She looked like she might collapse at any minute if he just sat there and waited for her to move. The walk over to the dining hall was silent and they all went to change before going to the dining room. Eric was in a black suit as were the other men. He found himself smirking darkly when she walked in.

When it had been time to pick out a dress for her to wear on the mission, Eric had picked out the dress that he wanted to see her in. And he had made the right choice. She was in the skintight black dress and Eric smirked. It looked as good as he had expected it to. There was a netted opening that went around most of her back and onto her hips. It showed part of the quote on her hip and the angel wing tattoo. It had a slight slit in the right leg that went to her mid-thigh and had only one shoulder.

She quickly noticed that he was looking at her. "See something that you like?" she asked.

Eric walked over to her and pressed a hand against her hip. Her face turned a bright red. "I do," he hissed in her ear.

"So what are you going to do about it?" she asked.

His pants were growing uncomfortably tight. "Take it," he growled, grabbing her and pulling her into him.

They were just inches away from each other when he spotted Four and Zeke walking over to them. He quickly released her and watched as she stumbled back breathlessly. That was when he noticed that she wasn't wearing her shoes. "Where are your shoes?" he asked, changing the subject drastically.

"They're in the bathroom," she said.

"Why?"

"Because that was the best place to leave them."

"Why are you not wearing them?"

"Because I can't walk in those clown shoes," she snapped.

"Put them on," Eric barked at her.

"No."
After a while he had decided to leave her alone and just forget it. He was sick of arguing with her. He was too busy thinking about their meeting with Jeanine later. She looked good. It bothered Eric that his pants were once more getting uncomfortably tight at the sight of her slim waist and strong legs. He had to shake his head clear of the current thoughts that he was having of her.

They walked into the old dining room and Eric realized that it was outdoors. All of the tables were wooden but the one that they were headed to was a deep oak. It was clearly more expensive. The area was nicely lit by lanterns and Eric could imagine that this was all rather peaceful. Although he knew that it would get old quickly. He noticed that as they walked all eyes were on her and all around them people were whispering.

Oh my God, she's back.

What is she doing here?

She looks so different.

Is that Amarantha?

It is.

Look at her.

She looks like one of them.

Do you think that she failed their initiation and she's back here to beg for a spot?

The voices were echoing all around them. And it didn't take long for Eric to find himself hating them. They had no idea what Dauntless was like. They wouldn't even have been able to make the first jump. From Four and Zeke's stances he could tell that they were angry with the Amity members too. Even Cameron looked a little bothered. Max was as quaint as ever. But he had to be.

Eric took a little bit of a leap and threw his arm over her shoulder. She was as tense as he figured was possible for her to be. She looked a little surprised but he ignored her. As expected, all who were talking before silenced themselves. No one wanted to speak about that like her in front of Eric. A few were still murmuring, but one little glare from Eric immediately silenced them too. He was the only one that could say things like that to her. As they walked up to the table he shook off the thought that she fit well into his body.

Alex's P.O.V.

Eric's warm arm was thrown over my shoulder and I couldn't help but to think that I fit into his side well. It terrified me to be back here. I hated it. I had left here with the intention of never coming back. Johanna greeted us as we walked up and seated us at the head table where usually only the higher priority members sat. Or guests. But I was a guest here now. This was no longer my home. It felt strange to be up here. I'd never been here before.

I was currently seated between Four and Eric with Zeke next to Four and Cameron next to Eric. Max was on the other side, across from Eric and Jeanine Matthews was sitting directly in front of me. Johanna was on her other side. I saw a few of my old friends and tried my best to ignore them. I could tell by the way that they were all whispering to each other that they were talking about me. Looking away from them, I took a sip of water when I saw a figure come up from behind me.

Turning back I saw the one person that I had definitely been hoping not to run into here. The boy that I had had my first kiss with. He had broken up with me in front of everyone. He had made me
look like a fool. I had given him two black eyes. And now here he was smiling at me like I was one of his oldest friends.

"Amarantha?" he asked, making me scowl. Not that name again. "Oh my, it's so good to see you again."

I cocked my eyebrow at him. We were not friends. He shouldn't even be speaking to me. I kept my response short and sweet. All I wanted was for him to leave me alone to eat my dinner and suffer in silence. "Jason. It's Alex now," I greeted sharply, hoping that he would take my hint.

He merely smiled at me and I rolled my eyes. "Oh, come now, Amarantha, we were always friends," he said.

Once more I scowled. "We were never friends Jason, and my name is Alex. Not Amarantha. Leave," I hissed. He backed off slightly, looking more than a little shocked at my words.

My name was not Amarantha and we were not friends. "All I get is you snapping my name at me and giving me a name that doesn't even sound like you anymore?" he asked me.

I scowled darkly at him and noticed that both Four and Eric were watching him with narrowed eyes. I was glad to see that I wasn't alone here. "Pretty much," I said.

The Amity part of me thought that I should have been a little nicer to him. After all, he had only been trying to be honest with me. It wasn't like he had been purposely trying to hurt me. But that didn't matter. The Dauntless part of me wanted to rip him a new one. And that was the part that was currently winning.

"We can't even have a friendly conversation?" Jason asked.

"I have a job to do here and it doesn't involve talking to people with the likes of you," I snapped before turning back to my meal. Of course, I had no appetite.

His face still hadn't lost the look of shock. He was still standing right behind me and I shook my head. I thought that I had been rather nice. "I know we had issues in the past but I'd like to put them behind us. We miss you here. I miss you," he told me.

"That makes one of us," I snorted.

It was easy to see the way that the boys were all grinning at me. Particularly Eric and Four. They people here in Amity might have missed me but I did not miss them. There weren't many people that I missed from here. Johanna. Iris. Florian. Derrick. My parents. Jason certainly wasn't one of them.

"But I know that you've found a new home. I hope. Are these your friends?" he asked, motioning to the men with me.

From the sound of his voice I knew that he was teasing me. I recognized that tone. And I knew what he was doing. He was thinking that I had no friends in Dauntless. He was hoping that I didn't. I couldn't just say that my friends were back at the Dauntless compound. He would never believe me. And for some reason I couldn't let him think that I was all alone in the Dauntless compound. So I decided to lie, hoping that they would stay silent.

"Yes. They are," I said to Jason, whose smile dropped at my words. "This is Eric, Four, Zeke, and Cameron." Max I decided to leave out. "That's one of the leaders of Dauntless over there. Max."

To my surprise, none of them contradicted my claim. I had just met two of them this morning, just a
few hours ago. They were all smirking at Jason, who currently looked furious. Even Eric was
smirking at Jason. In the back of my mind, I hoped that Jason had seen him with his arms over her
shoulder.

"Well... I'm glad to see you aren't alone." Yeah, right. "And this is what Dauntless members do?" he
asked.

My face brightened a little bit when I realized that I had to be at least somewhat honest. As much as
it pained me, there was still the slightest chance that I wouldn't make in in Dauntless. "I - uh - I'm not
a member yet. Initiation lasts eight months," I said.

"Eight months?" Jason asked, eyes brightening.

I knew that he was happy to hear that I wasn't a full member yet. "I was brought here because I
knew more about Amity than anyone else," I told him softly.

Jason knew that he had to upper-hand. But I hoped that it wouldn't be that way for long. "Oh!" he
chirped. I snarled at him. There was that voice that I had spent so many years hating. "So there's still
a chance that you won't make it?"

Obviously he was more than thrilled to hear that I could still end up Factionless. I was lost in thought
thinking about something to say to him. I wasn't sure what to say. Technically it was true. I might
still not make it. But that wasn't something that I wanted to think about. I was slightly startled when
both Eric and Four jumped out of their seats and turned to face Jason. He immediately backed off,
dwarfed by both men. And Jason was by no means small. I was glad to see the little trickle of fear
that seeped into his eyes.

"No," Eric said. I glanced over to him. I had thought that it would be Four to defend me. "She is
going to make it. In fact, she's one of the top ranked initiates. I suggest you move alone. Before you
see just how far she's come," Eric snarled at Jason.

He had one hand on my shoulder and I smirked as Jason, for once grateful for Eric. Perhaps we were
finally making progress in our odd little relationship. A hand appeared on Jason's shoulder and I
looked up to see a man that I had once considered a second father. Mr. Rose. Florian's father. I hadn't
even thought that I might come across Iris or Florian's parents.

"Jason. Perhaps we should leave Miss Freesia to her own friends? She seems to be here on
business," he suggested with a smile. Jason nodded and turned to leave, shooting me one dark look
before leaving. "Hello, Amarantha. It's been too long. I hope Dauntless life is treating you well."

Smiling at him, I wrapped an arm around him, giving him a small hug. He looked almost exactly like
Florian, just older. "Mr. Rose. It is. Thank you," I chirped sweetly.

I released him and noticed that all of the Dauntless men had settled back into their seats and were
watching me closely. "You're welcome, dear," he said softly.

"I'm sorry about Florian. I had no idea that he would be changing Factions. It came as much of a
surprise to me as it did to everyone else," I told him as I took a seat once more.

It was easy enough to feel Eric stiffen beside me and I almost smirked. He must have finally realized
that this was Florian's, the boy that I was kissing in the photos, father. I was glad to see that it
affected him. He smiled at me and I was taken back to the man that had taught me to paint and
dance. The man that had always been more than my best friend's father.

"Thank you, sweetheart. I had a slight feeling that he might leave," he said. Florian had never said
one way or another whether he was staying or leaving. "It makes no matter. I'll see him on Visiting Day."

I was glad to see that at least Florian was going to be getting a visit from his parents. "I'm glad that you're going to see him," I said honestly.

"Your parents are working shifts in the field tonight. They'll be back in a few hours," Mr. Rose told me and my heart nearly stopped.

That was why I hadn't seen them yet today. I would be gone before they even got back. I wasn't sure whether or not I was happy about that. "I'll be long gone by then," I answered quickly.

Just as I had been expecting, Eric was watching me to see just how faithful I was to Dauntless. I hoped that it was enough in his eyes. I didn't doubt that he would leave me here. Mr. Rose nodded at me with a little smile, probably knowing that I was uncomfortable talking about my parents. Especially in front of all of these people. I noticed Jeanine giving me a little smile. But it was not encouraging.

"Well then I'll say hello for you," Mr. Rose said.

I couldn't bring myself to tell him not to so I nodded weakly at him. "Thank you," I muttered.

At least they would know that I didn't totally hate them. I wanted to tell him to tell them that I was sorry but I couldn't bring myself to do it. "I can see that I'm interrupting something so I'll be taking my leave. Goodbye Amarantha. Alex. Excuse me. I'm so used to seeing the little Amity girl. But the Dauntless woman is just as beautiful," Mr. Rose told me.

Once more I smiled at him. Florian was lucky to have a father like that. "Thank you, Mr. Rose," I said softly.

"It was a pleasure to meet you all. Thank you for looking after our girl," Mr. Rose said to the others.

My face was bright red as I looked down at the table. Mr. Rose walked off without another word. Once I finally looked up I saw that both Four and Eric were smirking at me. The table was silent for a moment and I drained my water glass awkwardly. I knew that everyone had been watching me for nearly the entire meal. And Johanna was the only one whose smile was real.

"How sweet," Jeanine Matthews purred at me. "They all seem to care for you so much."

There was a teasing look in her eyes. Bitch. I should have figured that she was going to say something like that. She didn't know how to actually be kind. She just gave everyone that cold and calculating smile that we all hated so much. "I spent the first sixteen years of my life with them. They were my family. They always will be," I told her.

"That's quite an Amity trait," she said.

"Just because I don't agree with the way that they think doesn't mean that I never cared for them," I snapped at her. I was sick of her pushing people around.

Just a moment after I said it I felt Eric stomp down on my foot. I bit back a groan and hung my head over the table. That hurt. "Be nice," Eric hissed in my ear.

The rest of the message was subliminal. Don't say anything that could get you killed. "Eric here told me that you had spirit. I saw it when we first met. I'm glad to see that it hasn't died," she told me with a little grin.
She had me totally lost. Why was Eric talking to Jeanine Matthews about me? I wasn't sure that I liked that. "I'm so glad that I frequently come up in your conversations," I said, this time earning a kick in the shin from Four.

The conversation dwindled after that as everyone went to eating their food. I mostly just picked at the fruit on the table, not hungry enough to eat anything else. I overheard Johanna and Max talking about a few other houses that were ransacked and thought about their owners. They were all homes to kids that had Chosen this year. Most of them were transfers but a few had stayed. Had we done something to attract the attention of the Factionless?

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed both Four and Eric grabbing the bread and I panicked. They didn't know about peace serum. "Don't eat that!" I hissed before smacking the bread out of their hands.

It went flying and I smirked when it hit Jeanine. Johanna was staring at me like I was from another planet and I smiled bashfully at her. "What are you doing?" Eric snapped at me.

"The bread has peace serum in it. Trust me when I say that you don't want to eat it. Detoxing feels like waking up with a terrible hangover," I whispered to both Dauntless members.

They both pushed back their plates and I smiled at them. Four grabbed some more water and poured me another cup before putting the cup back in the middle of the table. He leaned over to me and I smiled. "Thanks for that," he said softly.

Once more I nodded. I would have wanted them to do the same for me if we were in the opposite position. We were silent for a little while more and I continued to drain water cup after water cup. I had to do something to keep my hands busy. I was getting more and more nervous the longer that we sat here. I just wanted to go back to Dauntless.

"Alex," Jeanine called and I looked up to her. What now?

"Yes?" I asked, as politely as possible.

"How is training going for you so far?" she asked. My eyes widened. I hadn't been expecting her to actually ask about me. "I feel like I've heard everyone's perspective on your training except for you."

Shrugging at her, I tried to downplay my talents. The last thing that I wanted was for her to decide that she wanted me on her side. "It's been going well. I haven't lost a fight yet and my ranking is high," I said and she nodded at me. That wasn't to say that I hadn't lost a sparring match, but I didn't want to tell her that. "I think that I do rather well with guns and knives too."

My last words were rather soft. I didn't want Eric or Four disagreeing with me. As much as they both liked to make fun of me, we all knew that I was one of the better initiates. Jeanine smiled at me and I was grateful that no one said anything to counter what I had said about my skills.

"You haven't gotten into the second stage have you?" she asked.

That was about another month away. "Not yet," I told her.

I certainly wasn't looking forward to it. I was enjoying the physical training. It made me feel tough. "I do enjoy the second stage of initiation. It shows who people really are," she told me with a small smile. I could feel Four's arm tense against me. "But sometimes it shows more than their fears. It shows other little... attributes. Don't you think that it's interesting? How no one can hide anything during the final stage?"
It wasn't a question, but I answered her anyways. "Yes," I answered stiffly.

"Good. I do, too," she said lowly, her eyes twinkling from the lights hanging in the old oak tree.

And that was it. Finally it hit me. I knew why I was here in Amity. I knew why I was really here in Amity. Max hadn't requested me be brought along to Amity. It wasn't him that wanted me here. Jeanine had wanted me to be here. She had wanted to talk to me. But I had already known that. Now I knew why the Factionless were here, too. They were searching for my records. They knew my house, they knew my room. It was requested specifically from their leader. So were other people, many of whom demonstrated behavior abnormal for any Amity member.

They weren't looking for transfers though. They had been searching my house for my Aptitude Test results. They were trying to figure out who was a part of the Divergent population were. Somehow they had found out that I was Divergent. They knew that I was one. And judging by the look on Jeanine's face, she knew too.
Chapter Twelve

The morning came far too soon, as it did most mornings. Weakly I stood from the bed and stretched out my muscles. I hated these damn beds. Screw sleeping with Eric. I just wanted to sleep in his bed. It was like a marshmallow. But in a matter of months I would have a real Dauntless bed all to myself. As for now, I would merely have to sulk about my stone-like bed.

It would probably be an hour or two before everyone else would be awake. Not that it was surprising. I always rose earlier than the rest of my friends. Of course, if it weren't for training and my constant bundle of nerves I would probably sleep in too. But that wasn't the case. I walked into the showers and let the cold water run over me. My muscles immediately contracted. I hated the water in the stupid dorms. It was freezing. At night, after a long day of sweating and pushing our bodies to the breaking points, it wasn't bad. But first thing in the morning, it was awful. I just took a few minutes to wash off before getting out.

It had been a week since the trip to Amity and I found myself jumpier than I normally was. All of my friends had noticed but I'd done a good job brushing them off. I merely told them that I was just nervous for the end of the first stage of training. It wasn't a lie. But I was more nervous because I felt like at any minute someone would jump from around the corner to shoot me in the head. Whether it would be the mystery Factionless leader or Jeanine Matthews was still to be determined.

Either way, it would be bad. The Factionless were dangerous but they didn't know weapons or fighting. As far as I knew, they would have a hard time getting near me. Jeanine Matthews was another story entirely. It would be easy for her to get near me. All she had to do was say that she wanted to come visit the Dauntless compound. It didn't help that if they did have the scanners that would tell someone whether or not we were Divergent, I was fucked.

Fortunately, I hadn't heard anything from the leader of Erudite since leaving the night after the Amity trip, but I knew that I would see her at least once more. Despite wanting to snap crude words at her every time that I saw her, I knew that I had to watch my mouth. She was a dangerous enemy to have. Every time that I had spoken out of term that night Eric would stomp on my foot, silently ordering me to rectify my mistake.

When I had finally gotten back that night I had been immediately ambushed by my friends. Even though it had been well after one in the morning by the time that I had gotten back to the dorms, they had all been wide awake, wondering where I had been all day. At Eric’s orders, I had been forced to lie to them and tell them that my mother was sick. I'd fed them a story about how I had been visiting the Erudite hospital.

Of course they had then asked all about how my mother was doing and how my family had taken to seeing me once more. I had been forced to alter my story to tell them that I hadn't actually seen my family. I'd told them that I had only gone to the hospital to get my mother's medical records and check to ensure that she was doing alright. The next night I had told Heather the truth about what I had been doing. Excluding the Divergence. She had warned me to stay away from Jeanine. Not that I needed it.

There was no way that I was going to be seeking a conversation with the Erudite woman. Away from my issues with Jeanine Matthews and Divergent were my continuing issues with Eric. Of course there was no way that they were ever going to end at any point. Which was a pain in the ass.

Already expected, Heather still found them absolutely hilarious. Most nights we would sit together and I would regale her with my latest stories of our strange relationship. She was still giving me the
same advice, to sleep with Eric. But she wasn't the one that had the risk of Eric putting a tattoo wherever he wanted on her. The problem was that I wanted to cave. He did too. We both knew it. Heather thought that I should just kiss him and get it over with. It wasn't actually a bad idea. She had also made a few jokes about being the maid of honor at our wedding. I had chased her through the compound for nearly an hour after that.

On the other hand, Heather and Cole were officially together. It happened only three days ago, but no one had been surprised. Everyone knew that the two of them were going to get together. The question hadn't been whether or not they would, only when. It was the same thing that Heather thought about Eric and me. Every one of the transfers had been fully supportive of their new relationship, save Hunter, Colt, and Jade. But of course that hadn't been very surprising.

I was actually still under the impression that Jade liked Colt, who wouldn't give her the time of day. Heather had officially let Cole start sleeping in her bed in the meantime. It had, at first, been a little awkward. But to their credit, other than a few chaste kisses, they never showed any affection towards each other. I had a feeling that they had other places to go if they wanted to.

While they were having a sweet and loving relationship, my relationship with Eric had moved forward slightly. But we were currently at a strange stand-still. We had actually managed to be nicer to each other in the past week that we had ever been in the four and a half months that we had known each other. Of course, I had let him see a side of me that he had never seen before during the trip to Amity. I was grateful that he never talked about it.

It wasn't something that I wanted to think about. We still teased and yelled at each other all the time. I would try to keep my distance from him but it never quite worked out in my favor. Nearly every time we spoke I found myself in close quarters with him. Whenever he came to speak to me he was always pressed up against me. He had become more touchy in the past week or so. His hands now found their way to my hips and more than once he had tugged on my hair in passing. He knew that I liked it.

I tried to push thoughts of Eric out of my mind today. It was going to be the last of the fights and I knew that if I wanted to keep my high ranking, I was going to have to win the fight. It would also make me one of the few initiates that were undefeated in training. I was currently ranked number three. Eric had actually told me in some words that he was proud of me. On the other hand, Four had directly told me that he was proud of me. Both meant the world to me.

Only Aaron and Jackson were still above me. I had noticed that they were the only two people whose rankings had never moved. They had both come to congratulate me over the past week and so had Lisa. We had become good friends over the past two weeks since we had all first gotten together during our time on the zip line after Capture the Flag. Serena still didn't like me, but her snide comments had lessened slightly.

It wasn't just the final fight that had me nervous. I was terrified when I thought about tomorrow. It was the day that I had been dreading since coming to Dauntless. Visiting Day. I had no idea what I wanted when it came to seeing my parents again. Did I want them to come? It would be great to see them again. Did I want them not to come? It would at least make their separation from me easier. Either way it was going to be hard.

But, on the bright side, physical initiation ended in two weeks. Then would come the emotional and mental stages. I was more nervous for those than I had ever been for the physical part. I didn't want to know what was going to come up in my fears. I wasn't sure that I wanted to know either. Eric had told me that it was the worst part of Dauntless.

As I washed the grease from yesterday's training out of my hair I thought about what was coming. I
would head out of the dorm and straight to the dining room where I knew that Eric would be waiting. He always was. I hadn't returned to his apartment since the Amity trip, but we had fallen back into the routine of having breakfast together. I couldn't help but to wonder if some people thought that we were a couple. We acted like it sometimes.

He was still dating Sarah, much to my annoyance, and I felt my blood boil whenever I saw the two of them together. Especially since he would dangle her in front of me when he knew that I was watching. I did get great pleasure out of the fact that whenever he was with her he looked extremely bored. I could swear that whenever the two of us were together there was more life in his cold gray eyes. But maybe that was my wishful thinking.

Turning off the water, I shivered at the sudden blast of cold air. If there was one thing that I ever missed about Amity, it was the warm air and water that ran through the Faction. Eric had gloated to me once that hot water only ran through Dauntless member apartments. Of course, I had used the shower in Damien's apartment more than once. He had left me a key a few days ago and I had been utilizing his hot water since then.

We weren't really dating but I had a strange feeling that he was going to ask me out once initiation was over. I knew that I would be smart to say yes. But Damien wasn't who I wanted. I walked over my bed, not worried about covering up since no one was awake. I grabbed a pair of black leggings and a tight black short-sleeved shirt, pulling them both on. I grabbed my boots quickly and tied my hair up as well before heading out of the room. As I left, I saw Cole start to stir. He was an early riser too.

Heading towards the dining room, I said hello to a few Dauntless members that were already awake. I even stopped for a quick chat with Zeke. I didn't see him around too much but when I did I liked to talk. He had become something like a friend to me recently. I was starting to learn a few other member's names as well. But there were plenty of people that I didn't know yet. I would meet them in time. Once I was a member I would have more time to make friends. I walked into the dining room and raised my eyebrows. Eric wasn't at the table that we normally sat at. Had he slept in tonight?

"Think fast," Eric's voice called from the corner.

I turned to face him, not quite understanding what he was talking about. Of course, I should have figured that nothing good was going to come from the minute that he said 'think fast.' A bright red spot came flying out from the corner of the room and I had no chance to avoid it. So I merely groaned loudly when it came in contact with my forehead. I stumbled backwards and pressed myself into the wall, covering my eye. Shit that hurt. Did he throw something at me?

Whatever it was, it was heavy. "Too bad. You weren't fast enough," Eric said with a little smirk.

I saw him out of the corner of my eyes, leaning on the wall and tossing a red apple in his hands. My hand dropped from my eye and I growled deep in my throat. He threw a fucking apple at my head. It was times just like this that were one of the reasons that I still hadn't slept with him. Because he did things like throwing apples at my head while I wasn't paying attention.

"What the fuck, Eric?" I snarled at him.

My head was throbbing from where the apple hit me. He was walking over to the table, still smirking proudly. For a moment I wanted to smack myself for following him. As much as I really did like Eric, it was times like these that I couldn't stand him. He took a seat on the bench and motioned for me to sit next to him. My eye was throbbing and I wanted to cradle it, but I knew that Eric wasn't going to let it go if I did. So I ignored the throbbing pain and took a seat next to him.
"You're such an ass," I muttered.

"Don't be a baby," he shot back.

I turned towards him and glared. "You know, apples are a little bit heavier than you think. Particularly when they're aimed at your fucking eye," I hissed at him.

"Stop whining."

"Good morning to you, too," I muttered under my breath.

He looked up to me and the corners of his lips twitched slightly. "Your last fight is today," he said.

But they had already told us that. I'd already been preparing for the fight. "I know that. But what were you thinking of doing? Blinding me before the fight so that I can't win?" I asked.

I honestly wouldn't have been that shocked. He leaned towards me slightly, placing a hand on my leg. I wanted nothing more than to bat him off, but I didn't. "I don't need to blind you for that." I rolled my eyes at him. "If your reflexes are that slow right now there is no way that you're going to win the fight," he said.

Once more, I rolled my eyes. I yawned softly, dropping my head on my arms. I was exhausted. All of this work over the past few months was more work combined than I had ever done in Amity. Surprising me slightly, Eric handed me a fresh apple and I took it. As much as I wanted to eat it I wanted to get Eric back even more.

So I slowly raised the apple and went to put it to my mouth before reaching around and tossing the apple at Eric. He had clearly known that I was going to do it as he easily deflected it and the apple went flying across the dining room. I turned back briefly and saw that a few workers were glaring at us. Of course, Eric was a leader and no one was going to say anything against him or me. At least not while he was with me.

"Unless the person that I'm fighting has a bag of apples hidden up their sleeves, I'm pretty sure that I'll be alright," I said.

It actually made me smile, the way that he laughed softly. "You never know," he put in.

There was still a small smile on his face. "You look much better with a smile, you know," I said, leaning into him slightly.

I'd almost forgotten that his hand was on my leg. It tightened around my thigh slightly and he yanked me so that we were facing each other. "Is that so?" he asked teasingly.

Knowing that I shouldn't say anything more, making the conversation even more awkward than it already was, I turned and grabbed the water bottle that he had sitting in front of him. He watched me with a crooked grin as I took a few sips. He watched me for a while before turning and staring straight ahead. As he was no longer watching me, I glanced over to him. His collar was down slightly and I noticed that he had a few dark bruises that were running down the length of his neck. They were not from a fight. Not that I would ever admit it, but I was extremely bothered by the fact that he had them.

It was like he was wearing them as a trophy. "Have a fun night?" I asked, grabbing his collar and yanking it down.

His eyes brightened and I knew without any more prompting that he knew exactly what I was
talking about. He smirked and turned towards me, grabbing my hand and peeling it off of his shirt. I yanked my hand away quickly. He reached back over to his shirt and popped his collar so that the bruises were pushed out of my view. He finally glanced over at me and I didn't like the way that the look on his face made my stomach churn. I certainly didn't like the way that he knew how he affected me.

"Jealous, little Amity?" he asked me with a light lilt in his voice.

I rolled my eyes and shook my head at him. "Absolutely not," I hissed, shoving myself back from him. "I'm not jealous of your little friend that you sure as hell don't care about."

It was almost irksome, the way that he didn't even bother to rebut about caring for Sarah. "You are jealous," Eric said bemusedly, the corners of his lips turning upwards.

"I am not!" I hissed.

But he was still smiling at me. "Don't worry, you can leave them if you really want," he said as he leaned into me.

I scoffed and shook my head. "Absolutely not!" I howled at him. He merely continued to smile at me. "And if the day ever did come that I would do something like that, I would at least be smart enough to keep them hidden."

"So you are thinking about it?" he asked.

"No! I'm just smart enough to put them somewhere hidden."

But I knew that it wasn't something that Eric would want. He would want to put them somewhere to show them off. "Or maybe you want someone to do something like that to you?" he asked, seemingly realizing something.

His warm hand landed on my thigh once more and I groaned.

Not this again. Once he had let go of me, I was praying that he would never touch me again. It only sent things through me that were absolutely terrible, things that once more made me want him. His fingers were tight on my thigh and I knew that the way that he was grabbing me was possessive. He knew that I was still seeing Damien and I hoped that it bothered him that someone was touching me other than him. Just the way that it bothered me that someone was touching him, other than me.

His fingers were slowly winding their way up my thighs. They had almost made it up too high before I swatted them away, proud of myself for standing my ground. Not yet. Despite the fact that Heather wanted me to sleep with Eric, I wanted to prove that I was tougher than him. Because I was. He was the one that was going to bend to me first.

"Get off of me," I snarled at him.

He leaned back slightly, looking somewhere between angry and impressed with me. "I'm impressed, initiate," Eric said, leaning away from me a little more.

"I've had it with this, Eric. Say you want to sleep with me or leave me alone. Which one is it?" I asked him.

So maybe that had come out a little snappier than I had meant it to. But I meant it. He was teasing me too much. I wanted to know where he stood on this. I wanted to know whether or not Eric wanted to be with me for more than a night. Not even in a relationship. I just wanted to know that he didn't
want to sleep with me once and then forget that I ever existed. I wasn't sure that I wanted to hear his answer though. I feared that he wasn't the type to keep someone like me for more than a night.

"Tell me, would you really want me to leave you alone?" he asked me. I froze in my spot, unable to answer. That confirmed his question. He knew that as much as his bothering was a pain in my ass, I would never want him to stop. "I thought not."

There was a smirk on his face that made me roll my eyes. His stupid pompous attitude was finally getting on my last damned nerve. I had dealt with him for a long time like this, and I was done. There wasn't going to be any more of this. Not after so long of the back and forth. For once I wanted to be the one with the ball in my court.

"You do realize that you're risking your leadership position here in Dauntless by doing this?" I asked him.

He raised a brow. "Come again?" he asked.

"With what you're doing. You're risking your position. Not only yours, but mine too," I snapped at him harshly. If he got me kicked out of Dauntless for this, I was going to come back here and kill him. "I'm sick of denying this so let's bring in a little candor here. I like you."

My stomach gave a pathetic jump as he stared at me. His eyes widened and I shrugged my shoulders. "Excuse me?" Eric asked.

It wasn't for me. I was doing this for Iris. Because this is something that she would have wanted me to do. "I'm done trying to pretend that I don't. I sure as hell don't like your damn attitude and I don't like the way that you treat me, but I am attracted to you. Would I sleep with you? Yes," I said, making him smirk.

"I thought so," he said cockily.

"I'm not done yet, asshole," I continued, speaking over him. "But will I? No. Not now and not ever. You're an ass. I know what would happen if I did. You'd drop me because you would have gotten what you wanted."

His gray eyes darkened for a moment and the previous sneer on my face dropped. He actually looked upset that I had said that. Maybe not upset, but it looked like I had said something unsavory. "You really think that?" Eric asked, completely throwing me.

There wasn't a doubt in my mind that if we ever slept together he would never speak to me again. He would have gotten what he wanted. "What? That you would drop me once you slept with me?" I asked him to clarify.

"Yes," he said, nodding at me.

I took a deep breath. Might as well continue being honest here. "Yes. I do," I said softly.

For a moment I actually wished that I hadn't said it. A strange look that I had never seen on Eric's face before crossed over his features. "Then you clearly don't know me as well as you like to think that you do," he responded.

Another flash of emotion went through his eyes and I sighed. Maybe I had been a little too harsh about it. I actually felt bad for what I had said to him. To be fair, I didn't know Eric that well. Maybe he wouldn't leave if I slept with him. Maybe he would keep me around. After all, I wasn't asking for a relationship with him, maybe just a friendship. Something that told me that he looked at me as more
than just a pretty initiate with a loud mouth.

"I think I knew you pretty well," I said softly.

"Not if you mean what you just said," Eric said.

My heart jumped into my stomach. I couldn't believe that he was acting like this. Almost vulnerable. "I..." I started, unsure of where to go from there.

Eric figured it out for me. "Your last fight is today. Be prepared," Eric said, standing and moving to leave the table.

Without bothering to turn back and see if I was going to say something else, he turned to leave. I felt terrible for what I had said to him. It had been uncalled for. To his credit, he hadn't even dropped Sarah. They had been together for about three months now. Maybe Eric really wouldn't drop me. Maybe he cared a little bit more then he let on. I didn't think that he really cared, but I certainly had a feeling that he cared more about me than most of the other people in Dauntless. Fighting back my better intuition, I spoke up once more.

"Eric?" I called out before I could stop myself.

He turned back to me with a cold look on his face. "What?" he asked, a slight growl to his voice.

"Say my name and I'll take back what I said," I told him with a little grin.

His eyes brightened slightly and for a moment I thought that he might actually laugh. But he didn't. His lips turned up slightly and I couldn't help the small smile that came to my lips. I knew that he wasn't going to say my name, I just wanted to make the moment a little lighter hearted.

"Don't be late, Amity," he said and I laughed.

He had certainly accentuated the Amity. "Wouldn't dream of it," I teased.

Giving me a final smile, he turned and left. I wondered if he was ever going to actually say my name. Probably not. As he walked out of the dining room, I followed him with my eyes. A small smile fell over my face. That was the Eric that I had come to like so much over the past few months. If only he was a little easier to deal with.

I sat in silence, draining the water from the water bottle that Eric had left me with. I wasn't alone for long. Just a minute or two after Eric had left, I saw Cameron come in through the doors. He was wearing finer clothing, a suit and dress shoes, so I assumed that he was going to be visiting another Faction today. Over the past week I had said hello to Cameron a few times in passing, stopping for the occasional conversation. But most of the time he was with Eric, and that meant that I tried to avoid him. I actually considered myself close to being friends with Cameron.

"Alex," he greeted with a knowing grin.

"Hi, Cameron."

"I figured you'd be in here," he said.

I raised my eyebrow. How did he know that? Cameron was a late sleeper normally. He never joined Eric and me for our early morning breakfasts. "How did you figure that?" I asked.

"I just saw Eric leaving and he actually looked amused," Cameron explained.
Despite nodding at him, I wasn't really sure what he meant. "Am I really one of the only people that amuses him?" I asked him.

Cameron walked across over and took a seat across from me on the bench. He had no food with him but I wasn't surprised. Most members ate breakfast in their apartments. Unless they had to deal with the initiates. Like Four, Eric, and Lauren. He smirked at me and leaned onto the table. I smiled at him and leaned back slightly. That was how I knew that Cameron was a good friend of Eric's. They shared the same personality traits and quirks. They practically were the same person. Except for the fact that Cameron was much nicer. Although I'd recently found out that Cameron was the same way with women. Not that it came as a shock to me. Most men in Dauntless were that way.

"No. Plenty of people amuse Eric," he said. I found myself slightly disappointed. "But no one amuses him quite like you do."

I couldn't help but to smirk slightly. In some strange way I was glad to hear that. "What does that mean?" I asked.

"I'll let him admit that."

"What a let-down for such a good set-up," I teased.

"So what did you two argue about this time?" he asked, changing the subject.

I cocked my head at him. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"He only gives me that stony silence when it's about you."

Cameron frequently said things that caught me off guard, but that completely threw me. Since when did Eric get bothered by things that I did? Well, always. But he was never that bothered by me. He would get upset and we would fight and then he would get over it. It was the way that we acted. It was the way that we had always acted.

"I'm still not sure that I know what you mean," I said.

He merely smiled at me. It didn't quite reach his eyes. I could tell that he hadn't slept much the night before. It was the reason that I would never want to be an Ambassador. They worked all the time. So did leader's, but it seemed that they had a bit more free time. They were just needed at all times in case of emergencies. But I would take any job that wasn't on the Fence.

"Alex, I've known Eric a long time. Nearly all of our lives. He's always been my friend and I've always been his. I think I'm the only person that he really tells everything to," Cameron admitted.

I smiled softly at him. It was nice to see Eric's real friend. I knew that he had plenty of other friends, but he didn't seem to like, or tolerate, any of them the way that he did with Cameron. "That's sweet," I said softly.

"I've seen him go through a lot of girls. He never waits for them to come to him. He never tries to tease them. He's never done any of this. Not until you," Cameron said.

If I hadn't been confused before, I sure was now. "I don't understand," I muttered softly.

He didn't really like me. He had told me that more than once. He just wanted to sleep with me. And the feeling was mutual. Right? "I'm not saying that he loves you. He doesn't," Cameron said.

That was nice to hear. "Thanks for that," I said, laughing softly.
Cameron tried to rectify his mistake quickly. "He doesn't love anyone. He won't let himself. He can love. But he doesn't. He just needs the right person to show him how," he said.

This conversation was getting a little too strange for my liking. Was Cameron telling me that I was the person that should try and show Eric how to love? We were both too hot-headed. We were bad people to try and mellow the other out. We only riled each other up.

"I think that I'm a little lost here, Cameron. I like you. I like Eric. But he doesn't seem the type to ever want a real relationship," I said.

"He never has."

"So why bring it up?"

"Because I think that he can. He just has to find the right person," Cameron said, giving me a very pointed look.

He was staring at me, looking more serious than I had seen him in a long time. "Are you telling me that I should be with him? It's against Dauntless rules," I said.

Lately I had found myself with fewer and fewer reasons that I shouldn't be with Eric. I was losing the fight with myself and I knew that he was too. Only one question still remained. Who bends first? "I know that. So does he. But he doesn't care. What Eric wants, Eric gets. And you're what he wants," he told me.

I shook my head and rolled my eyes. I knew that he wanted me. We had both tried to push it down for long enough and now it didn't matter anymore. We both wanted the other. "Yeah. Trust me. I knew that," I said.

"Don't be like that. That isn't what I meant. He won't ever admit it, so I'll do it for him. Eric likes you. He likes you a lot."

Had I been drinking something I was sure that I would have spit it out. He wasn't serious. "I'm not so sure that it's me that he likes. I think that he likes the idea of me," I tried to argue.

"He likes more than that. I don't know if he wants to date you or whatever, but he certainly takes more shit from you than anyone else. You should see him come storming into my apartment, spending nearly an hour on a rant about you. I don't think he sees it, but I do. He has this little spark in his eyes. He likes that you challenge him. He likes that you are the only one that doesn't just give in. He respects you," Cameron said.

There was no way that Eric really respected me. "I definitely don't think that he respects me," I said.

He wanted to get in my pants. That was it. We weren't the types of people to be in relationships. And we certainly wouldn't be good together. People across the Dauntless compound could hear us screaming at each other on a regular basis. That wasn't what made for a respectful and loving relationship.

"He does."

"And did he tell you about the bet that we made?" I asked Cameron, placing my hands under my chin.

It was what would show Cameron that Eric wanted nothing more than to sleep with me. Cameron smirked at me and nodded. "He mentioned it," he said.
Of course he knew. "I'm not letting him tattoo something on me. He's going to stamp Amity across my forehead or something," I complained.

Actually he would probably make it much worse than that. Cameron smirked at me and I couldn't help but to smile back. I did enjoy seeing the way that he looked out for Eric. Not that Eric wanted it. "I'm not so convinced that he'd do something like that," he told me.

"I am."

We both smiled at each other. "Don't worry about the tattoo. I somehow think that if - when," I rolled my eyes, "anything happens between you two, the last thing on your minds is going to be a stupid tattoo."

Why was it that everyone wanted Eric and I to sleep together? "Maybe not on mine. But it'll be on his," I argued.

People began to trickle into the dining room slowly, my indication that our conversation was coming to an end. "Think about what I said Alex. I'm determined to see the two of you together at least once. Eric deserves a nice girl," Cameron said.

"Oh?"

"Well, not too nice." Once more, we both laughed. "And I think you deserve a nice guy too. Nicer than Roberts," he continued.

For a moment I was floored. Damn him. "I -"

I opened my mouth to defend myself but one sharp glare from Cameron shut me up. It practically mirrored the one that Eric would give me. "If it's the last thing that I do, it's going to be to see the two of you together. Have a good day, Alex. Good luck in the last fight," he said.

Maybe Eric and I really were meant to be together. I mean, we were similar enough. But could I really tolerate his attitude? "Thanks, Cameron," I smiled at the older man.

He laughed and leaned down to give me a quick kiss on the cheek. I blushed and waved him off. I wouldn't want to get him in trouble for an inappropriate relationship that wasn't even real. He didn't need a second motion to leave as he went tearing through the dining room and back towards the apartments. Probably to go give Eric the same speech. Heather entered the dining room with our friends in tow and I waved them over.

"Hey guys!" I yelled out.

Heather and Cole took their usual spots on my left, Heather giving me a quick grin. She knew why I was always out here so early. Dante took the open spot on my right and Jax, Draven, Buck, and Jet were across from us. Skylar was sitting with Jet but, as usual, she was silent.

"Everyone ready for the last fight today?" I asked as I stole the orange off of Buck's plate.

He glared at me for a moment but I simply smiled back at him. We usually split the fruit anyways. I tore it in half and handed Buck the piece in my right hand before digging into the other half.

"Absolutely!" Heather yelled through a mouthful of eggs, spraying them everywhere. I grimaced and shoved a napkin into her hands. As much as I loved Heather, her table manners left much to be desired. "I mean my ranking went up a lot after Capture the Flag." I cleared my throat. "Thank you, Alex!"
"You're welcome, Heather," I said, smiling at her with a little nod.

She was still the one to sacrifice herself to get shot and had been the one to grab the flag while I'd been busy with Eric. She had done well without me. "But once, just once, I want to win a damned fight," she hissed.

Everyone laughed at her. I wanted her to win the fight. She would probably be safe even if she lost the fight but I knew that she wanted to at least win one. "You'll win," I told her brightly.

Cole wrapped his arm around Heather and I smiled at the two of them. At least someone was having a nice relationship. "You're going to win this fight," he told her and she smiled.

"You've improved a lot since the last fights anyways," I added.

"And maybe you'll fight Raven or Skylar," Cole continued.

Heather and I scowled at him. Clearly he had missed the hidden insult in his words. She wanted to win a fight against the higher ranked initiates, not against a bottom ranked one. Skylar dropped her head into her dish and I sighed. Grabbing the rind of the orange I chucked it at Cole and shook my head. He had probably thought that Skylar couldn't hear him or wasn't listening. Heather was staring with a blank face ahead of her. Cole looked like he wanted to say something but neither seemed to know exactly what to say.

Wanting to diffuse the awkward tension that had suddenly formed, I stepped in to brighten the mood slightly. "Hey maybe you'll get Jade. Personally that's who I want to fight. I'm so sick of her trying to make me look like a fool during training," I growled.

Everyone knew that Jade had been out for me since the beginning. Heather suddenly stepped back into the conversation. "You know, you're right. A fight against Jade would be awesome!" she yelled.

I smiled at her. Jade suddenly looked up at the call of her name and we all dropped into our plates. A fight now would get us nothing but a mile run sprint around the City from Four. He had given us one a few weeks ago when half of the transfers had been late to training. They had all been locked out of the dorms that night. Thankfully I hadn't been one. Buck and Dante had though. It didn't matter. One day I'd gone on a little run with Eric after telling him that his fat head should have weighed him down. I could still see him bringing us by the Factionless district and telling me to say hello to my future family.

"God I'd love to knock her damn teeth in," Heather said, bringing me back to our previous conversation.

She had plenty of reason to hate Jade these days. She and Cole had recently become the victims of Jade's relentless teasing. We were all silent for a moment and I quickly ate the rest of my orange. I wished that I was more of a breakfast person, like Heather, but I wasn't. I would throw it up if I ate a full breakfast. I had made that mistake last week. Too bad I hadn't thrown up on Eric.

"Well I'll tell you what, if I get Jade I'll beat her face in for you," Dante said, breaking the silence. Everyone laughed loudly and clanked their water bottles together. We all hated Jade and Colt. "Hear, hear!" I cheered.

Hunter wasn't as bad. He didn't act like the two. He kept silent for the most part, only speaking when they spoke to him. Once more the group plunged into silence while we all ate quickly. I knew that everyone was focused on the fights today. For some of us today was a make or break day to get into Dauntless. In the next two weeks there was really only the potential to move up a spot or two. Fights
and Capture the Flag were the only way to make your ranking jump.

"Who do you think that you'll fight, Alex?" Jet asked me.

"Huh?" I asked, not quite catching the question.

"I mean they made you fight Colt, someone you hate, and Heather, someone that you love. You won both," he said and I nodded.

He was right. My fights seemed to be the only ones that were actually made to fit. Everyone else seemed to get fights that were randomly assigned. "You know, I was thinking about that this morning. I'm not really sure what they're going to do with me. I thought that I might get to sit out this fight but Eric said something to me this morning about me being ready for the fights so I think that I am fighting today," I said with a shrug.

I had actually been hoping that I might be able to sit out today and keep my ranking safe but Eric had made it clear that I was fighting. "Well you're high enough to keep you safe," Heather said.

"That's true. Maybe you or Dante?" I suggested to Jet. "Draven, maybe. Someone stronger."

Everyone at the table nodded, clearly agreeing with me. "I agree," Buck said.

I glanced over at him. He was digging his knife into the table and I smiled at him. It had become a habit of his lately. I wondered if he was getting nervous for Visiting Day. He certainly wouldn't be the only person. "Really?" I asked, curious for another opinion.

"They know that you're strong. They like watching you fight. I doubt that they're going to give you a lower ranked initiate. Someone up near the top. Probably Draven or Dante," Buck continued.

Both boys seemed to agree with our theories as well. Taking in a deep breath, I blew out a puff of air and swiped my hair to the side. Four and Zeke entered the dining room and I knew that we were going to have to leave at any minute. Four was a fast eater. Zeke sent me a quick smile and I gave him a small one back.

"God, you guys, there's only two more weeks before physical training is over. I mean, I'm kind of ready for it to be over. I think my body will give me some serious thanks," I said, making everyone smile.

"You can say that again," Cole said, rubbing his back where Jet had kicked him a few days ago.

"But I don't know if I want to face my deepest fears," I said, softer this time.

Once more, everyone nodded. "No one does," Jax said softly.

Everyone was nervous for the mental part of initiation. No one wanted to face their own fears in their minds, the one place that we couldn't run. "I don't even know what I'm afraid of. What about you guys?" I asked.

It was true, I had no idea what I was afraid of. "How do you not know what you're afraid of?" Heather asked me and I shrugged.

There was nothing that I could really think that I feared. No animals creeped me out and I wasn't afraid of heights, falling, or needles. All common fears. Anything that I was afraid of was buried deep in the back of my mind. Maybe my parents hating me or them dying. But those were just unsavory. I wasn't sure if I was actually afraid of anything.
"I mean I'm terrified of drowning," Heather said.

That sounded totally reasonable to me. Drowning was probably slow and painful. "Any reason?" I asked her.

It wasn't something that I would want. But I wasn't afraid of it happening to me. "I don't know how to swim," she admitted.

"I think that there's a pool somewhere in Dauntless. I could teach you," I offered Heather.

"Thanks," she said, smiling weakly at me.

Wrapping his arms around his girlfriend, who had clearly made herself nervous, Cole gave her a quick hug. "I can't blame you for that," he told her. Everyone was watching him closely to see if he was going to tell us what he was afraid of. We all leaned forward, silently edging him on to tell us what he was afraid of. He finally groaned and pushed the palms of his hands into his eyes. "Don't you dare laugh," he snapped.

We all nodded and leaned into him. "Yeah, yeah, tell us," I goaded.

"So I was reading this book one time and I read about this animal. It was called a scorpion. It's terrifying!"

"What is it?" Jet asked.

I had no idea what a scorpion was. Probably something that had existed before the war. "They have like armor around their bodies and this weird antennae thing that stings you. And they're poisonous!" Cole yelled fearfully.

Cole had gone slightly white and I smiled at him. It certainly didn't sound like a savory character but if it was gone I didn't see the point in being afraid of it. Every man to his own, I supposed. "Yeah, dude. It sounds terrifying. We aren't judging you," Dante said.

Everyone snorted softly, knowing that he was lying. Dante probably thought that Cole was being a baby. Cole merely scoffed and went back to his water. Heather smiled at her boyfriend and I saw that she was fighting back a laugh too. But that was how it was. Everyone's fears would sound silly to each other.

"I mean I'm afraid of enclosed spaces. I don't like the thought of not being able to get out of somewhere. I don't like the thought of being outnumbered in a small space where I can't run if need be," Dante told us.

That sounded like a totally reasonable fear to me. Had I not been raised in Amity, where people were constantly crowded around you, I might have been afraid of that as well. "I'm actually afraid of bridges," Jax said.

That was a strange fear. "Really?" I asked.

"Yeah. It's a good thing that there's only one in the City. I avoid it at all costs," he said and I smiled.

It was hard to imagine Jax being afraid of something that stood completely still and never moved. "Why are you afraid of them?" I asked.

"The train went over the bridge and I always hated it. I mean what if it collapses? You die. You're crushed," he said.
A sudden shiver shot up my spine and I shook my head. He was certainly right about that. I would have never thought of it that way. If the bridge collapsed and we were trapped under it we would die. We would either suffocate to death or something much worse. Now there was a bone-chilling thought.

"I suppose that makes sense. Being crushed to death would suck. Or suffocating," Draven said. I was extremely curious to see what he was afraid of. He didn't seem like the type to be afraid of anything. "I'm with you, Alex. I don't really know what I'm afraid of." I was glad to see that I wasn't the only one who wasn't sure what they were afraid of. "I mean I guess I'd be afraid to lose you guys."

Leaning over to Draven I grabbed him in a hug and he smiled down on me. "How sweet," I joked, nudging him.

I probably should have said something like that. Whatever. They all knew that I loved them. "Well, I mean, of course you'd be afraid of losing us! Who else is this fun?" Buck asked.

We all laughed and shook our heads at his antics. It was a good thing to lift the somber mood that had fallen over our table. "Who else will tolerate us?" I corrected.

More laughs were exchanged over the table. "You know, when I was a kid I was burned on the hand. Put it over an open flame. Burned the skin off of my hand," Buck said.

The image that came to mine was horrible. I had seen the scars on his hand but had never said anything. I had thought that they might have been a birth defect or something. It was interesting to know where they came from. I couldn't help but to wonder what had actually happened and what his family had done about it.

"I've been afraid of extreme heat and fire since then," Buck admitted.

We all nodded. Buck's fear was something that was completely reasonable. Everyone else's seemed to be things that weren't going to actually happen to them. "Well if there's ever been a good reason to have a fear of something, that's it," Jet said.

He was right about that. I noticed Buck pulling the sleeves over his hand now that we were all looking at them."Absolutely," Heather agreed, patting Buck on the arm.

I immediately looked away from his hand and turned to look at Jet. "I guess I'd be afraid of being buried alive," he said.

We all stared sidelong at him. That seemed to be a strange fear. Especially for someone that could overpower anyone that would try to bury him alive. "Why?" I asked.

"When I was a kid my siblings all locked me in a closet and my parents didn't even realize that something was wrong. It took them almost a full day to find me. I thought they never would. I thought that they would suffocate me or I would starve. It was terrible," he told us.

Damn. It made me glad that I was the only child in my family. I would have hated for something like that to happen to me. I couldn't help but to wonder if Jet had ever forgiven his siblings for something like that. It seemed like something that would stick with you long after it happened.

"What a bright discussion we're all having," I said, trying to lighten the mood.

It worked as we all began to laugh. Of course, it didn't last very long. Four was standing in the corner of the dining room. "Get in the training room," he shouted.
"Come on, Four's yelling at us to get in the training room," I said.

Everyone groaned but stood anyways and headed into the training room. I dropped the bottle of water into the trash before heading into the training room. Heather was standing next to me and I waited for Four to let us know who we were all going to be fighting. I saw my ranking standing proud at the number three spot and I smiled. I'd be number one soon. Just so that I could throw it in Eric and Colt's faces. And maybe do just a little bit of gloating to Aaron. But in good spirits.

"Last fights today! Go see who you're going to be up against," Four yelled, uncovering the fighting board.

Colt vs. Dante
Skylar vs. Buck
Jade vs Heather
Draven vs. Cole
Raven vs. Jet
Alex vs. Hunter

So that meant that Jax would be sitting out in the fights. I let my eyes run over my fight once more and let out a deep breath. Just what I wanted. To have my ass beaten into the ground and lose my first fight. There was no way that I was going to win this fight. I believed that I had a good chance at winning any fight. Except for a fight with Hunter. He had never taken it easy on anyone and I knew that he wasn't going to take it easy on me. He would probably make it even harder on me since I hated Colt and Jade. The only thing that I could hope was that I could hold my own for a while. I just couldn't get up there and lose in the first minute or two. I had to show that I could at least manage to defend myself, even against someone much stronger.

The rest of the fights were pretty evenly mixed. The fight between Colt and Dante would be a good one. They were both strong and fast. I had a feeling that the fight wasn't going to be pretty. I wasn't sure who would win. I hoped that Dante would. Skylar and Buck was going to be easy. Skylar would lose, and it would push her back below the red line. After Capture the Flag she had come up above the red line. This would push her back below.

Jade and Heather's, I was seriously looking forward to. Heather was going to win her first fight. I was positive of that. And I was going to be cheering her on the entire way. Draven and Cole would probably be a good fight. But Draven was going to win. He was stronger and faster than Cole. Raven and Jet was going to be another fast one. Jet would win and Raven would stay below the red line. I was glad that at least she and Skylar were good friends. They could support each other, no matter what.

Sighing deeply, I shook my head and had to suppress the sudden urge to yank my boots off of my feet and throw them at Four and Eric. They were the ones that had done this. All of my friends were staring at me and I groaned. It seemed that whenever the fights were posted, I was always the one that everyone had to watch their words around.

Probably because I was always getting the strangest fights. "I guess I should have seen that one coming," I said with a little shrug. My friends looked concerned but I brushed them off. What was done was done. "Hey, don't worry. I might not win this fight but there really isn't any way that they can push me down below the red line. I'll be alright."
They all nodded. "Just move fast. Hunter's good but he's slow," Jax advised.

I nodded and turned to Heather, giving her a wicked grin. "But hey, Heather, you got Jade! Beat her fucking face in for me, will you?" I chirped.

The worried look on Heather's face fell and was replaced with a grin mirroring my own. We were both excited for her fight. "Sweetie I'll do it for you, for me, and for everyone!" Heather exclaimed loudly.

We all laughed with her. I calmed down and glanced over to the side of the room where Jade and Colt were speaking to each other, motioning to me. I knew that they were trying to edge Hunter on. Probably about ripping my head off or breaking my neck. Hunter didn't smile or laugh with them, but he did nod at them. I found that it unnerved me even more than it would have if he'd laughed. All I could imagine right now was that he was taking their words seriously and making up fifteen different ways to kill me. It stunned me the way that he always stayed silent. I was pretty sure that I had only heard Hunter speak once.

We were all shifting on our feet and thinking about our fights when I heard a call from across the room. "Amity!" Eric yelled.

I shook my head but walked over to him anyways. It wouldn't end well if I didn't. "That's not my name," I hissed.

Just once I wanted to hear him call me by my name. He had called every other initiate by their names but he had made them sound like insults. I was so pissed with him as I walked over to him. He was the one that had set me up to fight Hunter. At least he would finally see me get my ass handed to me by someone else other than himself.

"I don't care," he snapped.

"You've made that clear."

"You think you have a chance to win this fight?" he asked me with his signature smirk on his face. Asshole.

He knew that I wasn't going to win this fight just as well as I did. "You're gonna rub it in?" I asked him with my hands on my hips.

So much for feeling sorry for him this morning. "Answer me," Eric said.

And so much for Cameron's theory that Eric really liked me. He didn't like me. He just wanted to make my life as annoying as possible. And he was already very good at it. "Yeah, Eric. I know that Hunter is stronger than me. I know that. I'm not expecting to win this fight. I just want to hold my own for as long as I can. So thanks for this. When he breaks me in half I'll be sure to thank you," I snapped at him.

He was smirking at me and I rolled my eyes once more. He was going to enjoy my fight far more than any sane person should. Eric's signature smirk was on his face and I wanted nothing more than to wipe it off. He always looked like he thought that he was so much better than me. I was determined to prove to him that he wasn't.

"Tell you what, Amity, I'll make you a little deal," he told me.

I cocked my head to the side, motioning for him to continue. "Go on," I purred.
If it was something like the last bet that we made I wanted nothing to do with it. That only made my life harder. "You go out there and win that fight with him, I'll lose the bet. Give you exactly what you want," Eric said.

At his words all rational thought and word processing flew out of my mind. My throat went dry and I was sure that my eyes had widened to the size of saucers. What the hell had he just told me? He was going to lose the bet as long as I won my fight. No way. He wasn't really going to do that. Was he?

"Huh?" I asked stupidly.

There was no way that he was willing to lose the bet. It was probably just one of his tricks to make me fight harder and then make me look like a fool later. Eric was laughing at me but I was too stunned to do anything. He leaned into me but I didn't bother backing off. My mind was reeling at his latest antic. Why was it that he always did this to me? Why couldn't he have just bothered the Dauntless born?

"Win the fight, little Amity," he told me with a teasing tone.

Unable to speak, I nodded stupidly. I still couldn't quite believe that what he said was true. But if he really actually meant it then it was amazing. It meant that I could finally cave without having to worry about him putting a tattoo on me. And even better, I got to put a tattoo on him! Maybe a really huge Amity symbol over his chest or something. Maybe my name stamped across his ass with a little heart. I'd pick something perfect.

"You know where my apartment is," he told me with a little smirk. Once more I nodded dumbly. "Now go and get ready for your fight."

His smirk and teasing tone had dropped and I knew that he was back in full leader mode. Tough and uncaring. But there was still something in the back of his eyes. I nodded and walked away from Eric. hoping that I wouldn't stumble over something. It did shock me when his teasing demeanor returned long enough to push me back towards my friends, placing his hands right on my ass and shoving me forward. I looked back long enough to shoot him a nasty glare, receiving a playful smirk in return. My skin was tingling. Hopefully I'd know the feeling even better later on tonight.

Heather shot me a concerned glance and I gave her a bright smile, trying to push Eric's proposition out of my mind. "All right!" Four called out, startling me. "First fighters in the ring. Now!"

We were all clearly moving too slow for him. I took my usual seat near Heather at the edge of the ring while Cole took a spot next to Buck and Jax, who were sitting behind us. Colt and Dante walked into the ring, the former looking excited and the latter looking like he could care less. As I stared at them I couldn't decide who I thought would win. Both were good fighters, but very different. As long as it was Dante, I wouldn't mind.

They circled each other for a few moments, shocking me. Colt was always the type to attack without thinking. He had learned something since his loss against me a few months back. Finally, he made the first move. Colt went rushing at Dante, but Dante saw it coming. He stepped out of the way and delivered a hard punch to Colt's chest. I yelped in glee but it didn't last long. Colt had sacrificed that move to make a better one. While Dante was recovering his hands back to his front, Colt threw a hand directly under Dante's chin and drove his fist into his face. Dante stumbled back. His lips was bleeding but he seemed unfazed.

Their fight was good. They ran back and forth and their movements were well calculated. It shocked me that Colt was behaving like a real fighter this time. He didn't like that he was now in the tenth spot. Whether or not he lost, I had a feeling that Colt's ranking would go up. There went the hope
that he might get kicked out of Dauntless. Finally Colt's sideswiped Dante. It smacked him in the side of the head, making everyone grimace at the loud crack, before Dante fell to the ground.

Colt and Dante both looked like they wanted to continue the fight but Four was smarter than that. "Stop!" he yelled, Colt backing off at the order. "Good. Dante, you alright?" Four asked as he grabbed Dante and lifted him from the mats.

His lips was dripping blood on the floor and Four handed him a small towel. "I'm alright," Dante muttered, still sounding dazed.

"Need to go to the infirmary?" Four asked.

Dante shook his head. "I'm alright," he said.

He came to sit back down with us and I made room for him to plop next to me. "Next fight! Skylar versus Buck!" Four yelled, stunning everyone back into action.

I had figured that Dante wouldn't go to the infirmary. He never did. But he still looked a little woozy. "You alright?" I asked.

Dante nodded and shook his head. Heather walked over to give him a glass of water and he thanked her. "I'm fine," he said.

I wasn't sure that I completely believed him but I didn't want to embarrass him and tell him that he needed to get himself looked over. For all I knew he was just a little tired. "Let me see," I said, taking the rag and wiping off the blood.

"Jackass doesn't play by the rules though," Dante growled. The haziness in his eyes was gone. I knew exactly what he meant.

Skylar and Buck were standing on opposite ends of the mat. Both looked hesitant to move. Eric was now tapping his foot against the floor. It wouldn't be long before he ordered them to fight. And no one wanted to wait that long. Everyone knew what would happen if we made Eric wait too long. After what seemed like a few minutes too long Buck ran to Skylar, bowling her over. The fight was fast, just the way that everyone expected. To her credit, Skylar did manage to get back up a few times, but every time it was only a matter of minutes before Buck got her back down again. I could tell that Buck was taking it easy on her.

Every time that Buck and I had sparred he had left deep purple bruises all over me. I knew that he hit me as hard as possible. But that was because he knew that I could take it. And I hit him back just as hard. His hits to Skylar were just enough to make her stumble or squeak in pain. She lost when Buck punched her once in the stomach before slamming his foot down on her chest. Her eyes rolled back in her head as she fought for breath and Buck backed off a little, looking extremely guilty for what he had done. But he just wanted the fight over. Buck gave her his hand and helped her up. He gave her a bashful smile and she shook him off, somehow still smiling.

Both initiates made their way off of the mats, Skylar moving slower. She was swaying slightly as she walked past Four. "Skylar, you good?" Four asked.

She nodded with a sad smile back at him. "I'm okay," she said softly.

A little pang went through my chest at the thoughts that must have been going through her head right now. She knew that she had no chance in Dauntless now. This fight was her last chance to stay and she had lost. As cruel as it was, I was glad that it wasn't me.

Everyone in my group whooped loudly as Heather went to stand at the near side of the mat. Jade wore a grin that screamed that she had already won as she walked up to the far side. I yelled out Heather's name a few times. Even though she wasn't facing me, I knew that she was smiling. Four called for the girls to start and everyone went silent. Jade attacked first. Heather knew that she would. She spun out of her way but didn't hit Jade. We all began screaming for Heather. Hits were flying everywhere and they ranged from punches to the chest to ripping out her hair to knocking teeth in.

Colt looked furious at our jeers but Jade remained unfazed. Long after the fight had begun, we still hadn't quieted down. Both girls were bleeding with nail wounds from each other, but neither looked like they were about ready to back down. It made my heart swell with pride. Heather had this. It was the longest she'd ever lasted in a fight. Even her fight with me had ended faster. And we had had to take a time out for Eric to rake me over the coals. I panicked as Jade grabbed Heather's arm and pulled it behind her. There was a loud pop and an excruciating wail of pain from Heather.

Cole looked like he was beside himself with a mix of fury and fear. I grabbed his hand and yelled for Heather to keep moving. My chest twisted with fear as Heather stumbled to the side and fell. My fear was short-lived. Heather tripped Jade, who went sprawling to the mats, clearly not having expected the sudden movement from Heather. My friend jumped up from the ground quickly and, before Jade got the chance to move, Heather drove a booted foot into Jade's face, effectively knocking her out.

For a moment no one seemed to believe it. Not even Heather. But I quickly broke the stunned silence. "Yes, Heather!" I yelled.

The cheers flew up after my slightly awkward yell and Cole began to howl loudly at his girlfriend's first win. Heather was standing on the mat, bleeding slightly and her shoulder definitely looked popped out of place. She was staggering where she stood but she looked much better than Jade, who was still yet to move. Not that anyone was rushing to her aid. Heather had a small smile on her face and I grinned at her.

She let out a few disbelieving laughs before moving slowly off of the mat. Both Four and Eric were wearing small smirks on their faces. Clearly they had both been rooting for Heather during the fight. Even though Eric didn't like any initiate, with me apparently being the exception, he certainly hated Jade more than Heather. She made her way off of the mat and Cole caught her in a hug. I smiled and let the two of them have their moment. Jade was currently forgotten about, being carried off to the infirmary by Hunter and Colt.

"Good fight. Heather, get to the infirmary. Have someone reset that shoulder," he ordered and Heather nodded. "Draven and Cole, get up here!"

Draven patted Heather on her uninjured shoulder before heading up onto the mats for his fight. "Oh, I've never been so proud of you!" I yelled as Cole let go of Heather and made room for me to meet her.

She still looked a little dizzy as I grabbed her for a hug, careful not to put any pressure on her dislocated shoulder. "Thanks," she said, still sounding woozy.

I couldn't help but to laugh in her ear. She was definitely staying in Dauntless. "You alright," I asked, looking in her eyes.

They seemed to be rolling around in her skull. But Cole had clearly realized the same thing that I just had. Our best friend and girlfriend would be staying in Dauntless. I could only imagine how ecstatic he was, knowing that she was going to be staying in Dauntless for sure now. I was thrilled enough
"That's my girl!" Cole yelled, laughing as he grabbed her in for another hug.

One quick shout from Eric to stop our celebrating and Cole went tearing off to the mats, completely forgetting about us. We all laughed and I watched with a small as everyone else began to hug Heather happily. Of course, it wasn't just that Heather was staying. It was the fact that we had finally watched Jade get cut down to size. And someone that Jade had thought would be no match for her. I could only imagine how horrified she would be when she really came to. Heather wore a small blush on her face at all of the attention being placed on her and I smiled softly. She had earned it. That was a fight well done.

"Thanks guys. Man I wish Four wasn't paying so close of attention. I could have used a few more good kicks," she said with a little laugh.

Everyone joined in and people began to take their seats at the edge of the ring once more. Four was standing off to the side of us, watching the fight, but I did notice his lips twitch in amusement. Heather waved a quick goodbye to us before disappearing out the door and heading to have her shoulder reset.

Cole and Draven had already been fighting for a while when we all finally got to watching their fight. And it went long after our attention had gone to the new fight. They were fighting fair and their movements were clean, but it was easy to see that Draven was the stronger. They were friends, and both had high enough rankings that they were safe no matter what. It still didn't stop the fact that both wanted to win.

It was the same way that I imagined I would feel once I got to my fight later. But I had a damn good reason to win. Eric had made sure of it. I was startled back to reality when Draven threw a fist at Cole's stomach, chest, and head, one after the other. Needless to say, it knocked Cole back. Draven swept out his legs before sending another punch to his stomach, effectively ending the fight. But everyone knew that Draven would win. He was too good.

On the bright side, he really didn't do much damage to Cole. He was able to stand back up once he finished wheezing and headed back to us. Draven helped him stay upright for a minute before he finally shrugged his friend off. He already looked ten times better.

"Not bad guys," Four said. We all nodded. Not that I had fought yet. My heart began to beat rapidly when I thought that my fight was only about an hour and a half away. "Alright we're going to break for lunch. Everyone get some food and water in you. When we come back we'll finish with the final two fights."

As I made my way out of the room, I noticed that Four's eyes held a little pity in them when they ran over me. Thankfully lunch was a mostly silent affair. I noticed that at the Dauntless born table it was the same way. People were only chatting just for the sake of it not being a silent meal. I wondered if they were finally realizing that after living here for sixteen years, some of them were going to be Factionless. I could only imagine what that was like. Aaron caught my eyes, along with Jackson and Lisa, all three of them smiling at me. I smiled back before going back to my lunch. I had to keep my head in it.

For most of the hour that I had, I tried to think of ways that I could beat Hunter. But no matter what I thought of, I knew that it wasn't going to be good enough. He was stronger than me. One hit of his would be like five of my own. He was faster too. Surprisingly fast for someone so large. It almost wasn't fair. He was probably smarter than me too. He would know what I was thinking before I did it. That was the benefit of not speaking. I had no idea how he thought or really acted. There was very
little chance that I would win this. But I had also felt that way before fighting Colt. Maybe I would
surprise myself.

Fat chance. Heather came back towards the end of lunch with her arm in a sling. She had regaled us
of how painful it was to have a shoulder reset and I tuned out. I wasn't a fan of anything having to do
with healing the human body. Blood and guts didn't scare me, but I wasn't overly fond of them.

So, instead, I went to thinking about Eric's proposition. If there was ever a time to win a fight, it
would be now. I could do what I wanted with him and I wouldn't have to be afraid of what he would
tattoo on me, and where. It was certainly worth it. And I could rub it in his face that I had won all
three of my fights. But I couldn't deny that I wanted him anymore. I did. I wanted him more than
anything.

And every time I saw the little hints of affection between Heather and Cole, it just became even
harder not to hunt Eric down. Like he had said earlier, I knew where his apartment was. And as
much as I wanted to like Damien more, I just didn't. He was nice and he was good to me, but he
wasn't the guy that I wanted. On more than one occasion I had woken up from a dream, starring
Eric, and I had forced myself to take one of the Dauntless initiate dorms famous icy showers.

I was slowly munching on my piece of chicken when I heard the call that I had been dreading.
"Initiates! Back in the training room!" Four yelled.

I walked slowly and partially numb. Heather stood at my side, knowing that I was nervous. As bad
as I felt for it, I hoped that Jet would get his and Raven's fight over with fast. I didn't want to wait this
stupid fight out anymore. I wanted it over with. As we walked into the room I was not surprised to
see that Eric was watching at Four's side. Taking a seat at the front of the mats, Heather sat at my
side, her hands on my knee.

"Raven and Jet, get up here," Four called.

He looked tired as Jet and Raven walked onto the mat. I saw that Raven was shaking and Jet looked
more than a little uncomfortable. Not that I blamed him. Jet had feelings for Raven and vice versa. It
was the same look that I had seen when Cole had been forced to fight Heather. I couldn't help but to
remember when I had fought with Eric. Well, the multiple times I had fought Eric. We had actually
been violent, each of us trying to hurt the other. But part of me liked that. The raw passion wasn't
something that I was used to. But it was something that I liked. What the hell was wrong with me?
Maybe this fight with Hunter would be good for me. He could knock my head right. I probably
needed it.

Their fight was the shortest out of any of the other ones. Even Skylar and Buck had been up on the
mats for longer. I assumed that Jet just wanted the fight over with as fast as possible. He didn't want
to do any more damage to her than he had to. Jet had made the fight last just under five minutes. Jet
roughly shoved Raven's shoulders back and she stumbled over herself. Before she could recover, Jet
raised his leg and did a sweep to Raven's head. She clearly saw it coming, but before she could move
away, his foot connected with the side of her head. She made no noise as she fell to the ground but
her head snapped back roughly. Jet ran over to her and I sighed. I knew that he felt terrible.

Four walked up onto the mat and helped raise Raven back to her feet. They tried a few times to get
her to come to, but nothing was working. She was completely out of it. "Bring her to the infirmary
and have them check her head," Four ordered.

Jet nodded and scooped Raven into his arms. I could see the defeat in his eyes. Like her friend,
Raven was not going to be staying in Dauntless. Not with another loss. Jet ran through the doors and
I watched him go before my heart gave a little skip. It was my turn now.
"Last fight! Hunter and Alex," Four said. My friends all patted me on the back and whispered encouraging words to which I blankly nodded. I wasn't sure what to say.

My foot hit the mat but before I could walk up, Four caught my arm. "What?" I asked, shaking slightly.

"Be careful up there, alright? I've heard Colt and Jade talking," Four warned me.

"Thanks."

If I wasn't nervous before, I sure as hell was now. Hunter was Jade and Colt's lackey. He did what they said. And if they said to kill me, I had no doubt in my mind that he wouldn't. Hunter was already in his spot as I took mine on the other end of the mat. I had never really been close to Hunter and on even ground before. Now that I was, I realized just how much taller than me he was. He was huge. I took my stance and waited for Hunter to rush at me. Just like Colt, Hunter always made the first move. But Hunter was more careful about it. His moves were much more calculated.

Like I had expected, Hunter made the first move. He rushed at me and I moved out of the way. But he had known that I was going to do it. It was the way that everyone started. He was already turning and easily grabbed my shirt. I panicked and sent my foot backwards, stomping on Hunter's. It probably didn't hurt but it did startle him enough that he let go of me. My relief was short-lived.

Hunter turned to me once more and grabbed my shoulder. He yanked on it roughly before shoving me forward. During my fall to the ground he shoved me onto his knee. I felt bile rise in my throat but I pushed it down. Hunter came to grab me once more but I rolled over myself and straightened out, sending a foot into his gut.

His muscles contracted under my foot and he grabbed it before I could get it back. I yelped as he dragged me underneath him, kicking me in the face as I went. I howled in pain as blood began to run down my nose. I wiggled it and was relieved when I realized that it wasn't broken. At least my fight was going better than I had thought that it would. After five minutes I was still fighting. Hunter brought down a fist but I was quick enough to block it.

Skin on my forearms was breaking at the continuous hits, but I was not giving up. The bad part was that, despite being able to hold my own against Hunter, I wasn't doing any damage to him. It was like surviving but not living. Hunter took my momentary lapse of attention to send a heavy hit to my eye and I yelled as I fell to the ground. Before he could get at me again I kicked over myself, making sure that my booted foot hit him in the neck.

He sputtered for a moment and I smiled. Hopefully I had closed off his windpipe. As I tried to stand, Hunter recovered from my kick and he sent a kick of his own at my ribs. I went flying back against the mats and nearly slid onto the concrete. I was gasping for air, having had the air knocked out of my lungs. I had fallen right underneath Eric and a quick glare from him forced me to stand back up. I had to win this.

Hunter came storming up to me but I slid out of the way at the last minute. I turned on my knee and sent a hard kick to the side of Hunter's. For the first time he yelled out and fell to the ground awkwardly. I smiled gratefully. Maybe I really could win this thing. As I grabbed his hair to flip over him and close my legs around his neck, Hunter managed to wrap a hand around my thigh. He yanked me to the ground, forcing me to rip out some of his own hair.

Although I knew that he could care less about his hair. He punched me in the face once and I pushed past the stars. I began to grasp at straws. As Hunter lifted me from the ground, I grabbed onto his back and plunged my hands under his shirt. He was slick with sweat. I dug my nails into his back and under his skin, grimacing as flesh stuck under them. He was bleeding from my nails. I could feel
it seeping into his shirt. I managed to squirm my way out of his awkward hold and begin the fight once more on even ground. But even though I was back to fighting, I could feel myself getting weaker by the moment. I wasn't going to be lasting much longer at this point. One of us had to end this thing.

Probably as eager to end the fight as I was, Hunter sent a direct punch to my cheek and I fell as the world began to spin. I was about the lose the fight. I could tell. As he advanced on me, I spun over myself once more. But Hunter was faster than me. He lifted me up by the shirt and wrapped his fist in my hair. I was struggling against him but my movements were getting weaker by the second. I was too tired to keep fighting.

To my shock, instead of hitting me and ending the fight, Hunter wrapped a hand around my neck, reminding me of the way that Eric had once choked me. I couldn't breathe. Just like with Eric. But Hunter didn't let go like Eric had. His grip just got stronger and stronger. I could hear my friends calling for the fight to end and I heard both Eric and Four's voice yelling for Hunter to stop. But he never did. My vision was going black with spots as Hunter hit me three times in the head. His grip became strangling as I fought to breathe. I could feel my windpipe and vocal chords cracking and the voices in the distance were getting farther and farther away. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the world went black.

Eric's P.O.V.

It didn't take much to make Eric angry. In fact, it was extremely easy to make Eric angry. Everyone knew that. Now Hunter knew exactly what it took to make Eric see red. Eric had never been so angry. He was stewing in his own fury. He was currently in the infirmary, a place that he hadn't been in a long time. Not since his own initiation. But he felt that he had to be here. Because he was the one that put her with him. He was the one that thought that the look on her face would be priceless. He had never expected Hunter to try and kill her. He had had a feeling that she might be injured from the fight but he hadn't expected her to have nearly had her windpipe cut off. He was pacing angrily at the front of her bed, resisting the urge to finish off her opponent. But he had done enough. Hunter was currently splayed out in the bed next to her and Eric smirked.

It felt good to get his anger out on someone. He hadn't gotten to beat someone senseless in a long time. It was always about shooting people. While faster, it was much less fun. There wasn't as much satisfaction as getting to knock someone's nose out of place. Eric had excused his behavior towards on explaining that initiates were supposed to fight each other, not kill each other. He was furious that someone had broken the rules of Dauntless initiation, and that someone had dared to hurt her other than him. Four had excused Eric's behavior, the one thing that Eric could thank him for. Eric had immediately rushed her to the infirmary as Four had gone to speak with Max about the incident. It was obvious that Four was steaming over the Amity's condition as well. It was the one thing that Eric saw eye-to-eye with Four on.

She wasn't doing well. She definitely had come out the worst of anyone's fights today. People had been injured worse during the matches, but this was the worst that Eric had seen someone come out during the fights this year. Unsurprisingly, she had come in with a collapsed windpipe. Eric had been told that it had blocked off her air flow. She was apparently breathing just fine now. But he could still hear the rattling in her breaths. She had one cracked rib and a few bruised ones as well. They would get better with time. She also had plenty of other minor injuries. Scrapes and cuts and bruises. It had only been two hours since the fight but she was finally stirring. He took that as a good sign.

Her friends were all outside and waiting for word that they could come into her room to check on her. But no non-members were allowed in until the doctor came to clear her for visitors. The door to
her room opened but Eric didn't bother looking back. He figured that it was either Four or the doctor. But as the figure stopped behind him, Eric figured that it was neither of them. He looked down at the floor and saw the familiar dress shoes. It was Cameron. Somehow he must have heard about the fight.

"How's she doing?" he asked.

Cameron was a little quieter than he normally was. Not that it really surprised Eric. He knew that Cameron had grown fond of her over the past few weeks. He liked her. He didn't want to see her injured. Eric didn't want to see her injured either. Not like this. But what was done was done. There was nothing that could be changed now. And he wouldn't apologize for putting her with him. He had thought that it would be funny. He was wrong. It was enough to admit it to himself.

"She'll be fine. Collapsed windpipe is the worst. She might be hoarse for a day or two," Eric said, shrugging. She'd be fine. There was no need to worry. "She has a cracked rib too and some bruising to the others but that's the only internal damage she has."

"That's good," Cameron said softly.

Eric was happier than he cared to admit that there was minimal internal damage to her. If someone was made unfit for Dauntless service they would become Factionless. For the first time in his life, Eric would have felt terrible if he had gotten her kicked out of Dauntless. He had joked with her about it, but he wouldn't want her gone. He was just starting to enjoy their banter. And he was still yet to sleep with her.

"How long ago was the fight?" Cameron asked.

"About two or three hours."

"She woken up since?"

She'd been completely out of it since Eric had body-slammed Hunter, forcing him to drop her. "She's been out since the fight. She's stirred a little bit, but nothing more than that," Eric said.

"She doesn't look too good," Cameron said and Eric nodded. She had a dark ring around the sides of her neck and bruising and swelling all over her face. "Too bad tomorrow is Visiting Day. If she has anyone coming to visit her, they're probably going to lose their minds."

Suddenly Eric began to wonder whether or not her parents would come to see her tomorrow. She never really spoke of them but Eric knew that she had hurt them when she transferred. She loved them. He had seen that in the way that she had looked at the pictures when they had gone to Amity. And they certainly loved her. He had been able to tell by the mountains of pictures they had of her all over their home.

"I'm not sure if her parents are going to come. You know as well as I do. Most transfer's parents don't show up. Sometimes old friends do," Eric said. None of their friends had come. Not that Eric cared.

"I remember how freaked out my parents were when they saw what I looked like after my fight," Cameron said.

"You looked pretty damn bad."

Eric couldn't help but to laugh. He had fought Cameron the day before Visiting Day and had left a lot of damage. It hadn't affected their friendship but Cameron's parents had certainly looked at Eric
differently. At least Cameron's parents had come. His own probably hadn't even thought of him since leaving Erudite over four years ago.

They were both silent as Eric listened to her heartbeat on the monitor. It was steady and strong. "I knew she'd lose the fight," he admitted.

If Cameron was surprised by his confession he didn't show it. He merely nodded and moved to sit in the chair by her bed. Eric continued standing at the base of her bed. "So why did you put her up against him?" he asked.

Eric couldn't help the sudden rush of anger that shot through him. "Why the hell do you think that I put her up against him?" he snapped.

Cameron wasn't fazed by Eric's attitude. They had known each other forever. He had spent his entire life dealing with Eric's nasty attitude. He merely shrugged. Eric could tell that Cameron honestly didn't know. As funny as Eric had thought that it would be to watch her lose a fight, there had been another reason too.

"Why did you put her with him?" Cameron repeated.

"Can't make it look like I'm taking it easy on her. I put her up against Colt the first time. Thought that it might be funny," he admitted. The same reason that he had put her up against Hunter today. "But I gave her the tip about his knee. She won the fight by doing that. Then I put her up against her friend. I knew she'd win that fight." It was true. He knew that she would win against her friend. "Couldn't do it again."

"Man, stop denying it," Cameron snapped. Eric opened his mouth to snap back at Cameron, hating ever looking weak, but Cameron was able to beat him to the punch. "Eric I've put up with a lot of your shit over the years. I never said anything about the girls that you fucked over. I never said anything about your stupid two-bit vendetta against Four." Eric scowled. Cameron knew that Eric's vendetta against Four was well deserved. "I never said a damn thing when you were pulled to join Jeanine. But this is where I draw the line. She cares about you. And be damned what you say! You care about her."

Cameron was wrong. Eric didn't care about her. He didn't care about anyone. Not even himself. "I don't," Eric snarled.

To Cameron's credit he never once faltered against Eric's glare. Cameron knew Eric better than anyone, which was exactly why he should have known that Eric didn't care for her. Just because he tolerated her more than anyone else didn't mean that he liked her. He liked her. But he didn't like her that much.

"You do, Eric. I've known you since we were kids. You look at her differently from the way that you look at anyone else. Do something about it," Cameron prodded.

Eric shook his head. There was nothing to do. He would eventually sleep with her and then it would be over. "Do what with her? I want nothing from her," Eric snarled.

"Why are you with Sarah?" Cameron suddenly asked.

Once more Eric was thrown by something that Cameron had said. He wasn't really sure why he was with Sarah. She was a good person to go to when he was bored. She was good for taking out his frustrations, mostly from the Amity. But he had no real reason why he was with her. He never had a reason why he was with any girls that he was with.
"She's a good lay," Eric finally answered.

"Wrong," Cameron immediately interjected.

Cameron looked somewhere in between sad and angry. "Excuse me?" Eric asked.

"I used to think that. When I first met Sarah, that's what I thought. But you know what I realized recently?" Cameron asked.

"I don't think that's a question," Eric said, trying to force a smirk.

"That's not why. You're with her so you can forget about her. And look at her Eric!" he yelled.

Eric's eyebrows knitted. He had no idea what Cameron had meant by look at her. He wasn't sure if there was something hidden in his words. "I have looked at her, in case you've forgotten," Eric said snottily.

"You picked the one person in Dauntless that probably looks the most like Alex. You're hoping that Sarah will make you forget about her. She won't," Cameron told him.

Did she really look like the Amity? She had the same long blonde hair. The same strong body. But Sarah was taller. She had green eyes too but they weren't as striking as hers. Sarah did look rather similar to the Amity but Eric brushed it off. It was a coincidence. A lot of girls had blonde hair and green eyes.

"It's none of your damned business which girl I decide to take back to my apartment," Eric snapped, sick of this. "Thanks for trying to help, but I don't give a damn. I don't like her. She's just another initiate."

Eric was sick of having to think about her. He wished that she had stayed in Amity. It would have made his life easier. "No she isn't. Grow up, Eric. You know that you care about her."

"I don't."

"I know it too. So get the hell over yourself! Tell her, when she wakes up. Tell her that you want her," Cameron said and Eric laughed. She already knew that. He didn't have to tell her. But Cameron knew what Eric was thinking. "And not just to take back to your apartment."

Eric's face broke into a small grin and he shook his head. "You think that I want anything more than to take her back to my apartment?" Eric asked.

"I do," Cameron said.

Eric let out a humorless laugh. Eric didn't like anyone. There was no one that knew anything about him other than Cameron. He intended to keep it that way. "Then you don't know me as well as you think you do."

Shaking his head, Eric stood from the side of her bed. She was moving a little bit but her eyes were still closed. "Wrong again, Eric. I know you better than you think I do." Eric didn't want to bother telling Cameron that he was right. "She's waking up. I'm going to go and I'm going to give you two weeks," Cameron said as he walked to the door.

Eric raised his pierced brow, wondering what the hell he was talking about. "Two weeks for what?" Eric asked.
"You have two weeks, Eric. Tell her how you feel, or I will," Cameron threatened.

Eric couldn't help it. He let out a loud laugh. "You will not. There's nothing to tell," Eric said.

Cameron's face hardened. "I'm not kidding. She deserves to know and you deserve to be happy. I think that she's the one that's going to make you happy. Hope she feels better soon," he said before taking his leave.

As the door shut, Eric took a seat in the chair that Cameron had just vacated. She was stirring in her bed, clearly about to wake up. She would be awake within a minute or two. Eric couldn't help but to let his mind wander with the things that Cameron had said. He had never thought that Sarah actually did look a little bit like her. It had never occurred to him. Could it have been a subconscious thing that he had done?

Eric watched her chest rise and fall a few times and lets his eyebrows furrow. For the first time since meeting someone he has no idea what to think about her. She had him completely confused. He knew that he was physically attracted to her. But was there any way that he could like her too? He couldn't tell. It bothered him that he might actually like her. He didn't know how to handle a real relationship. He had never been in one. The relationship with Sarah wasn't real. The only thing that Eric knew for sure was that he liked her more than he had ever liked a women. And that bugged him.

Finally she began to stir, rolling to her side slightly. He smirked down at her, trying to wipe all the thought from his previous conversation. Her eyes finally opened and he saw how hazy they were. He nearly laughed at her. She looked drunk. He could only imagine how confused she was. The doctor said that she wasn't even sure how much the Amity would remember.

"Initiate," Eric greeted. Her head lolled over to look at him. "Honestly, you did better than I was expecting. You lasted a whole, maybe two minutes."

She would never see the side of him that even Cameron rarely saw. She rolled her eyes at him. "Oh good, just who I wanted to see first thing after having my ass handed to me," she said.

Her voice was extremely hoarse and Eric almost grimaced. That was his fault. She recoiled for a moment too, but he noticed that her smile never faltered. It almost made him feel better that she was smiling. Almost. But it partially made him angrier. He wanted to hate her. To not care. Her eyes dropped after a minute and Eric assumed that she was thinking about how she had lost the fight. It had been her first loss.

"I lost the fight?" she asked for confirmation.

Eric nodded. "You did."

"Damn. If there was ever a good time to win a fight," she joked.

Eric laughed and leaned back in the chair. "I was rooting for you," he told her, making her laugh again.

He hated that he liked her laugh. Thankfully it faded quickly and she looked back at him. Her green eyes looked dull. "How bad was it? Try not to soften the blow or anything," she said with a little laugh. Eric found himself laughing with her.

But they quickly sobered. Eric knew that he had to tell her what had happened during the fight. "It was bad. But I was expecting it. You lasted about ten or so minutes. Took a hell of a beating out there. Bruised a few ribs and cracked one. You have a collapsed windpipe too. Just give it a day or
two. Your voice will go back to normal,” he told her.

She nodded, looking down at the sheets. She was twisting it in her fingers. "Good. I didn't want to sound like a chain smoker for the rest of my life," she said, forcing a smile.

He knew that she was disappointed in herself. He knew what it was like to lose a fight after being on top for nearly the entire time of training. And he knew what it was like to have no one say something to pride you for trying. "You didn't do half bad, Amity," he told her. She didn't look up but he did catch the grin on her face. "Besides, your little fighting buddy can keep you company for a while.”

This time she did look up. He motioned to the bed next to hers that was hidden by an opaque glass. It was soundproof. Eric didn't need to worry about anyone hearing them. She looked over and he noticed her eyes widening. He wondered if she understood what had happened.

"I didn't think that I really did anything to him," she said softly before looking back to Eric. He smirked. She hadn't caught on yet. "It wasn't me. It was you."

"I did."

"What did you do to him?” she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. It didn't really matter what he had done to him. But he'd tell her. "He has a broken rib, jaw, and cheekbone," he said carelessly.

Not that it mattered. He would be fine after a few days. He was lucky that Eric didn't shoot him where he stood. "Oh," she muttered.

"Nothing compared to what it could have been. He got off easy as far as I'm concerned," Eric sneered.

He hated thinking that someone else had laid a hand on her because of something that Eric had done in the first place. She nodded but never looked back over to Hunter. "Will he be alright?" she asked.

Eric was thrown. Of anything that she could have asked, Eric hadn't thought that it would be whether or not Hunter would be alright. He had nearly killed her. Why the hell did she care whether or not he was going to be alright? It was one of the many ways that she and Eric were different. He couldn't care less what was going to happen to him. Eric merely shrugged his shoulders and handed her the water bottle on the side of her table. She took it from him and began to drain the water. He had figured that she would want that.

"Don't worry about him. He'll be fine in a few days," Eric said. She nodded blankly. "We encourage people to take care of their opponents. That doesn't mean that we want them to kill each other. Hunter took it a step too far. Someone had to make sure that he knew what we were all about.”

After a moment she began to smile brightly. Eric stared at her. He was always curious how she managed to be positive so much. Even after he spoke to her like she was less than nothing. "Defending my honor, huh?" she asked with a teasing grin.

Some life had come back to her eyes. He merely scoffed at her. He wasn't sure. "Defending Dauntless rules," Eric said.

"Well, thank you anyways," she said softly. Eric grinned at her. "Did you do it?" she asked after a few beats of silence.

Eric raised a brow at her, not understanding the question. "What?" he asked.
"Put me with Hunter?"

His stomach curled slightly. "Yes," he admitted.

"Why?"

He hated that she had to ask why he had done it. He didn't want to tell her, but he also didn't want to lie to her. "I thought that it would be funny," he finally said honestly.

She was silent for a long time, merely staring at him. She nodded, glancing down towards the bed before looking back up. "Thank you for admitting it," she said softly, looking back at him.

Something in her voice actually made him feel almost guilty. He didn't like the feeling in the slightest. "I didn't think that he would try and do that. I would never have put you with him if I'd known that was going to happen," Eric told her, trying to justify what he had done.

She nodded at him. "I believe you. But you knew that I would lose the fight."

"Yes."

To his surprise, she began to laugh. Every day she surprised him more and more. "So I guess you didn't want me that badly?" she asked, smirking at him.

He shook his head, almost tempted to touch her. "That's what you think," he said, smirking back.

Her face went bright red. There was a long stretch of silence in between the two of them. "So when can I get out of here? And where are my friends?" she asked him.

He rolled his eyes. He had been waiting for her to ask about her friends and when she could leave. "Once I leave the doctor will come in and check on you. As long as she gives you the all clear you can leave," he told her. She nodded, looking happy. Her injuries weren't serious enough to keep her overnight. "You're friends are waiting outside. They haven't shut up about seeing you since the fight. Doctor wants to see you before they're allowed in. You should be proud of your friend Heather. I thought that she might have attacked Hunter had I not. She looked about ready to."

The grin on her face had dropped and she was now scowling at Eric. "So you'll say her name and not mine?" she asked.

Eric shook his head and laughed. "I could care less about the Candor transfer," he snarled.

She almost smiled and he realized too late what he had said. He had essentially admitted that he had feelings for her. But he did mean what he'd said. She meant nothing. The Candor transfer was only another face in the crowd. For whatever reason, the Amity wasn't.

"Good. I'm glad to see that she's coming into her own," she finally said.

They were silent for a moment. He was sitting at her bedside and watching her as she drank her water. She said nothing. He noticed that she wasn't trying to order him to leave for once and Eric almost smiled. Perhaps they were making some ground. Before Eric could stop himself, Cameron's words took over his mind once more and Eric's tongue moved faster than his brain.

"Have you gone back to him?" he asked, wanting to slap himself after.

Her head cocked to the side in confusion. "What?" she asked.

"Since that night. At the Chasm," Eric said. The last part of his statement was quiet.
She visibly tensed on the bed. He didn't like the thought of someone else touching something that he had claimed for himself. "Just a few times." He was shocked that she had actually admitted it. "Why?" she asked, her voice suddenly taking a defensive tone.

His answer came out faster and snappier than he had meant it to. "Don't go back there," he hissed at her.

She recoiled slightly but not out of fear. The sudden surge of jealousy had taken over him. Eric was always the jealous type. "And why is that?" she snapped. Her voice had been soft and hoarse. It suddenly seemed to get much stronger. "You'll kick me out of Dauntless? You said it before. You don't have any solid evidence. And you won't. You won't kick me out."

She had too much faith in him. If he ever had due reason, including catching her with Roberts, he would kick her out. It would make his dilemma easier. "I will kick you out," he snarled.

"You won't. Not until you get what you want. Which, by the way, I am not going to give to you," she added haughtily.

She would. She just wouldn't admit it. So he would. Like her, he had grown sick of these games. "Because. You're mine," he snarled the last part, leaning over her.

He decided, just this once, to appease Cameron and make a move. Her eyes had finally regained their life but they were darker than they normally were. And the shock was evident. He was leaning over the bed and towering over her small figure. She was wearing just a thin hospital gown and he grinned.

"You didn't win the fight but that doesn't matter. Not anymore. Do you still want me?" he asked her.

He didn't need to hear her answer. He already knew it. But she nodded anyways. "Yes," she said, her voice once more hoarse.

"Good. Then say it," he told her.

All he wanted to hear her say anymore was that she wanted him. He didn't give a damn about the tattoo. His hands were on her thigh and slowly traveling upwards. Her skin was boiling hot. "Say my name," she rasped.

The hoarseness in her voice made it sound even darker. But Eric hadn't been expecting that. He leaned away from her slightly, withdrawing his hand at her sudden movement. He almost growled. He had been so close to touching what he so desperately wanted to touch.

"Say my name, and I'll give in. We both want something. But who caves first?" she asked.

Not him. Never him. Women came to him. Not the other way around. "Certainly not me, initiate," he sneered the last word at her.

That was exactly why he couldn't admit anything to her. She wasn't as desperate as the other women in Dauntless were. It was something that bothered him and turned him on at the same time. She wasn't afraid of him and she didn't back down. It was something that he had never known that he wanted. But he did want it. He wanted it and he wanted her.

Suddenly he grabbed the roots of her hair and she hissed as he pulled her into him. He knew that she liked it. Their chests were touching and he grinned as the gown slipped off of her shoulder, leaving it bare. He leaned his mouth down and kissed her bare shoulder. He felt her shiver beneath him and he laughed. He loved knowing that he could do that to her.
"Who has the strongest resolve?" he asked her as he moved away.

They both ungracefully snorted. Each one of them knew that they were getting to the end of their ropes. It wouldn't be long before one caved. But Eric wanted so desperately for her to break. He refused to break first. He wanted to see how long that he could go without saying her name. He heard the soft clicking of heels and he backed away from her.

"The doctor is coming," he said softly.

He backed away from her and she nodded. "Good timing," she said.

They both smirked as she raised a hand to his face. She let her nails tap the skin on his cheek and softly pull their way down his face and neck. He fought back a shiver as her fingers hooked in to the front of his shirt and pulled him closer to her. She pressed a hot kiss against the side of his neck, just barely feeling her teeth graze over him, and he stared down at her, his eyes black. He wanted her more than anything. He wanted nothing more than to lock the doors and do away with her. They never once broke eye contact through the entire confrontation.

"Well?" she asked. Eric found himself at a loss for words. She was being braver than he had ever credited her for. And he had no idea what she meant. "Leave. No one can be in here with the doctor. See you tomorrow, Eric."

She was smiling brightly at him. He backed off once more and laughed softly. He knew all of her buttons to push and she knew all of his. "Try not to get your ass handed to you again in the next few hours," he told her.

She laughed softly as he stood by the door and watched the doctor come in. As he walked out, he turned to close the door but noticed that she was slowly undressing. He stopped and watched her. She slid off the hospital gown and kept her eyes locked on his. She reached around her back and unhooked the bra that she was wearing. It slipped just slightly off of her body and he watched with dark eyes before she clutched it to her chest and stared at him with a quirked lip. Of course she wouldn't show him.

"Goodnight Eric," she practically sang to him.

He smirked at her and winked before leaving, catching the glare that the doctor was giving him. As he left and walked through the halls back towards the apartment, he noticed that his pants had grown uncomfortably tight. As they so frequently did whenever he was around her. He wanted desperately to go and find Sarah to take care of his little problem but he knew that she wouldn't be enough. She hadn't been in a while.

Walking into his apartment and past the kitchen, he noticed that the photo of her in the red dress was still on his counter. He smirked and let his mind wander, wishing that she had brought the red dress with her. Once his mind had gone too far he shook his head and walked into the shower, making it as cold as possible. He needed it. For a fleeting moment he wished that when he walked back into the room she would be there, waiting for him in his bed. A thought that bothered him to his core. If he did find her in his bed he would never let her leave. He would never want to let her leave. And for the first time in his entire life, he wondered if it was because of more than just her body.
Chapter Thirteen

When I opened my eyes in the morning, an excruciating pain shot through my entire body. Every inch of me felt like it was on fire. At any moment, it felt like I might keel over and die. But I had to keep fighting. I had to keep myself together. Hunter might have won the fight, but I was going to show him that I was stronger than he was. My chest was constricting in pain with every breath that I took. I shook the pain off. I could do this. I had to do this. I stood weakly from my bed and walked into the bathroom. I walked with a slight limp but continued to shake off the pain.

Before jumping in the shower, I popped open my pain pill bottle and downed two. They made me a little fuzzy but not bad enough that I couldn't function normally. I swallowed them and peeled off my oversized shirt. Well, Damien's. I turned the dial as hot as I could stand it in the shower. As I washed off the sweat, I thought about what had happened after Eric had left last night. It had definitely been a rather amusing and funny end to my day.

My friends had all come running into the room, each with a different look of panic on their faces. All of the transfers except for Colt and Jade had been there. To my surprise, a few of the Dauntless born had come to see me too. Aaron, Jackson, Greg, Michael and Lisa had all come. Serena had been there too, but I had a feeling that it was because Lisa had dragged her.

Heather and Buck had seemed the most concerned, but all of the transfers had asked me if I was alright. Even Skylar and Raven, who had both taken bad hits in their fights, had said that my fight looked painful. The Dauntless born initiates had all laughed and asked me what I had done to him. Although when I had mentioned that Hunter had nearly killed me, they had turned somber. Apparently no Dauntless took the rule-breaking fight as a joke. Even Serena looked heated at Hunter's actions.

That was what told me that it was a big deal. Everyone had been concerned for my health, but after a few reassurances from the nurse that I would be fine, they had calmed down and taken turns telling me what had happened. I didn't remember much after Hunter had grabbed my throat. But I was grateful to see how much they all cared for me.

After I had been discharged and thanked everyone for sacrificing their nights to wait for me, Heather and Cole had gone to dinner with me. Not that I had been able to eat much. My throat had felt closed off so I'd merely eaten a small bowl of soup. The nurse had recommended that I stay with warm drinks like coffee and tea for the next few days. And lots of water.

Down at the dining room, I had seen both Zeke and Cameron, each of whom had taken the time to speak with me. Cameron had been impressed that I had lasted as long as I did. He had respected that I hadn't given up. Zeke on the other hand had done a full grill of my health. As I had been leaving for bed Four had come and found me, apologizing profusely for the fight. I had shrugged him off and accepted his apology. It was Eric's fault. As most things were.

Although I had already known that I was going to lose the fight before I had gone in, I was upset that I hadn't come out as the winner. It was the first fight I'd lost. I had been hoping for only a few bruises and cuts. Maybe a black eye or two. But I had come out with so much more. At least Hunter would have to be laid up in the infirmary for a few days. Four had come to me last night and told me that he would be out of it for a few days. As cruel as it was, I hoped that no one would be coming to visit him. After all, he made me look, and feel, like I had gotten hit with one of the Amity trucks. All of this on the day before Visiting Day too. At least no one was coming to visit me today.

Today was the day that most transfers dreaded. Visiting Day. Most of my friends had been nervous
last night, not knowing whether or not their families were going to come. I had no idea whether or not my parents would come. They had looked extremely upset that I hadn't stayed in Amity. Maybe that meant that they didn't want to see me. I wasn't sure if I even wanted them to come. As much as I missed them, I didn't want them to see me like this. Either way, I was going to dress up. Everyone had today off, initiates and members. I hoped that some of my friend's families would come. I wanted Heather's father to come. I knew that she missed him. And I hoped that, somewhere in Candor, Iris and Florian would see their parents.

For a moment, I even wondered whether Four and Eric would have anyone coming to see them. Neither ever spoke of family or friends outside of the Faction. I knew for a fact that Four was a transfer, but I didn't know where he was from. All I knew was that he never spoke of his life before Dauntless. He must not have had a good one. Eric never spoke of a family either. I had wondered if maybe they'd had died. He was never seen with anyone that looked old enough to be parents and I had never heard of him having siblings. It made me feel a little bad for him. Family was so important but he didn't seem to have any. Maybe he would have some old friends come and visit.

There was some banging out in the main room and I knew that everyone else was getting ready to get up. Without training today, everyone was sleeping in. Even I had slept in today. And that was pretty rare. But it was probably a good thing that I had slept in and avoided my morning rendezvous with Eric.

After I had so boldly, and stupidly, acted out with him last night, I knew that it was better to avoid him for a day or two. We just needed time to cool down from each other. It was the way that we were. Things would heat up between us for a while and then we would step back to cool down. I was grateful that there was no training today. I might explode if I had to spend all day in close quarters with Eric. He'd probably be busy doing his job today, whatever that actually was. The only job he seemed to do was make my life harder. But I wouldn't be out and about today. I would be hiding in the dorms. I wanted to imagine that my parents were coming, but I knew that they wouldn't.

Hopping out of the shower, I headed over towards the mirrors. Raven had been staring in my direction, but at the sight of me she looked away quickly. I didn't have a problem with it either way. We had all become pretty numb to seeing each other without clothes on. I grabbed a towel and wrapped it around me before going out into the main room to grab my clothes. Everyone was up and moving around as I headed to my bed. Colt and Jade were both glaring at me but I brushed them off. They were outnumbered here. They'd be stupid to try something.

Grabbing my clothes, I walked back into the bathroom, stepping off to the side and pulling a curtain. I pulled on my underwear before grabbing a black shirt with sheer panels around the ribs. It was looser fitting but tight enough to show that I had lost weight since being here. The panels showed off the bruises but I was proud of them. They also showed off the tattoos. If, by some miracle my parents came, I was sure that they would say something about them. I grabbed a pair of tight black jeans that had rips in them along with my black boots. I brushed my hair back, leaving it down, and went to the mirrors. I put on a tiny bit of makeup to disguise the bruises. The only thing that I could see were touches of the black eyes and bruising around the hairline.

Heather was already waiting for me, clearly having skipped her shower. She was dressed and shaking slightly. She was nervous to see if her family was going to come and visit her. Cole was currently on Heather's bed by himself. He was staring up at the ceiling. He had mentioned last night that no one was coming for him. He probably wanted to hide in the dorms all day. Not that I blamed him. It only hurt to see all of the happy families and know that you weren't a part of it.

The only reason that I was going to head out into the Pit was because Heather had asked me to come
check the registrar with her. The registrar was the way to check if you had anyone in Dauntless on Visiting Day waiting for you. Guests from other Factions would check in at the registrar and leave the name of the member they were here to visit. When we went up to the desk, the registrar would check if anyone was waiting on us.

As I walked over to where Heather was waiting, I noticed that she was wearing a pretty dress. It was something like the sundresses that I used to wear in Amity, except hers was black with a red strip running across the bottom hem. It looked nice on her. And since she had very few bruises from her fight with Jade. She looked a hell of a lot better than I did. Thankfully the makeup had made a startling difference on me.

"Hey, you ready?" Heather asked me.

"Yeah. Let's head out," I muttered, motioning towards the door.

She seemed to sense my hesitation as she shifted slightly in her spot. "Alex, if you don't want to go out there with me, don't worry about it. I don't want to make you do something that you don't want to do," she said softly.

I shook my head and put my hand on her shoulder. She needed someone today and I wanted to be there for her. She would do the same thing for me. "No, Heather," I told her with a smile. My voice was stronger than it was yesterday but it was still raspy. "Don't worry about it. Let's go find your family."

"You're positive?" Heather asked.

Once more I nodded. "We're good. Let's go," I said.

The two of us smiled at each other and headed towards the Pit. I was confident that we would find her family out there. They loved her. We were met with an immediate rush of people. Dauntless was always busy, but it was never this crazy. The Pit was about to burst at the seams with people. Families were running everywhere and people were embracing each other tightly, some crying. There was a sea of black, white, blue, and even the occasional spattering of gray. But no one was wearing red or yellow. I had to fight to keep my smile on my face and not let the disappointment in my eyes reach my face. This was about Heather. We were here to find her family. Not mine.

We fought to get to the registrar desk, where there was a huge line. Most of the people in Dauntless were probably here. A few people were leaving the desk with tears in their eyes. Others were leaving with bright smiles. Some wore straight faces. But no one could completely disguise their emotions. Not today. Today was the one day where Faction before blood meant nothing. But for some people, it would always mean everything. And that was how I was sure my family felt. Heather and I finally reached the front of the line and we smiled down at the woman at the desk.

She had dark hair and a few tattoos on her arms. She was not smiling. "You're an initiate?" she asked Heather.

"Yes, ma'am," Heather said.

"Transfer?"

Heather nodded once more. "Yes, ma'am."

"Name?" the woman asked.

Heather was silent for a moment and I knew that it was because she was nervous. She probably
wasn't sure if she wanted to hear if she had someone here. I nudged her gently and she jumped. "Heather," she answered weakly.

The woman had a tablet in front of her and her hands went flitting over the screen. She wore a passive face and the longer that she stared at the thing the worse that I felt. I could only imagine how Heather would feel if her family really hadn't come to see her. She had seemed so confident that they would. Finally the woman looked up and my chest constricted. She didn't look happy. I could feel Heather shaking as I grabbed her hand.

"You have two people waiting for you. They should be waiting in the dining room. That's where most of them are," the woman said.

Heather brightened, giving a little laugh. "Thank you so much," Heather chirped excitedly.

Heather turned back, ready to leave and find her family. Before I could follow her the woman spoke up once more. "Do you need to check for anyone?" the woman asked me.

Thrown for a moment, I debated on what to do. Part of me wanted to say yes and be hopeful, but I knew that it was better to not be disappointed. Plus I had Heather do deal with. So I shook my head. "No thanks. No one is coming for me," I added on.

The woman nodded at me and I noticed the tiniest bit of pity in the corner of her eyes. She had probably dealt with a lot of heartbroken kids today. She probably did every year. It must have been draining. I made way for the next person behind me and headed over to where Heather was waiting for me.

"Heather do you want me to leave or go with you? I don't want to intrude on something," I told her.

Heather looked horrified that I had even suggested I leave. She grabbed my hand, dragging me into the Pit. "No, I really want you to come with me actually. I want my family to get to meet you," she told me.

I smiled softly and nodded. "I'd like to meet them, too," I said softly.

The noise of the Pit almost drowned me out, but Heather merely smiled at me and continued to pull me along with her. I thought about what the woman had said. Heather had two people waiting for her. One definitely would have been her father. But who was the second? Her mother was dead. I remembered that from the file. I assumed that it was probably a sibling.

"Where are they? God there are so many Candor's here. They all look exactly the same," Heather groaned.

"Don't worry. We'll find them," I promised her.

"How? By doing another dive off of the roof to see them from above?" she asked.

I laughed at her. She was right. There were a number of them. Candor seemed to be the most prevalent Faction here, followed by Erudite. It was hard to pick them out with the Dauntless members weaving in between them. I tried to look for someone that shared Heather's appearance but I couldn't find anyone. Many of them looked just like her.

"Dad?" Heather asked and I turned back.

Standing a few feet from us was a small family. A man that looked to be about my father's age and a little girl. Very obviously her father and little sister. Her father was tall, seemingly where Heather got
her height from, and dressed in Candor clothes. The little girl was wearing an all-white pantsuit. She had Heather's fluffy brown hair. They were the spitting images of each other. And they were all grinning at each other. The sight warmed my heart. The little girl started running towards Heather and I smiled as my friend leaned down to her sister.

"Heather!" the little girl called out before launching herself into Heather's arms. They laughed and spun together for a second before backing away. "Oh, we missed you so much!"

I was smiling at the trio and standing back slightly. I liked seeing her family so happy to be back together, but there was a little pang in my chest as I thought about the fact that my family was nowhere in sight. Yellow and red was nowhere to be seen. And it wouldn't be for the rest of the day. I turned back to Heather's family and noticed that her sister was just a few years younger than her. Her father came up and hugged Heather tightly. Even from here I could hear Heather give a little sniffle.

"Hey, sweetheart. Good to see you again," he told her.

They didn't look much alike. I assumed that she had gotten her looks from her mother. Both of the kids must have been carbon copies of their mother. As Heather grabbed her sister once more, her father turned back to me and smiled. I returned the gesture and blushed a little, taking another step back. This was time for family. I was only here for moral support until she found her family. And she'd found them. Maybe I would just leave them here to have their moment.

"God, I missed you both so much," Heather told her family. She laughed and hugged everyone once more. "You guys, I can't wait to tell you all about Dauntless. It's so great here! I miss home but this is the place for me," she said and I smiled.

I was glad that she didn't think that she had made a mistake. Her father smiled and nodded at her. "We want to hear all about it. But we're most excited that you're happy," he told her, pressing a kiss into her hair.

She looked on the verge of tears. "But, anyways, I want you both to meet someone. Dad, Leah, this is Alex," Heather said. She released her sister and came over to grab my arm and drag me towards her family. "She's my best friend here in Dauntless."

"It's so nice to meet you both. Heather's a great girl and she helped me adjust here," I greeted her family.

Moving forward, I shook her father's hand and gave her sister a little hug. She was a small girl but she was as tall as me already. Despite the fact that she was probably a few years younger than me. Her father had eyes like mine and I almost smiled. They weren't as bright as mine but they were close.

"So you're a transfer as well?" her father asked me.

He towered over me but it was nothing like how intimidating the Dauntless men could be. They all had their friendly moments but I knew that they could kill me in an instant. Heather's father was
nothing more than a man that loved his daughter. "Yes. From Amity," I added, not quite sure why I said that.

"From Amity?" Leah asked.

I turned to her and gave a small nod. "Yeah," I confirmed.

Heather's sister brightened and she smiled at me. "Cool!" she yelled and I smiled.

Her sister was just about as friendly as she was. It was almost impossible to tell if she would follow in Heather's footsteps or stay in Candor. "Ah yes, I remember watching you at the Choosing Ceremony. You were the talk of the town for quite a while," their father told me.

I smiled and nodded, fighting back a blush. I had never thought that anyone outside of Amity would be surprised by my choice. But of course, it was the least common transfer choice. It had shocked everyone. "I didn't realize that my transferring would be such a big deal," I said, shifting awkwardly.

"It was quite a big deal. It's been a long time since an Amity transferred into Dauntless," Heather's father told me.

"Yes. It has. No one's ever made it into Dauntless, from Amity," I said.

"Really?" Leah asked, sounding shocked.

I nodded at her. "I intend to be the first," I said proudly.

The entire family smiled at me, Heather patting me on the shoulder. "How are you finding Dauntless?" her father asked me.

He had a soft voice. Authoritative but kind. It suited a Candor well. "I enjoy it here a lot," I answered with a grin. Heather was watching us with a small smile. "It's different than Amity but I don't regret my decision. This is the place for me."

Heather pulled me into her and I laughed. We both missed our home Factions in some ways, as did any other transfer, but neither one of us would ever want to go back. None of us would. Despite how awful living in Dauntless was sometimes, this was the place for us. The hardships were part of what made Dauntless exciting.

"That's how you know that you made the right choice," Heather's father told me with a smile. I smiled back at him. He was a good man. "And it's good to see that Heather has made at least one good friend here."


Both he and her sister smiled. They clearly wanted their girl to be happy. "Brave thing that you did. Both of you. Pardon me for saying so Alex, but I'm proud of you," her father said. I was floored. What did that mean? "It takes a lot to transfer to a place that hadn't had an Amity transfer in over twenty years."

Once more I smiled. My parents might not be coming today, but at least I had someone, even for a moment, that acted like a father. "Thank you so much. I'm glad for your daughter. She's made my transition here a lot easier," I said honestly.

I probably would have collapsed by now had it not been for Heather. She turned to me and gave me a brief hug, both of us giggling softly. "We drive each other nuts, but it's good to have each other,"
Heather said.

We both smiled and I gently disentangled myself from her. "Alright. It was a pleasure to meet the both of you but I should go. I want to let you all have your time together," I said and Heather nodded gratefully.

I knew that she wouldn't have asked me to leave but I also knew that she wanted to have time alone with them. "Are you sure?" she asked me.

"Of course. It's your day. One day a year isn't much. But at least it's something," I said softly.

Everyone standing around me nodded. There was a slightly upset look on Leah's face. She must have missed her sister. "Is your family still in Amity?" Leah asked me.

I nodded weakly, wondering for a moment if maybe they were actually on their way to Dauntless. "Leah!" both Heather and her father snapped at the younger girl.

I knew that she meant well. "It's really okay," I told Heather and her father.

"Sorry. But I hope that you get to see them," Leah told me.

Once more I smiled at her softly. She would be a good Abnegation. "Thank you," I told the younger girl.

"And it was good to meet you too," she added.

Leah walked up to me and I gave her a quick hug. She backed away and Heather wrapped an arm around her younger sister. I smiled and stuck my hand out as her father approached. We shook hands quickly and I noticed that my grip was harder than his. Probably from being in Dauntless for a few months. I sometimes forgot that others didn't go through the same rigorous training that we did.

"It was wonderful to meet you, Alex. Take care of Heather for us and we'll make sure that she takes care of you," her father said.

"Of course," I confirmed.

"And I do hope that you get to see your family today," he added on softly, probably not wanting to offend me.

Smiling at him, I backed away and went to stand a little closer to Heather. "Thank you both," I responded, giving quick smiles to Leah and her father before turning to Heather. "Heather I'll see you at dinner, alright?"

"I'll be there," she said brightly.

Heather moved in to give me one last hug. For a moment I thought that she might ask me to stay, as she looked extremely guilty, but she nodded anyways. I started away from the family, but just before I got out of earshot I overheard Leah ask Heather if she had a boyfriend. I smirked but managed to resist shouting back to go find a boy named Cole. I hoped that Heather would bring her family to meet him, if nothing else, just to get him out of the dorms for a few minutes. As I walked, I debated on heading over to Damien's apartments. I had nothing to do and I wasn't sure that I wanted to be alone today.

Deciding that I might as well try to see if Damien was in his apartment and not being visited by anyone I took a sharp turn, narrowly avoiding an Erudite couple, both of whose eyes widened when
they saw my face. I scoffed and brushed it off. It was normal to the Dauntless members, but other Factions were startled by the bruises. Even Heather's family had seemed a little cautious. As I walked towards the entrance to the Dauntless member apartments I heard my name being called out.

"Alex!"

I turned back to see Buck coming towards me with a large family flanking him. I smiled at the sight of them. They all looked happy, dressed in their Candor finery. I was glad to see them here. Yesterday Buck had confessed to me that he wasn't sure whether or not his family would be coming. The group were all laughing and smiling at each other, but their faces were now trained on me. Buck had his parents with him along with what I assumed were three siblings.

"Wow this is quite the little group you have there," I said, smiling at the group that laughed at my words. "Hi. I'm Alex."

They were all greeting me and I grinned brightly. Even though my family wasn't here I was glad that at least Buck and Heather had theirs. "Yeah, like she said, this is Alex. She's a transfer from Amity and she's a good friend of mine. You guys would like her," he said and I blushed softly.

Buck's family all nodded and for a moment I saw a softer side of Buck, one that I didn't see too often. "Aren't you sweet?" I teased, nudging Buck gently.

He laughed and nudged me back. "I was hoping that I could find everyone to introduce them. Oh and if you were curious a few others are walking around with their families too," he told me. So other families had come too. "Dante, Draven, and Jax all have their families in the Pit. I just saw Jet with his family over the Chasm."

I smiled brightly and nodded. That was almost all of my friends that had their families come and visit them. With the exception of Cole and myself, and Raven and Skylar, everyone's families had come. "I'm glad that they have them," I said.

"Me too," Buck added.

I wasn't sure about Colt, Hunter, and Jade, but I didn't really care. "Maybe I'll go see them later," I said softly.

But I wasn't sure if I actually would. As happy as I was for everyone to get to have a reminder of their old homes, I was a little depressed looking at all of the families that supported their children no matter what. The air had grown awkward around us and I tried to force a smile on my face.

"But come on Buck! Stop stalling. Tell me who all these lovely people are," I said.

Buck's family all smiled, grateful that I had changed the subject. "Oh, I was hoping to avoid having to talk about them," he said flippantly. I laughed, along with Buck's family. "This is my mother and father. The best parents in the world." I smiled at him. That was sweet. Buck very closely resembled his father. He did have his mother's eyes though. "And this is my older brother, Harry." He motioned to a boy that looked to be a few years older than us. He was a near clone of Buck. "This is my younger brother and sister, Jared and Jessica." They looked more like his mother.

We stood and chatted for a while. It didn't take me more than a few minutes to realize that they were a very close knit family. They constantly teased and prodded each other. Not one person in the family seemed to be picked on more than the others. They all looked happy to be back together and not once did they make a comment on how barbaric Dauntless was. Although Jessica did question whether a girl with a shaved head was actually a girl. Everyone had laughed at that.
Time after time everyone had taken turns telling me about embarrassing stories with Buck. He seemed mortified as their stories went from cute and innocent to tales about his first failed date, which had ended with Buck having his dinner dumped in his lap. That killed me. We all talked for about twenty minutes before I decided to leave them to their own conversations.

As grateful as I was to see Buck and his family, I was still upset that I had yet to see my family. But I brushed it off. There was no need to dwell on something that I had known for months wasn't going to happen. I made my way into the dining room to grab myself an apple for breakfast, but on my way I had run into Dante and his family. They were dressed in more black than white and I couldn't help but to wonder if they had done it to blend into the crowd more.

They were softer spoken but very sweet. I could see why Dante had wanted to leave. He wasn't much like them. He was louder and a joker. Being around his family had calmed his personality. I made sure to do the same as I spoke with them. His parents were older but it didn't matter. I could see that Dante loved them and wanted to protect them. Perhaps that was the reason that he had come to Dauntless. We spoke for about a half an hour before I departed.

On my way out of the dining room I had literally run right into one of Draven's siblings. I had accidentally knocked them to the ground, feeling terrible, but Draven and his family insisted that it had been funny. They were a curiously mixed bunch. He had one older brother with him, who was in Abnegation gray. He looked extremely uncomfortable here. He had two younger siblings along with his parents that were all sporting Erudite clothing. They were a little haughty for my liking. I immediately knew why Draven had left.

They were all too stuck up for someone like him. Although his younger siblings all seemed a little too hyperactive for Erudite. Perhaps they would all be transfers. I chatted with them for a while and quickly realized that they were extremely sweet. But they were normal Erudite's. They weren't overly affectionate. They also didn't seem to like the fact that Draven had transferred to Dauntless. But they were supportive all the same.

Once I had been able to tell that Draven's family wanted alone time with him I had bowed out of the conversation and headed on my way. I was still slowly heading towards Damien's apartment but it seemed like every time that I got close someone else called me over. Not that I minded. It was nice for my friends to be able to keep me busy for the day.

Not long after departing from Draven's family I had run into Jax's. I hadn't stayed with them long. They were a little overwhelming. He had a huge family with him but they didn't seem overly affectionate. I wondered if it was just because they were out in public. He had four siblings, his parents, a sister-in-law, niece, and two sets of grandparents. They were nice enough but had laughed when Jax told them that I was one of the best initiates. He had seemed incredibly guilty at their reactions but I shrugged it off. I would have laughed too. But it meant that I had wanted to leave quickly.

They hadn't been the friendliest family, but they seemed to love each other, and that was all that mattered. I would have rather had them here and make a few jeering comments at me than have them not come at all. On my way away from Jax's family I had gone across the Chasm. I'd decided that heading to Damien's apartment might not be such a good idea. With all of the members milling around, I didn't want to risk anyone seeing us.

There were a ton of families in the Chasm and everyone looked extremely nervous. Even a few Dauntless members looked nervous as their families approached the edges. As I walked, I noticed that Jet was with his family and Raven was with them. I smiled softly and came up, saying a quick hello. I didn't want to stay long and interrupt their meeting. Jet only had his parents but they were
both extremely sweet. They reminded me of Jet. Quiet but strong. I could see why he had fallen for Raven. She was like them. They seemed fond of Raven and I. Jet must have had a good life growing up.

His parents had asked me to stay with them longer but I had politely declined. Departing from them, I walked through the Chasm and into the Pit. Just as it had been that morning, it was overflowing with people. More were fanning out now, being shown the rest of the compound and apartments, for the older members. I pushed through, trying to make my way to the apartments. As I walked, I saw Jade and Colt with their families. I couldn't help but to scowl. I hated them. They had nearly gotten Hunter to kill me. They were smiling with their families and laughing, but it wasn't sweet. Maybe they'd fall off the Chasm for what they did to me. I hoped that Hunter's family wasn't here. They all deserved the worst. I damn well hoped that Eric kicked Hunter out.

Trying to get the three initiates out of my mind, I thought back to the people whose families I hadn't seen. Skylar, Cole, and Raven were the only ones I hadn't seen. I wasn't sure about Hunter. But I was inclined to think that they weren't here. We were already well into the afternoon. If my family was coming, they would have been here by now. I should have expected it. I had expected it. It just hurt to finally become a reality. Somewhere in the back of my mind I had been holding out hope that they would come.

As I walked to the walkway that would take me to the Dauntless member apartments I overheard a woman calling out over and over again. "A! A!" the woman called. It was loud enough in here. Why were people yelling and making it even worse? I was extremely grouchy today. "A!"

They yells just kept coming from her. It was ridiculous how loud the woman could be. She sounded to be about my age and I realized that she was probably looking for a sibling. Her voice continued to echo through the Pit. I was about to turn around and yell at the woman to be quiet, but I forced myself to keep walking. Even if Damien wasn't home maybe I could go bother Cameron or Zeke. Or Eric... Maybe.

"Amarantha, damn it!" the same woman yelled.

That time I froze. The woman that was yelling was yelling for me. And it wasn't really a woman. It was a girl my age. I knew that voice. How could I have not recognized it? But how could she be here? I turned back as slowly as possible and saw two figures that I had thought that I would never see again. Iris, my best friend, was standing just a few feet away from me. She was in full Candor clothing. Right next to her, to my surprise, was Florian. Also in Candor clothing. They were both grinning madly at me.

Were they really here or was I finally going insane? "Iris?" I asked weakly. It came out as more as a whisper.

She still heard me, nodding her head up and down quickly. "It's me," she said, her voice shaking.

I moved my eyes over to the boy with her. "Florian?" I asked in the same whisper.

He nodded at me with a huge grin on his face, reflecting Iris's smile. "We're here," he said.

I was completely thrown. What the hell were they doing in Dauntless? They couldn't come here. Cross-Faction travel was forbidden to anyone other than members. And they couldn't have been members yet. Could they? If they weren't, they were breaking Faction laws. I didn't see any members flanking them. They were about ten feet away from me when it finally clicked with me. They were actually here.
"Iris! Florian!" I yelled.

That was all that it took. I ran to Iris first, tackling her. I was glad that she had rooted herself to the ground because I would have knocked her over had she not. We went spinning together for a moment and laughed loudly. I fought back the tears that were in my eyes. They were here. Someone had come to see me. I finally released Iris and ran for Florian. He grabbed me tightly in a hug and lifted me from the ground. I hissed in pain but didn't bother telling him to let go. I was just thrilled that they were here. Florian slowly let me back to the ground and I grabbed both of their hands.

"My God. What are you both doing here?" I asked them.

They both smiled and Iris was the first one to speak up. "Coming to see you, stupid!" she yelled.

That much I had been able to put together. "Well, yes, I did manage to figure that one out," I chuckled.

"Florian's parents came earlier and we hung out with them for a little while until they had to go," she said.

Mr. Rose had been telling the truth. He had gone to see his son. "Good. I saw him the other week. We went on a quick mission to Amity and I saw him. He mentioned that he would come to see you," I told them.

"You saw my dad?" Florian asked.

"Yeah. We talked for a while," I said, smiling at him.

"Anyways, the train was still coming to Dauntless so we made the choice to come and see you! Even if it was just for a few minutes," Iris told me.

They would never know how much that meant to me. "God, I'm so glad to see you both. You have no idea. I've missed you both so much!" I said louder then I meant to. People all over the Pit were now staring at us. "I mean I've made friends here but I miss you guys. I've known you for all of our lives. Feels weird not to see you guys any more."

Florian and Iris both nodded sadly at me. We were all happy, but we missed each other. Iris seemed to not know what to say to that so Florian stepped in. "Yeah, it is weird. Trust me, we miss you every day," he said.

It almost made me feel bad. I thought about them all the time, but not every day. The only thing I really thought about every day was Eric. He captured my mind more than I wanted to admit. "I miss you guys every day too," I said.

"I mean, we had each other when we left but you were alone. We wished that you could have come with us but you're happier here. That's all that matters," Florian said.

Not long ago Florian had been trying to convince me to go wherever he was going to go. I was glad that he had grown out of that. Even after only seeing them for a few minutes I could tell that we had all grown up in the short four months and a half months since we had last seen each other.

"Yeah, I am happier here. This place is so great compared to Amity." They both smiled at me and nodded. "I'm sure that Candor is too?" I asked.

I wanted to make sure that they both had made the right choice. "Absolutely," Iris chirped.
"So much better," Florian added.

That was what I wanted to see. "We'll talk about that later. But how are you both here? I thought that you couldn't leave for Visiting Day unless you were a member," I said softly to them.

If they were here illegally I didn't want to get them in trouble. Iris looked a little confused. Maybe Candor initiation was over. "Yeah, that's right. We are members," she said.

At least they were already on track for the rest of their lives. "Well that's great for you guys!" I cheered.

"Candor initiation is only four months. Are you still an initiate?" Iris asked me.

I nodded at her and her face dropped into one of complete disbelief. "Yeah. For a few more months," I answered.

Her face almost made me laugh. Even Florian looked shocked. "What the hell? How long does Dauntless initiation last?" she asked me.

"Eight months," I answered quickly.

If they hadn't looked surprised before they did now."What?" Florian asked, sounding floored.

"Five months for physical training, two months for mental training, and one month for emotional training," I told them.

They both exchanged a look with each other before turning back and nodding. I noticed that they were both looking over the bruises on me. Iris looked panicked the moment she saw the ones around my neck. Those were the hardest ones to hide. I was grateful that they hadn't said anything. I knew that I looked shitty.

"We don't really ever get days off. But that's Dauntless life for you. Hard and fast. But I wouldn't give it up for anything. I love it here," I said.

They both smiled. "That's great," Iris said.

They knew that this place was crazy and tough but they were both grateful that I was happy here. I felt the same way. "There's a few pain in the ass people here but there were people like that back in Amity too," I told them. My mind jumped to Eric but I pushed him from my thoughts.

Florian and Iris both laughed and I smiled at them. "Of course. It wouldn't be a Faction without people to ruin it," Florian said.

If only he knew about Jeanine Matthews. "How true that is," I said, laughing at them.

"But better than being Factionless right?" Florian asked.

Both Iris and I nodded. "One of my leaders keeps joking about me being Factionless. But I'll be damned if I ever wind up Factionless," I hissed.

"Absolutely not!" Iris barked.

We were all smiling at each other and standing close. We had clearly missed each other. "So don't hold out!" Florian yelled, making me jump. "Candor compound is boring. It's just a huge glass building. It's a great Faction but the compound is totally normal. Even Amity was better. But the Dauntless compound looks amazing! Show us around."
It was almost an order. "Alright, alright," I snapped with a little bit of a laugh.

These were the friends that I had grown up with. They were the ones that I had always hoped would go somewhere other than Amity. I'd always known that none of them were happy. They were the same ones that I had grown up with, but they were happier and more confident. I was sure that they saw the same things in me. We began to walk through the Pit, each of us shoving our way past the crowd.

"Well, anyways, I'm glad that you guys made it through initiation," I told them. They both smiled at me. A sudden thought hit me and I turned to them. "Hey I have a quick question." It drew their attention back to me. They nodded for me to continue. "Was initiation at Candor ranked? Like the lowest ranking initiates had to leave the Faction and become Factionless?"

Both Iris and Florian looked floored at the thought. Before they spoke up, I already knew the answer. "What? No. Unless you did something that showed that you had absolutely no potential in Candor, you stayed. Initiation was all about learning to be Candor," Iris told me.

Some part of me wished that Dauntless initiation was like that. I didn't want to see Skylar and Raven leave. But I understood why it wasn't. We had to have the strongest. No weak links. "That's interesting," I muttered.

"There were like forty or fifty initiates. I think only one person left," Iris continued.

My eyes widened. "That's a big initiation class," I said.

"How many does Dauntless have?" Florian asked.

"Dauntless only has twenty eight."

"Wow. That's tiny," Iris said.

"I know."

"Does Dauntless do that? Get rid of people?" Iris asked.

Perhaps it would have been smarter to lie to make them feel better, but they were Candor now. They would see through my lie. "Yes," I answered simply.

Both of my friends looked horrified at the thought. "It does?" Florian asked.

"Dauntless only takes the strongest. It makes sense." Iris scoffed and I shrugged at her. "Trust me, it does. At the end of stage one, in just under two weeks, seven people will be leaving. Dauntless born and transfers, we're all ranked together. But during physical training we're trained separately. At the end of the next stage two more people will be leaving. That will leave nineteen members at the end," I explained to her.

I supposed that for someone who hadn't heard of the system, it didn't sound fair. But for Dauntless, it was a part of life. We were used to the constant threat. It made us fight harder for our spots. "That's harsh," Florian said. I nodded at him. "Are you safe?"

I heard the worry in his voice. It was written clearly on his face; Iris's too. They were Candor, they didn't hide things. "I'm fine," I answered quickly.

I heard the air go out of both of their lungs and I smiled. At least they still cared. I walked them through the doors of the training room and noticed that a lot of people were here. Kids were showing
families what they had learned and initiates like Jax, Jet, and Draven were showing off their rankings.

"This is the training room. Over there is the board of rankings," I said, leading my friends over to the board. "Aaron and Jackson are in the top two spots. They're both Dauntless born boys. I like them a lot. You would too." My heart dropped when I saw that I was no longer in the third spot. Not that I was really expecting it. "Draven is a transfer. He's cool. Michael is another Dauntless born. I like him too. We don't talk much though. Hey I'm in the fifth spot!" I couldn't believe that I hadn't dropped more. "Cool, my loss only dropped me two spots. Hunter's name isn't highlighted. Maybe they are getting rid of him."

The last part had been muttered more to myself than my friends. They really didn't have any idea what I was talking about. Hunter's name was currently in the sixth spot but it wasn't lit up like the rest of ours. His was darkened. I wondered if that meant that he was going to be kicked out of Dauntless. I hoped so.

"Loss?" Iris asked. I turned towards her but didn't get a chance to answer. "And what do you mean? I don't see your name anywhere up there." I looked at her with a cocked eyebrow. My name was right there. "And who's Hunter?"

That was when I remembered that she didn't know anything about my new life here. Sometimes I forgot that they weren't here with me. They probably had no idea what Dauntless initiation consisted of. "Oh! We fight each other. Learn to defend ourselves and others. Each time we win or lose a fight it drops or raises our rankings. Yesterday was our last fight. It was the first one that I lost," I said sadly. But Iris and Florian looked impressed. "Hunter was the boy that I lost too. And I changed my name. Alex. Number five. That's me."

Florian smiled at me and walked forward, slinging his arm over my shoulder. He grabbed my bicep and I saw his eyes widen when he grabbed the muscle there. I had no doubt that I was stronger than both Iris and Florian now. He started poking all over me and I chuckled softly. He was clearly stunned when he felt all of the muscles on my body. They were prominent enough to realize that I spent a good amount of time training.

"Do you have any fat on you anymore?" Florian asked, laughing.

"Not much," I chuckled.

"Alex. It sounds much more Dauntless," Florian said and I nodded. I was glad that I had changed my name. Besides, Amarantha took too long to say. "And that's why you look like an Amity truck ran you over." We all laughed at that one. I had thought the same thing this morning. "But it doesn't explain the hoarseness in your voice."

Leave it to Florian to still be protective over someone that could probably kill him now. "It does actually," I said.

"Explain," he prompted.

"This dick that I was fighting against, his friends hate me. They convinced him to nearly kill me," I said. Iris's hands flew to her mouth and Florian's jaw set.

"What?" she howled.

"He collapsed my windpipe. Cracked a rib and bruised a few others," I said nonchalantly.

I knew that it was a big deal but it was over with now. Iris and Florian looked horrified. "Come
again?" Florian asked.

"It's no big deal. Eric, one of the leaders here in Dauntless, nearly killed him for me. We aren't supposed to seriously hurt each other. Only make them incapable of fighting," I said. They nodded at me. It probably made them feel a little better. "Eric broke Hunter's, the boy who beat me, nose, jaw, and cheekbone. A rib or two also."

Despite the fact that Eric was an asshole, I genuinely believed that deep down he really did care about the initiates. Or maybe he just cared at me. Either way, I knew that he wasn't going to let someone kill us. I just believed that he cared about me a little more than the others. Or, at least, I wanted to believe that.

"Remind me to thank this Eric," Iris told me and I laughed.

If only she knew that half of it. I wished that I could travel to Candor for a day, just to tell her everything about Eric. "I'm not so sure that I would say that," I joked.

She merely stared confusedly at me. I waved her off. "Seriously. That's crazy. You could have died," she said, sounding upset.

Of course, I didn't blame her. I would have had a panic attack had she told me that someone tried to kill her during her initiation. But that was Candor, no one anticipated it to be dangerous. Maybe a little embarrassing, with all of the truth-telling, but not dangerous. Here in Dauntless, danger was an everyday thing.

"People have died during Dauntless initiation before," I said. Both Iris and Florian chuckled softly, probably thinking that I was kidding. "I'm serious." Their faces fell. But I didn't want to dwell on the negative things here. "Anyways, let's keep going. How long do you have to spend here?"

We walked back out of the dining room and I chose to bring them to the dorms. "Only about an hour," Iris told me.

It wasn't long but it was something. "That's it?" I asked her.

"Sorry, Alex. We'd stay longer if we could, but Candor has rules. No one can be out past three that isn't a member for over a year," she said.

"That makes sense. I just wish that you could stay longer," I said softly.

"We do too," Florian said.

"We'll come back next year. Candor can't really go back and forth. Dauntless seems to get a lot more free reign," Iris said.

"Well we can handle ourselves if we get into trouble," I said, making them both laugh.

Trying to get her to lighten up about not wanting to stay long, I shoved her gently and wrapped my arm around her shoulder. She seemed smaller than the last time that I had seen her. "I'm glad to see you guys regardless," I told her.

"We're happy to see you again, too," Iris chirped.

Her hand brushed my stomach and I smiled as her jaw dropped. The small amount of fat I had ever had had melted off since being here in Dauntless. They could both tell that I had been through some serious training in the past few months. It was astounding how far I had come.
"I mean, I wish my parents had shown up but I can't say that I was really expecting it." Iris opened her mouth to say something but I cut across her. She had nothing to be sorry for. "Don't worry about it. I have a family here and I'll always love my parents. But I understand that they aren't happy with me. That's alright. Come on, let's go," I said, dragging them down the poorly lit halls.

We walked past members and visitors that were milling around Dauntless. I noticed that Iris and Florian both looked fascinated at all of the people. We passed back through the Pit, where shirtless members were fighting in the raised rings. I noticed Iris's eyes wandering a little bit over there. It made me laugh. And more than once I passed a member that I vaguely knew, saying a quick greeting before moving on.

"Man, Dauntless is so cool. But I feel like such a weakling when I look at all of you," Iris told me. I laughed and nodded at her. "Well, no offense, but you guys are kind of weaklings," I said.

Both she and Florian laughed, each of them shoving me. "Also, cool tattoos," she said. I glanced over at her curiously. I hadn't thought that she'd noticed them. "Yeah, I noticed them."

At the same moment, a group of shirtless, Dauntless men came running by and I smirked as Iris's eyes bulged. A few of them were men that were just a few years older than me, ones that I knew, and I waved at them. Iris looked very regrettable as she watched them run off. Cameron was involved in that group and we quickly yelled hello's to each other.

She turned back to me with her jaw hanging open. "Alright, maybe I'm regretting my choice now. Alex, can I come hide in your place?" Iris asked. I laughed loudly as Florian shoved her.

Shaking my head at her, I walked them down the hall that lead to the dorms. "I don't think you'd actually want to," I told her honestly. Her eyebrows raised as I pushed through the doors to the dorms. "These are the dorms that we live in."

They looked at me as I ushered them into the dark and cold room. They both looked extremely underwhelmed. Florian looked a little confused, but at least he was trying to keep a smile on his face. Iris, on the other hand, let the smile drop off of her face. I understood, this place was ugly. The apartments for members were much nicer.

"The girls?" Florian asked.

I shrugged my shoulders at him. "Both. Girls and boys live together," I said and Florian's jaw dropped. Iris laughed. "There are apartments, which are much nicer, but those are only for members. During initiation we live in the dorms. Dauntless is a little more relaxed about that stuff than you'd think."

"Sounds like Amity," Florian muttered.

"It kind of is. Oh, and Iris, one thing," I said, forcing Iris to tear her horrified gaze away from the bathroom. "Dauntless members aren't allowed to have relationships with initiates. Against the rules."


My mind jumped to Eric but I shook my head. Today was a day to be with my friends, not think about him. "Oh, over there is Skylar. She's from Abnegation." The girl was pouring over a book but glanced up quick enough to wave at us. I responded to the gesture before spotting Cole coming from the bathroom. "This is Cole," I introduced.
He was coming out of the shower as he pulled a black shirt over his head. He looked over at me and his smile widened when he saw the two people behind me. I assumed that he was glad that I wasn't alone today. "Hey, Alex! Not parents I'm assuming?" he asked as he walked over to us.

Cole looked much happier than he had this morning. "Gee, Cole, I wonder what gave that away. The fact that they weren't wearing Amity clothes or the fact that they're our age?" I rhetorically asked him.

Cole grinned madly and I heard Iris and Florian laughing behind me. It was strange. Not long ago Florian would have chewed me out for a comment like that. "The fact that they aren't raging bitches. It has to run in the family," Cole said.

Smirking at him, I kneeled down and spun on one foot, sweeping out his legs with one of my own. Cole hit the concrete on his back and grunted at the impact as Florian and Iris gasped, both fighting back giggles. I got back to my feet and offered Cole my hand to get back to his feet. He shoved me as we both stood back upright.

"Training with Eric has its benefits from time to time," I joked, making Cole laugh. "This is Iris and Florian, my best friends from Amity. They're Candor members now. That's why they could come here."

Cole smiled and moved forward to greet my friends. "Nice to meet you both," Cole said as he moved forward to shake both Iris and Florian's hands.

"Likewise," Florian said.

"You too," Iris said.

"Strange to see your girl like this?" Cole asked.

I liked the way that he said that I was their girl. "Not at all. We always knew that she was as tough as nails," Iris said.

They always had faith in me, even though they hadn't always shown it the best way. I pulled Iris in for a hug. "Good. She's a natural Dauntless. Anyways, glad you have someone here Alex," Cole said.

And it seemed that Cole believed in me, too. But my joy quickly turned on me when I remembered that Cole didn't have anyone coming to see him today. That had it be awful, and I didn't want to leave him out. After all, all of my friends had let me sit with their families this morning. "Hey Cole, you want to come with us?" I asked, hoping that he would accept. I didn't want him to be alone. "I'm gonna show them the Chasm and Pit before they go back."

He smiled at me but shook his head. "Thanks for the invite Alex but I'm actually waiting for Heather to come by with her family. I wanted them to have alone time but Heather really wants me to meet them," he told me.

It was nice that Heather wanted to include him with her family. They loved each other. Well, maybe not love, but they were getting there. "That's sweet, Cole. I met them earlier. You'll love them," I said.

"I'm nervous."

"Don't be. They'll love you."
"Thanks. I'll see you tonight," he said.

All visitors had to be gone by five. In all Factions, not just Dauntless. Visiting Day was nice, but it only lasted nine hours. "Alright. Well you know where to find us if you change your mind," I told him.

"I'll think about it," he said.

He nodded at me and turned back towards the bathroom. I could tell that he was wearing a little bit of aftershave. That was cute. He was trying to impress Heather's family. "Come on guys," I said.

Grabbing onto Iris and Florian's hands, I dragged them out of the room. We made the short walk to the Chasm and I covered my arms. It was freezing in the Chasm. It seemed that they felt the same, as Iris and Florian huddled into each other. Florian looked fascinated while Iris looked a little sick.

"This is the Chasm. Very dangerous. They teach us that there is a fine line between bravery and idiocy. Try to show off and jump will certainly end your life. Initiates die every year from getting a little too friendly with this," I explained to them.

A brief flash from Eric and I's confrontation here jumped into my mind and I pushed it back. We never spoke of it, and I was glad. I didn't want to think about it. Florian walked a little closer to the ledge and I watched him carefully. These railings could get a little weak. I knew that firsthand.

"God, this is terrifying. Why would anyone ever want to come through here?" Iris asked over the roar of the water.

I didn't bother answering her. I always thought that the Chasm was pretty. But I supposed that was why I was Dauntless and Iris was not. I saw the beauty in danger. She didn't. Breaking me from my thoughts, Florian called out. "Hey, what happened over there?" Florian asked. He was pointing to the far side of the Chasm near the training room and I followed his line of sight. "The railing is broken."

That was when I noticed it. The railing was broken indeed, red tape crossing over the section without any support. I blanched and fought to keep looking that direction. That was the same spot where Eric had nearly killed me, something that I wouldn't soon be forgetting. But I had thought that they had fixed it by now. I hadn't hung around near the Chasm in a long time. I usually just walked through it to cut the journey from the dorms to the Pit short.

"Yeah. There was an issue with a trainer and initiate. It ended badly. No one died," I answered vaguely, not wanting to tell them the whole story.

They clearly got the sense that I didn't want to talk about it as they let me lead them away from the Chasm. We walked in silence as I brought them through the Pit, our moods brightening almost immediately. "Check this place out," Iris hooted.

"This is the Pit. The life of Dauntless. The bar is over there. Dance floor is pretty much anywhere that you can walk. Fighting rings are all along the raised platforms on the walls. Dining room is through there. Dauntless member apartments are through those hallways back there. I'll have one once initiation is over. Shops and everything else are built into the caves in the upper floors," I explained.

Even with Florian and Iris standing right next to me, I had to yell for them to hear me. "This place is so loud. Is it always like this?" Iris asked.

Her voice was clearly straining with her yells. She wasn't used to this. Candor was probably

"Damn," she muttered.

They were both looking around and I gave them a moment to take everything in. The Pit was definitely sensory overload. I had felt the same way when I had first seen it. I saw a few familiar faces and nodded to Florian and Iris.

"Oh, back there are a few members that I know. The Asian woman with tattoos is Tori. She administered my test," I said. She had a man that I didn't know on her arm. "Next to her is Four. He's the trainer for the transfers." He was alone, speaking with friends. "On his other side is Lauren. She trains the Dauntless born." She seemed to have her parents with her. "Max is behind them. He's the Head Leader in Dauntless. There are five. I only know of two actually. The boy about Four's age, that's Zeke. That's his brother next to him. Uriah. I think Zeke said he was fourteen." Zeke was confident that Uriah would stay in Dauntless. They had their parents with them. "And over there is Cameron. He's an Ambassador." Cameron was also alone.

I was a little surprised to see that Eric wasn't with Cameron. They were usually seen always together. I hadn't seen Eric today. Maybe he didn't like Visiting Day. Maybe he stayed inside to avoid it. Although I wasn't sure why he wouldn't. His family was here. Unless, maybe, they had died.

"What about the other leader that you mentioned earlier? Eric or something?" Florian asked me.

Turning back to Florian I nodded. He had always been good with names. Iris and I were close to useless. "Yeah, Eric. I'm sure he's around somewhere. Or maybe he's having his girlfriend keep him company," I told them.

It was obvious enough that the words came out bitter and I had to force myself to not think about Eric with Sarah somewhere. He was a big boy. He could do what he wanted. Iris glanced over at me with a cocked eyebrow but I shook her off. I didn't want to have boy talk with Florian standing right next to me.

"Trust me, it's better that he isn't around. He's only here to make my life harder," I told them.

Without missing a beat, I heard Eric speak from behind me. "That's a sad story, initiate," Eric snarled at me.

I could feel him pressed against my back and I rolled my eyes. Iris and Florian were both staring at him with wide eyes. I turned back and found myself once more pressed up against Eric. I had hoped to show Iris and Florian around without running into Eric. He wasn't looking down at me, instead he was looking over my head to stare at Iris and Florian. His eyes quickly flitted over Iris before settling on Florian with a hard stare. I awkwardly remembered our trip to Amity when Eric had found the picture of Florian and I kissing. Eric wasn't stupid, he knew who this was.

"Just who I was dying to see," I snarled at Eric.

His hand found its way to rest on my shoulder. "Watch your mouth," Eric hissed.

Moving close enough so that Florian and Iris couldn't hear me, I placed my mouth as close to Eric's ear as I could. "You've never wanted me to watch my mouth before," I whispered.

Standing up against him, I could feel his muscles tense. His hand pressed down on my shoulder, pushing me away from him slightly. I could see his eyes darken. "Who are your little friends?" he asked, probably trying to get his mind off of me.
I didn't miss Iris take a step back to almost put herself behind Florian, who also looked extremely uncomfortable at the dark glare that had been settled on him. Despite the fact that I was tough, I was still a short blonde girl. Eric was huge and extremely menacing.

"None of your damn business. That's who, Eric," I snapped.

The second that I had said it, I knew that it was a bad thing to say. "I think you forget who you're talking to," he told me with a little snarl.

He loved to hang the fact that he was a leader in my face and I couldn't talk down to him. "Trust me, I didn't," I muttered.

I noticed out of the corner of my eyes that Iris and Florian were watching the scene with wide eyes. They had never seen me challenge someone that was clearly much stronger than me. But they didn't know the strange relationship that Eric and I had. And this was part of it.

"Come on, tell me," he prodded.

The last thing that I wanted was to tell Eric who they. "Why do you care?" I asked.

"Come on, Amity. I always care."

Out of sight of everyone else, Eric's fingertips gently trailed down my arms to rest at my hips and trail over the hipbone, almost slipping somewhere that they didn't belong. "Get off of me," I hissed, stepping back from him.

"Tell me."

I moved back and motioned to my friends. "This is Iris and Florian. They're friends from Amity. They're Candor members now, so they came to visit me," I told him. He was scrutinizing them and my teeth grit together. He was looking at them like they were still the weak and pathetic Amity dependents. "That's nice," Eric purred.

"Any other questions?" I asked.

Eric shook his head with a little smirk. He knew that he was making me angry. "I don't think so," he said sweetly.

"Good. Leave. I'm enjoying a single day where I don't have to listen to you either -" I ranted before cutting myself off.

The last thing I wanted was for Iris and Florian to know that the guy that looked like he might kill them was the same guy that I desperately wanted to sleep with. Iris and Florian looked confused at my sudden stop but Eric had a bright gleam in his eyes. He knew exactly what it was that I was about to say.

"You were saying?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Relax, I have better things to do than worry about who you spend your time with. Have you thought any more on our conversation last night? You seemed ready for it," he told me with a deep voice.

His eyes were gleaming as I took in a big breath. I knew that he meant this as a challenge to Florian.
He didn't understand that I didn't have feelings for Florian. Not wanting him to make this sound any worse I decided to put an end to the conversation there.

"Leave!" I snapped. Behind me both Iris and Florian jumped at the sudden raise in volume from me. "I'll... discuss it with you later. Goodbye, Eric." I thought that he might stop me but he didn't. "Come on."

I grabbed Iris's hand, who grabbed Florian's behind her and dragged them away from the Pit and Eric. Once I knew that we were out of eye-shot from him I released her hand and walked slowly out to the train tracks. We blinked at the sudden invasion of light and I nearly laughed when I saw that the trains were actually stopping today. It seemed so strange.

"What was that about?" Iris asked.

"Don't ask about him. He's weird," I told them.

Iris nodded at me and sighed when she saw the trains. I didn't want them to leave. "He's hot," Iris said, making me laugh loudly.

That was why she had been my best friend. Florian scowled and I smirked. I had figured that Florian wouldn't like him. "He's a dick," Florian growled.

That made me laugh even louder. Florian rarely cursed. It took a lot to make him say things like that. Iris was on my right and Florian was on my left. I threw an arm around their shoulders and smiled at them. They were both the best friends that I could have asked for. I missed them but I knew that we had all made the right choice. And I was glad that they at least had each other while I had my friends here.

"All three of us are right. Don't worry about Eric. He just makes my life harder than necessary," I shrugged off the earlier conversation.

Iris was staring at me with her classic look that told me that she didn't believe me. "Oh?" she asked.

"Don't you give me that look. I'm not sleeping with him," I told her. She merely scoffed. "I'm not! I promise." She stared at me for a moment, finally nodding.

Florian was still scowling. "Don't sleep with him," he snapped.

"Yes, father. The train leaves in two minutes. So it's your turn. Tell me, has anyone caught your fancy? Either one of you?" I asked.

Even though I hadn't found anyone that really suited me, I hoped that they had. As much as I liked Eric, I wasn't sure that he would ever want something even close to a real relationship. "Well actually. That's half the reason that we came here today. We wanted to tell you that Iris and I are actually together," Florian told me.

I couldn't help it. My jaw dropped. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"We got to Candor and we were alone. We couldn't be at each other's throat the way that we used to be. So we were better to each other in Candor. Happier. It was a few weeks ago that we just decided that we should try to be together. As more than friends. We're still new at it, but we're happy," he admitted.

Iris smiled at Florian wrapped his arm around her. Well they had certainly fooled me. I'd never seen that coming. "Oh, you guys!" I yelled, jumping forward and wrapping my arms around them. "I'm so
happy for you. For you both! You're perfect together. I'm really happy that you both have someone."

"Thanks, A," Iris chirped.

"You're okay with it?" Florian asked.

I knew that he was referencing the time that we had spent together. But we'd never really been together. It was a fling. "Of course! You guys are wonderful together," I said happily.

"Boarding train for Candor!" an older Dauntless member shouted.

We all turned to each other with sighs. "The train is about to leave. Get going. Go back to Candor. Be happy together," I said, hugging them once more. They turned to walk onto the train and I smiled after them. "And I expect to be the Maid of Honor!"

"See you next year!" Iris yelled.

We were all laughed as I smiled at them. They both laughed and I winked at them as they stepped on the train and it departed. The train wasn't moving as fast as it normally did and I was grateful. Families were hanging out of the side of the train, as were Florian and Iris. His hand was wrapped around her waist, keeping her safe and I smiled. I waved them off until I could no longer see them and I sighed.

More than anything, I wished that they could stay here, but I knew that they were better off in Candor. I watched the tail end of the train disappear before sighing and turning back to the compound. I was happy for them. And even though I had been joking, if they ever got married I had damn well better be present. I walked through the halls to the Dauntless compound and noticed that it was still extremely crowded. But it was slowly thinning out. People were leaving but many were still hanging around. Part of me wanted to go yell at Eric for interrupting my brief time with Florian and Iris but I decided against it. Forgetting about it would be a better idea. I was heading back to my dorm hoping to find Heather, when I heard another familiar voice call out.

"Amarantha?" a soft voice called.

My entire body locked up. That wasn't real. I was only imagining it because I wanted to see them. They weren't really here. But I saw it when I was out by the trains. Some families were still trickling into the compound. It was only three. They could have just come late. But they didn't. It was probably Eric just getting some girl to call me that. A bad joke.

But I had to know. So I turned. Slower than I ever had before, I turned back to see my mother and father standing in the middle of the crowd. They were certainly the easiest people to spot as everyone was looking over at them. They were wearing bright yellow and red clothing. Even with the white, blue, and gray now in the compound, the yellow and red were startling. I moved slowly forward until I was standing right in front of them. It was like if I moved too fast they would disappear. They were looking over me with worried eyes. This was the quietest I had ever heard my parents.

"Mom. Dad," I breathed out, barely above a whisper.

They nodded at me as I moved into them, pulling them into bone-crushing hugs. I could feel my cracked ribs straining but I didn't let them go. They were here. I couldn't believe that they were really here. I wasn't sure how long we stood together for and I didn't care. Maybe they didn't hate me after all. They finally pulled away from me and I looked them over. Both looked like they had gained some weight, but other than that they looked the same. Their green eyes were glistening with tears and their blonde hair was combed back, framing their thin faces.
"Amarantha. Oh, dear. It's so good to see you," my father said softly.

He pulled back and held my face in his hands. I winced slightly from the pressure on my bruises and he immediately let me go. "It's good to see you too," I said, my voice breaking.

"What happened to you?" he asked.

Both he and my mother were looking me over carefully. "Oh - uh - Dauntless... Dauntless initiation consists of physical initiation. That means learning to fight and fighting each other," I said and my parent's eyes widened. Not that I was shocked. They were Amity. They didn't agree with fighting. "I lost my fight yesterday. It was the first one I lost though. Don't worry about me, the other guy looks worse." I laughed but my parents didn't. It took me less than a second to sober. The reunion was not how I pictured it. "And my name is Alex now. Amarantha was too Amity." Suddenly I wished that I hadn't said anything. My parents looked heartbroken. I was making this worse. "But it's a good name. Just not for Dauntless. What are you guys doing here?"

Anything to change the subject. I had clearly made them both uncomfortable and I was trying to undo it. "It's Visiting Day. The only day a year that we can freely come to see you. We love you. We wanted to see you," my mother told me.

My eyes watered slightly as I smiled at them. I thought that they hated me for what I had done. And judging by the hurt looks on my parent's faces, they knew that I felt that way too. "I'm glad that you came," I whispered.

"We... What happened at the Choosing Ceremony was startling. We weren't expecting you to change Factions. You should have said something," my mother said.

Part of me wanted to yell at her and say that it was because of the way that they treated me that I hadn't, but I didn't. It was only one day a year that I could see them. I didn't want to spend it fighting. "I couldn't," I said softly.

"You could have," my father said.

"You just seemed so proud that I was going to be in Amity. I thought that it would be better if I just left you in blissful ignorance," I said, hoping that they could see my point. Both of my parents were nodding. "I was wrong. And for that, I'm sorry."

Startling me slightly, my father reached out and grabbed my hands. "Don't be sorry. What you did wasn't right, but you thought it was. That's all that matters," he told me and I grinned slightly.

"So you don't hate me?" I asked.

"Of course not," my mother said.

We might not be together anymore, but we were still a family. Faction before blood was shit. I loved my Faction and I loved my family. They were equal. "Are you happy here?" my father asked me.

"Yes. I love it here," I said honestly.

"Then you've made the right choice," he said.

I covered my mouth to suppress a small sob. This was all that I wanted to hear. I brought my parents in for a hug once more. "Thank you," I said, unable to say anything more.

"So I've never heard anything about the Dauntless compound before. No one at Amity has ever been
there. Why don't you show us around? We can't be here for long. Busy day tomorrow," my father said.

I was a little upset to hear that they couldn't be here for long, but I was glad that they were here nonetheless. "Sure thing. I'd like you guys to see the place that I live now. Initiation is still going on. It lasts eight months," I said.

Their eyes both widened and I smiled. Iris and Florian had given me the same looks. "Still?" my father asked.

I knew that they had all mirrored my face the first time that Four had told us that. "Yes. I know, it's a long time. But it's worth it. I'm actually on track to either be a leader or an Ambassador. I have one of the top ranking spots in Dauntless," I said proudly.

I wasn't quite sure whether or not my parents would be happy to hear that. "That's our girl!" my mother yelled before wrapping her arms around me.

It was one of the loudest and most boisterous I had ever heard her. I laughed softly and blushed. I wished that they could stay here for longer. I wanted to show them everything in Dauntless and everything that I had learned. I wanted to tell them everything that had happened to me and everything that I had learned. I wanted to tell my mother about the situation with Eric. I wanted her advice and, more than anything, I wanted to know what she thought about him. She'd probably run screaming from him. She was smarter than me.

"So where should we go first? We overheard another family talking about a pit. That sounds interesting," my mother told me.

I couldn't help it. I laughed loudly, confusing both of my parents. Trying to not make my parents feel stupid, I nodded and went to turn to head to the Pit. But just before I actually turned back I felt an arm fall over my shoulder. I jumped and saw my parent's eyes widen. Not now. I was hoping that maybe it was one of my friends, or even Four, but judging by the weaving block-like patterns on the arm, I knew that it was him.

"Initiate," Eric growled.

I rolled my eyes and sighed. Why couldn't he say my damn name? "What, Eric?" I asked through gritted teeth.

"These must be your parents?" Eric asked.

As I looked up into his eyes I noticed that they held a little surprise. My jaw was locked tight as I looked at my parents, hoping that Eric wasn't here to mortify me. "Yes. This is my mother and father. Mom, Dad, this is Eric," I said. My parents wiped the shocked looks off of their faces and replaced them with small smiles. There was a slight unease in their eyes. "He's one of the five leaders here in Dauntless. He works with us during training. Mostly to tell us what we're doing wrong."

My mother shockingly smiled at my sense of humor. At least she wasn't yelling at me. "It's a pleasure to meet you both. Your daughter speaks very highly of you," Eric said.

I couldn't help but to smile. That was sweet of him. I watched as he leaned down to kiss my mother's hand and I almost rolled my eyes at the little swoon that my mother did. He leaned back up to his full height to shake my father's hand and the two men stared at each other for a moment. It was the most serious my father had ever looked. But, after a moment, when Eric dropped his hand off of my shoulder and wound itself around my waist, I noticed that he finally smiled. Eric knew how to
"I'm very fond of your daughter," Eric said.

A little too fond. My mother smiled and I had to suppress rolling my eyes. They wouldn't like him if they knew what he had done to me since we had met. "Oh and I'm sure that she's fond of you as well," my mother said.

There was a little glitter in her eyes. "Mother!" I shouted.

That was going to come back to me. My mother had always wanted me to find a good boy. Did she think that Eric was that boy? "You seem close. Pardon me, but are you? We want her to have the best life she can in Dauntless," my mother said softly.

If I hadn't been mortified before, I was now. What the hell was my mother doing? And why wasn't my father stopping her? He was just smiling along, acting like this was not something that made me want to bury my head in the sand. Eric, on the other hand, looked thoroughly pleased.

"No!" I yelled quickly. "He's my leader. We have to be together frequently because of training."

"She's modest," Eric spoke up before I could say anything else.

His voice held a little bit of a laugh to it. He was far too good at this. "I am not!" I hissed.

My parents had lost any hint of nervousness around Eric. "How sweet," my father said.

They were fawning over him now. And he was clearly enjoying it. "As I said, I'm very fond of your daughter, Mrs. Freesia. Relations between Dauntless members and initiates are forbidden, but we all have favorites," he said. His fingers were at the band of my jeans and I knew that I was standing as stiffly as possible. I wanted to die. Or kill Eric. Maybe both. "And we're getting close to the end."

One hand squeezed my hip possessively. Now was not the time for this. "Get off of me," I hissed under my breath.

My mother looked like she had won the grandest prize someone could. "Well, please take care of our girl, Eric. You seem like a good man," she told him.

Eric nodded at my mother, giving her a small smile. "He is not," I muttered.

I had to suppress a scoff. "Alex, we're so glad that you've found a good man in Dauntless," my mother told me.

My jaw dropped. I thought that Eric might say something rude to my parents about how I was pathetic or something but he was only smiling. "He's not my man!" I yelled.

A few people looked over at us and I dropped my voice. No one needed to hear about my strange relationship with Eric. That could get both of us in trouble. Of course, no one wanted to be the one to rat Eric out. "Don't be shy," Eric goaded.

"I'm not! He's - He's my leader," I explained, having a hard time to explain what Eric was to me.

Both of my parent's faces fell and I noticed that Eric had stiffened slightly. "Really?" Eric asked.

"Yes," I muttered.

"I don't recall you feeling that way yesterday when I defended your honor," he said, accentuating the
Eric was smiling down at me but I knew that it was a challenge to me. I wanted to explode. Especially since my parents weren't seeing through his lies. "You did not," I mumbled.

"Come on now, don't be shy. Tell your parents all about us," he said, motioning to my parents.

"There is no us!" I yelled at him.

The smile stayed planted on his face. He knew that my parents only thought that I was being modest. Just like he had said earlier. No one was listening to me. "Yes there is," Eric insisted.

Even my parents were enamored with him. They were completely ignoring my pleas, probably because they liked Eric's story better. "There is not!" I snapped.

My father spoke up for the first time in a while and it wasn't something that I wanted him to say. "You defended her honor?" he asked.

"Yes."

"No!"

I tried to jab Eric in the ribs but he merely laughed, pressing into my cracked one gently. "Please, tell us more about this!" my father yelled with a little laugh.

Erin nodded and I rolled my eyes once more. Why couldn't Eric ever do his damned job instead of bothering me? "Oh, of course. Yesterday your daughter participated in her last fight. That's why she looks the way that she does. She usually looks much lovelier," he told my parents.

I couldn't help but to roll my eyes as my mother swooned and leaned into my father. "Thanks," I muttered irritably.

Eric's fingers dipped into the waistband of my jeans and I tensed as they brushed too low. I tried to move away from him but his hold was tight on my hips. "She lost. The boy that she fought against broke the rules. We don't fight to kill, only immobilize. He forgot that. So I stepped in and showed him exactly what happens when someone forgets that. No one will get away with hurting your daughter," Eric said fiercely.

It was the most intense that I had ever heard him to someone other than me. But I knew why. Because he left something out. Except you. It was hidden in his words. No one could hurt me but him. He had claimed me. But before he claimed me, he had to do one thing. Well, two. Say my name. And I wanted a damned apology for the Chasm.

"Oh, Alex, if you two ever get the chance to come by Amity, please bring him to the house for dinner," my mother requested.

"No."

"We would love to repay you for protecting her," my mother said to Eric.

Suddenly my blood was boiling. Being here in Dauntless meant that I knew how to protect myself. "I don't need protection!" I snapped, not really meaning to.

Of course, Eric didn't bother to recognize that I had said anything. "It would be my pleasure," Eric said softly as his hand came to sit at a respectable height on my hip.
My mother smiled once more and I noticed that even my father was smiling. "That's not what would please you," I muttered under my breath. Eric's hands tightened on my hips almost painfully.

"If we ever come to Amity I'll be sure to bring her by," he said.

My father nodded. Once more I felt my blood boiling. I hated how much they were falling for Eric's act. He was damned good. I really hoped that he wasn't thinking that my parents were just some stupid Amity's. But for some reason I thought that it was more than an act. It was definitely overplayed, but some part of me thought that he was being genuine. My father nodded with a bit of a smile on his face.

"How wonderful. You're a pleasant man, Eric. And a good man," my father said.

"Thank you, sir," Eric said.

"I'm glad to know that my presumptions about Dauntless were wrong," my father said. Eric and I nodded alongside him. "Alex, we actually have a bit of news to share with you."

There was an excited look on his face. I nodded back at him and shoved myself away from Eric. "Okay," I said to them before turning back to where Eric was still standing. "Leave, Eric."

This was family business and he had butted in enough. He looked like he was about to say something to him but before he could my father cut in. "Alex, don't be rude," my father scolded.

I had to snap my jaws shut to keep from saying something rude. "Manners, initiate," Eric teased.

"Jackass," I muttered.

"Pardon her, she's never been one to hold her tongue," my father told Eric with a smile. Eric smirked down at me and I rolled my eyes. "Well we didn't find out until shortly after you left. But it's a good thing. We're happy. Your mother, she's pregnant. Just four months."

He turned and rested a hand on my mother's stomach. My jaws snapped shut. Eric had grabbed me once more and the moment that my father had admitted that my mother was pregnant I felt his hand stiffen on my lower back. It stiffened along with every inch of my own body. Had I heard them right? I couldn't have. My mother was young, only thirty four, still in childbearing years. But getting towards the end. Amity's had children young, but they typically had many. My being an only child was strange. The only reason my parents hadn't had more was because they had fertility issues.

"Congratulations," Eric said.

I should have spoken up before him. But I still couldn't think of anything to say. I was floored. That wasn't something that I had seen coming. My parents were clearly waiting for me to say something. "You're pregnant?" I asked.

Okay, maybe not what I wanted to say to but it was better than nothing. I just couldn't wrap my head around it. My mother moved towards me and Eric let his hand drop from my back so that I could walk over to her. "Yes, sweetheart. We didn't really mean for it to happen but we're glad it did," she told me.

So it had been a mistake. A blessing in disguise. "This is something that we realized that we wanted when we got the news," my father said, walking towards us.

But this was a good thing. My parents had always loved kids. "The house is so empty without you. This is what we want. We just found out, it's going to be a girl. Just what we wanted. You're going
to be a big sister," she said, making me fight back laughter.

This entire day had been like one big joke to me. The only thing that would make this day even funnier would be if Eric admitted that he actually did have feelings for me. "Oh - Oh. Congratulations. Seriously. I'm so happy for you both. You make wonderful parents. To me, and to my new sister. This is wonderful news," I said, finding myself thrilled that they were going to be parents once more.

Not to mention that I would be a big sister. Something that I had never thought that I would be. I hugged each of my parents before backing away and turning to Eric. For the first time, I was glad that he was here. There was something that I needed to ask him.

"Can I, I mean, could I be there? When she's born?" I asked Eric.

He was the one that was going to have to give me permission. I would be a member by then but I wasn't sure if I could be there. I was silently pleading with him. I needed him to do this for me. "She can be," Eric said.

I heard my parents chuckling behind me softly. "Thank you," I chirped, jumping after him and attacking him with a hug. Eric looked very startled, but smirked down at me and tightened his grip slightly.

Even though Eric was speaking to them he hadn't looked away from me. "In the case of familial emergency or births, trans-Faction travel is allowed. I take it you will be at the Erudite Medical Center?" he asked, finally looking over to my mother.

"Yes," she said.

It was still almost impossible for me to believe. They were going to be parents again. "She'll be able to go. I'll take her on the train one day and show her the route," Eric said to my parents, both of whom nodded with smiles gracing their faces.

I was extremely impressed with Eric. I had seen him be civil before, but I had never seen him act this polite around someone for so long. Part of me hoped that it was because these were my parents, but I didn't want to get my hopes up. "Thank you, Eric," my mother said and he nodded. "We want her to be there."

I grabbed her hand and smiled as I leaned in to give her a hug. We were all standing together but it wasn't long before I saw a familiar man coming up behind us. Eric and I parted quickly but as Max came up to us, he said nothing about it. He merely gave me a knowing smirk and I couldn't help but to blush. He knew. Maybe member and initiate relationships were more common than I thought that they were.

"Hello, Alex. These must be your parents?" Max asked.

"Yes, Max," I said, giving him a small smile.

"Pleasure to meet you. My name is Max. I'm one of the leaders here in Dauntless," Max greeted my parents, shaking both of their hands. "I'm very sorry to cut this reunion short, but I need to speak with your daughter. Alex, I need you to recount to me what happened during the fight yesterday."

There was a regretful look on his face. The smile that had been on mine immediately dropped off. I just had an hour to spend with my parents. I didn't want to cut that time short. Even if I would see them in a few months. "Max, can't Four or Eric tell you what happened? Or can I come and tell you later?" I pleaded. I wanted to stay here. "I wanted to show my parents around the compound."
Of course I didn't sound very Dauntless at the moment. But I didn't care. I wanted to be with my family for the short time that I could be. For the first time I saw a real emotion in Max's eyes. Regret. Max had always seemed like a reasonable guy to me, but definitely a stickler for the rules. It was one of the ways that he and Eric contrasted.

"I'm sorry, Alex, but I need to get together exactly what happened yesterday so we can properly determine Hunter's punishment tonight. I'm very sorry," he told me and I nodded. There was no way that I was getting out of this one. "Perhaps next year?"

"Okay," I muttered.

Maybe my repayment for missing out on time with my parents would be Hunter getting kicked out of Dauntless. "It's alright, darling. We'll see you in a few months," my father said.

I was glad that they weren't angry with me. "That you will," I confirmed.

"And you can give us the grand tour next year," he added.

I smiled with a little bit of a nod. At least next year I would have an apartment that I could show them. Not some nasty dorm room severely lacking in privacy. Of course, I should have known that the conversation wasn't going to end there. Max had backed away slightly to give me a few final moments with my parents but Eric was still standing close to my side.

"Actually, I have time. I don't need to be anywhere for a while," Eric spoke up. My heart dropped into my stomach. He was not taking my parents on a tour where I couldn't supervise him. "I'd be more than happy to show you around the compound. If that's alright with you, of course?"

He was asking my parents. Not me. "No," I answered for them.

I turned around to face him, standing up against his chest. I hated that he was so much taller than me. He could just look down at me and make me feel smaller than I really was. That was part of the reason that he was so menacing. "I wasn't asking you," Eric said.

"I'm telling you no," I snapped.

"You're not the boss of me. It's the other way around."

"Exactly. You're a leader, you have better things to be doing," I said.

Of course my mother was as clueless as ever. She had fallen for Eric's act hook, line, and sinker. "That would be lovely!" my mother chirped. I rolled my eyes. No, Mom. He's only doing this because he knows that it would bother me. "Alex, love, it was so good to see you again sweetheart. The people here at Dauntless will keep you updated on my condition. It was good to see you. Another five months or so and we'll see you again. You look beautiful by the way."

"Thanks, Mom," I said softly.

"Try not to keep putting that ink on your skin. Your natural beauty is perfect," she said.

I was a little startled. I hadn't thought that she had seen the tattoos. "Thanks, Mom," I repeated. "I love you guys. Both of you. Take care of her, dad. See you guys soon."

"We love you, darling," my father said.

I brought them both into hugs, squeezing my mother gentler than I had with my father. As I released
them I turned to Eric, motioning him to follow me before he could go off with them. "Eric, come here," I called.

He nodded and walked over to the side of the Pit with me, standing behind a column, just out of earshot of my parents. "Want to give me a goodbye kiss?" Eric teased.

They could still see us, so I forced a smile on my face. "I'd rather. You watch what you say around them. Those are my parents and I love them. Say nothing stupid and don't you dare mention whatever it is that we've been doing," I told him.

He smirked and took a step towards me. I wanted to back away from him but I had run out of room. I would run into another person if I kept backing up. "Now why would I do that?" Eric asked me sweetly.

He was leaning down over me and his hands were on my hips. "I'm serious," I snapped at him.

He merely smiled. "So am I," he whispered into my ear.

He leaned forward and kissed my forehead. I backed away from him and felt a hot burn from where his lips had been. This was ridiculous. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to slap him or sleep with him. I heard my mother squealing in the background and I rolled my eyes. If only she knew my internal struggle.

Eric pulled away from me and walked back towards my parents, offering my mother his arm. Of course, she took it. My parents waved me off once more before disappearing out of sight. I sighed deeply and made my way back to Max, hoping that I hadn't made a mistake letting Eric leave with them. Max held out his arm for me to take and I did so, walking with him. Four was present as well, walking on Max's other side. As we made our way back to Max's office I realized that no one had come to visit Four.

Eric's P.O.V.

It was rare that Eric found himself to be in an excessively good mood around other people. But here he was, thrilled with himself. Despite the fact that Eric had never liked Amity members much, he found that her parents were rather sociable without being irritating. It was almost sickening how much they loved her. It was something that Eric himself had never seen. He was ecstatic at the fact that he could be alone with her parents for a while. Max typically had terrible timing, but it had come in handy today.

He had gotten what he wanted. He knew that her not knowing what was going on between them was driving her nuts. He also wanted to know what the little initiate was like when she lived in Amity. He only knew the girl that had forced herself to be tougher in Dauntless. They walked for a little bit and Eric couldn't suppress the grin that slipped onto his face. They were being completely innocent. Eric hadn't said one thing about the way that he interacted with their daughter, but he would be sure to hint to her that he had. He liked seeing her frazzled.

As he turned back briefly to make sure that they were still behind him, he saw that she perfectly resembled them. If they had looked a little younger he would have thought that they were her siblings. They were walking hand in hand and whispering to each other. Was that something that she wanted? Even though it didn't seem like it, she probably did. Was that something that he wanted? He wasn't sure. For the first time in his life, he thought that it might be. But that wasn't in his personality. He wasn't built to love. He wasn't raised that way. He was raised to be a soldier. And a soldier he was.
Eric walked slowly through the compound, pointing out the occasional thing to her parents. He pointed out a few stores that he knew that she was fond of. They walked through the Chasm after he showed them the training room, proudly displaying her rank. Her parents had seemed so proud. Eric wondered if his parents would have been proud of him.

"This is the Chasm," Eric rumbled over the roar of the water. "It's a wonder here in Dauntless. But it's dangerous. We warn the initiates to be careful around here."

"It's beautiful here," her mother said.

Eric was a little surprised to hear that. Most other Factions thought that the Chasm was stupid. They thought that it was stupid to build a Faction around something as dangerous as the Chasm. They didn't see the beauty. But she did. So did her daughter. Eric did, too.

"But I see how it's dangerous. And, is that a broken railing over there?" her mother asked, pointing towards the far end.

Eric didn't bother to look. He knew that it was the railing that she had fallen through during their fight after she had thrown the knife at him. He felt a sharp pang go through his chest at the memory. What would her parents think of him if they saw him then? He had realized a few weeks ago that he felt terrible for it. His intention had been to scare her. As much as he had wanted to kill her, he hadn't wanted to seriously do any damage. Eric had found himself in life or death situations before but he had never put someone else in them before. No one had ever put him in something dangerous. It had always been his choice. But he had nearly killed her. He didn't know what he would have done if he had.

Eric realized with a start that her parents had been waiting for him to answer them. "A few initiates got too rowdy," he lied. Her parents wore a look of horror at his words. "No one was hurt. Just a few scared kids."

They both nodded and Eric led them out of the Chasm. He walked with them through the dining room and the Pit, pointing out the little hidden amenities in each room they walked through. They looked a little nervous at the compound and Eric forced himself not to laugh. They were such typical Amity's. It was almost impossible to believe that they were her parents. They were so different.

As they walked her parents told Eric story after story about her childhood. He learned that her first word was shoes, despite the fact that she never liked wearing shoes. She had said elephant after that, but had never seen able to pronounce it correctly. They told him about the first injury she had gotten. A scraped knee. It seemed so mundane. An Erudite boy had done it. A boy a few years older than her had pushed her down on the concrete ground outside of school. She had apparently later in the day gotten in trouble for throwing her milk on him. The thought had made Eric smirk.

She used to run out of her house in her underwear when she was younger because she didn't like the red. She had said that it made her look sunburned. Eric had wished that she still did that. Not that he had told them that. When she had been lighter she had slid down the stairs on the cooking sheet. When she was still in school she used to deliberately get bad grades on tests and assignments because she was embarrassed that the kids called her a Nose. The nickname for Erudite kids. Eric knew it well. They had also told him of her brief stint as a singer; she apparently had a good voice. Eric wished that he could have heard it. His favorite story was about how she would ignore her job to run and dance through the flower fields for hours.

It seemed like they were telling him about a completely different person. With every story that they had told Eric, he had been made to think less about how much he wanted her in his bed and how much more he wanted to know the girl that had been raised in Amity and had been strong enough to
come to Dauntless. He already knew the girl that snapped and yelled at him for everything. He
wanted to know this girl, too.

He hated that he thought that way about her. But it wasn't that he had gone all mushy for her. He
would never want to give up teasing her and making her angry, and he wouldn't hesitate to hit her if
she had it coming, but every day he was finding it harder to deny that he didn't care for her. He didn't
love her. But he didn't just want to sleep with her anymore. He was slowly coming to fear that
Cameron was right about them. He liked her for more than her body. But he certainly wouldn't tell
her that.

As they left the Pit, Eric led her family back through the halls to the train station. They had told him
that a train would take them to Candor, where an Amity truck would be waiting to bring them back
home. As Eric led them to the doors of the train he turned back to her family with a polite smile.

"It was a pleasure meeting the both of you. It's curious to see the people that have molded your
daughter into the woman she is today. And she is a joy," he told her parents, who both grinned
brightly at him. He was wonderful with words. An Erudite gift.

Her mother moved forward to grasp Eric's hands. "Oh, thank you, Eric. We love our daughter more
than anything. Having her come here was hard but we learned to live with it. If she's happy, that's all
that matters," she told him.

Eric nodded. He knew that she appreciated that. She had been so convinced that they wouldn't even
come here today. "She's happy here," he told them.

"Alex has never been the type to really get close to someone. She's always been distant," her mother
said and Eric found his brows knitting together. She hadn't come off that way. "But I don't see it with
you."

That time Eric couldn't quite grasp what she meant. Amity's had a thing for being cryptic. It seemed
that her parents were not an exception to this rule. He thought about letting the comment pass but he
couldn't. He was curious what she had meant. "Do you mind if I ask what you mean by that?" he
asked her mother politely.

Her mother smiled, as if she had been expecting Eric to ask that. "The way that she looks at you. The
way that she speaks with you," her mother admitted. Eric found his stomach knotting awkwardly. He
wasn't sure what to think about that. He wasn't sure if her mother was right about that, but he knew
that she was. That was her daughter. She knew her. "She's comfortable around you. More than I've
seen her with anyone else besides her friends back in Amity. But she knew them all of her life. I
don't know what you did differently Eric, but she cares for you."

"I care for her too," Eric immediately responded to her mother.

He knew that it would appease her parents but he also knew that he wouldn't have said it for just
anyone. He said it because it was her. Because she was strange. Because she was different. Because
he liked different. But he didn't just say it for them. He had a lingering feeling in the back of his mind
that he said it because he meant it.

Both of her parents bought his line and smiled. Her mother's smile faded fast. Had she not been
wearing Amity clothes he would have thought that she was Dauntless from the way that her
expression had hardened. "She doesn't like games," her mother said.

Despite the fact that she was Amity and avoided confrontation, that was still her daughter and she
would still protect her. Eric was not afraid of her mother but he admired her. "I'm not sure that I
"I understand," Eric said.

"I think that was one of her many problems with Amity. No one told her what they really felt. They kept it in. All they wanted was to be happy together. They never wanted to talk out their issues. That's not something that she deals with well. She just wants to know what someone's feeling. She's always been that way," her mother said.

It was easy to see that her mother was telling Eric this as a warning to him. Despite the fact that Eric could kill her mother without a problem, that was still her baby. She would protect her from anything. Even a ruthless, Dauntless leader. "I don't blame her. I like knowing what people feel too. And I hope she knows how I feel," Eric said.

He managed to keep his face straight but he was shocked that he actually admitted that. It was probably because he knew that it wouldn't get back to her. Cameron, Eric knew that he would tell her. But her parents, they would leave it to Eric to say. And he never would.

"I think she knows," her mother said, smiling softly.

"She's a hard person to read. But I think that I'm starting to get the hang of it." He could tell that her parents were worried that she was here without them. It was probably startling to see her injured. "Your daughter, she isn't alone here. She's got friends. She's got me."

It was her father that stepped in that time. "Then please watch out for her," he said.

Eric wanted to laugh. She didn't need anyone watching out for her. She was strong. "She doesn't need it. But I will," Eric promised.

"She's a good girl. Everything good about someone. But sometimes her mouth runs faster than her mind. Just, watch over her while we can't. Please?" her father asked Eric.

He was a little surprised to see them so desperate, but he understood. They wanted to protect her. "Of course," he told them.

The train was pulling into the station and Eric nodded. It was time for them to leave. Her parents smiled at him and he felt a strange twist in his chest. These people saw the same things in their daughter that he did. He was glad that they came. She deserved to see them, if only for a little while. Before they could leave, he had to ask them one last question. He just hoped that they had an answer.

"I just have one question," Eric called out.

Both of her parents turned around. "What's that?" her father asked.

"Your daughter, she scored Amity on her Aptitude Test. Do you know why she came to Dauntless?" Eric asked.

Her parents both looked at each other and he wondered if maybe she had told them something else. They had confused looks on their faces and they both stammered for a moment. Eric immediately wondered if he shouldn't have said anything. Her leaving would probably always be a sore spot.

"She scored Amity?" her father asked.

Had she lied to them and told them something else? Or maybe she hadn't told them at all what she had scored. "That's what was on her records," Eric explained, feeling a little bad for saying anything in the first place. He probably should have stayed quiet about it and asked someone else. But he was
already in this conversation. He had to end it. "Did she say something else?"

"Yes," her mother stepped in.

Eric narrowed her eyes. She had lied to someone. "She was back extremely early from the Aptitude Test. We were shocked. She looked a little frazzled. We asked her what happened and she told us that she was sick. The serum for the test, it made her sick," her father told Eric.

His eyebrows raised. The serum had made her sick? How could the serum have made her sick? It didn't taste like anything and had no known allergens in it. "She didn't take it, then?" Eric asked.

"She never got to take the test," her father confirmed. "I assume that if her files have Amity on them it's because they had to put something."

It was an interesting theory but Eric wasn't really sure that he bought it. Still, this was the wrong place to talk about it. "That's interesting. I've never heard of the serum making someone sick. Not to worry. She's here now and here to stay," he told her parents, both of whom smiled. "It was good to meet you both. I'll tell her you say goodbye."

"Thank you, Eric," her father said, shaking his hand.

"Come by if you're ever in Amity," her mother said, pulling Eric into a hug.

Sickeningly, Eric almost found himself smiling. His own parents had never hugged him like that. Her parents gave a last wave before turning and departing on the train, leaving Dauntless. Eric walked back into the compound and immediately debated on seeking her out. But he knew that she would still be in the meeting with Max. He wouldn't be able to see her tonight. His meetings took forever. And a case like this was serious.

So instead he walked back to his apartment and settled at the kitchen counter. Her photo was still there and he picked it up. He stared at it for hours, debating on how she could have been sick from the serum. It never made anyone sick. It was designed that way. He knew that she the next time he could get her alone he would have to speak to her about it. But that wasn't the only thing he knew. The next time he got her back to his apartment, he wasn't going to hesitate. Her parents were right. It was time to end the games. He was going to do something about the pesky feelings that intruded his thoughts all day and night. They were done playing with each other. He was going to claim her. She was his. She always had been. It was time to show her.
We were in the middle of the last training day of Phase One and I was more thankful than I had ever
been. I was exhausted from all of the constant workouts and pressure. I sat comfortably with the sixth
training spot but I was fighting to stay there. I knew that, until Phase Two started, I would be stuck in
sixth. I couldn't stay there. I needed to be in either the first or second spot for leader training. But
Hunter had stolen that from me. I gave a quick glance up to the clock and shook my head. Twenty
minutes left. After they were over, we could leave and do whatever we wanted for the rest of the
day. Tomorrow was our first official day off considering it was the short break we got in between
Stage One and Stage Two of training.

As I glanced over at the ranking board I growled in fury. So many of those rankings were unfair. I
was sparring with Dante currently and ducked out of the way at the last second to avoid a kick to the
head. As he recovered I sent an identical kick to him. He didn't have time to move. My boot
connected with his face and he stumbled back. For a moment I felt bad, but he merely grinned and
advanced on me again. I knew that he was impressed. But I was just using my anger to drive me
forward. I was still seething over Hunter. It had been nearly two weeks since he had almost killed me
but I was still just as angry.

Max had decided that since Hunter's attack had been during a training exercise it would be improper
to kick him out of Dauntless. On the bright side, Four had looked about ready to explode when he
had told us his plan. He was clearly rooting for Hunter to be kicked out of Dauntless. But,
unfortunately, even though Max had been able to see our points he was not going to see Hunter out
of Dauntless. He was not going to lose the possibility of a good soldier.

The only punishment that he had received was solitary confinement and a ranking drop. Solitary
meant that he could no longer sleep in the same dorm as me. I wasn't quite sure where they actually
had him sleeping now. He still attended meals with us and trained with us but I never saw him at
night. Not that it bothered me. I never wanted to see him again. He had also been dropped to the
lowest ranking. Twenty eighth.

Unfortunately, Hunter was a natural born Dauntless and he had two weeks to improve his ranking.
He had raised his ranking quicker than I thought was possible. He was currently ranked twenty-first.
Safe from Factionless life. He was one spot above the red line. He probably deserved to be higher
but I was sure that Eric and Four refused to raise him anymore.

To my absolute pleasure, Eric had also dropped Colt and Jade's rankings. Colt was currently in the
eighteenth spot and Jade was in the nineteenth. They would be safe but they were in for some terrible
lives if they couldn't raise their rankings. Both had looked horrified at their ranking, but neither had
argued. They were smart enough to know that they were on thin ice. Even now, I'd never heard them
say a word. But I didn't miss the nasty glares they sent my way every day.

But they weren't people that I liked to think about. Most of the time I tried to forget that they were
even with me in Dauntless. Instead I tried to think about the other rankings. Aaron and Jackson were
still the top two ranked initiates. Draven had recently taken over my spot in third. If someone else
had to be in that ranking I was glad that it was him. Michael, a Dauntless born boy, was in fourth. He
was followed by Jax, myself, and Dante. Greg, another Dauntless born boy, was in eighth and Buck
was in ninth. Lisa and Sara were in tenth and eleventh followed by Jet and Colt. Serena was in
fourteenth and Heather was in fifteenth. Much to my pleasure, she was safe.

Five Dauntless born would be leaving us in the morning. So would Raven and Skylar. They were
the transfers that would be leaving. I felt for the girls but I was proud of them. They were being
strong. I could tell that Jet was hurting over losing Raven, but I had assured him that she wouldn't be out there alone. She would have Skylar. And Abnegation would take care of them. And, no matter what, Raven would never forget about him.

Startling me from my thoughts, I ducked out of the way, just barely missing a blow to my head from Dante. His foot thumped loudly on the ground and I grimaced. That would have hurt. He tried to stop to check if I was alright but I merely advanced on him, throwing my fist out, just barely scraping his arm. I wound backwards and slid across the floor, leaning up onto my arms and pushing my feet upwards, jamming them into Dante's chest. It sent him flying backwards.

It was much harder than I should have kicked him. I felt a little bad as I walked over to help him back up. I was shaking with nerves from everything that had happened the past few days. Out of the corner of my eyes, I noticed that Eric was watching me closely, but I brushed it off. I had better things to be worrying about. Last week I had overheard a conversation between Jeanine Matthews and Max, while Jeanine was visiting Dauntless. I already had a lingering feeling that she knew what I was trying to hide ever since the Amity trip. But I had been able to brush it off. That was, until I heard the conversation between the two leaders.

One Week Prior...

The halls back in the administrative part of Dauntless were dark and strange. They seemed so lifeless compared to the rest of the compound. And I found myself a little jumpy as I walked through the halls. Or maybe that was just because of the strange conversation that I had just had with Eric. He had been acting rather odd lately. He wasn't nicer to me in the slightest, if nothing else, he was actually cruder. He snapped at me nearly all the time and tripped me deliberately when we were sparring.

Although I had noticed that I was the only initiate that he would spar with. He probably just thought that it was funny to hit me. And more than once during our fights I had noticed him getting a little more hands-on. He would touch lower and wouldn't hesitate to put his hands where they didn't belong. It drove me nuts that I had no idea what had been said between Eric and my parents. He acted so smug and it made me nervous that he had said something that he shouldn't have.

I was walking to Four's office. Stupid me should have bothered asking him where the damn office was before brushing him off and leaving the training room. I needed a few papers for my extended trip to Erudite when my mother was ready to give birth. Although I was glad that it was Four I needed to go to and not Eric. I was making a point to avoid being alone in a room with Eric these days.

"You know what this means, Max," a cold voice called. I froze in my steps. I knew that voice. "They are dangerous. They pose a threat to the Faction system. They pose a threat to everything that we work so hard to maintain. They have to be destroyed. All of them," Jeanine Matthews spoke.

To her credit, Jeanine never yelled or snapped. Her voice was calm with the same lilt that it always carried. I supposed that it was something that came from being Erudite. I heard a man inside of the office sigh. I knew that I was in front of Max's office. I had been here last week. But the door was closed today. Still, these doors weren't soundproof.

"Jeanine, I understand what you're saying. But this is ridiculous. You're proposing a war against these people," Max said. A war? What were we going to war for? "They've hidden in the Factions well. Let them continue doing so."

My blood ran cold at his words. "You've seen it, Max. They're getting bold. They're working with the Factionless! They attacked Erudite. They attacked Amity. They were looking for files. I assume
that you know what they were looking for by now," Jeanine added.

I waited with baited breath outside the door. No one was speaking. "Files. As you said, "Max said, a teasing note in his voice.

"They were looking for files that might tell us more about them. More about who they are," Jeanine added.

"You know that the only time we can catch them is during the Aptitude Test," Max argued.

Bile rose in my throat. I knew that they were talking about Divergent's. That had been when Tori had discovered me. But she had covered for me. "Is that so?" Jeanine asked.

"Yes. They're hard to find."

"They are not that hard to find."

A terrible feeling in my stomach told me that she was talking about me. "And if we miss them in the Aptitude Test, well, Dauntless always reveals them," Max told her.

I had gone as white as a sheet. What did he mean by that? Was he just trying to reassure her of something or was there something that Dauntless could do about them? I could hear Jeanine scoff in the room. My heart was thumping in my chest as I pressed myself back against the wall.

"They are not caught in the Aptitude Test. They slip by it all the time," she told him calmly.

"Me. I had done it. Or at least, I had. Until the attack on Amity. "They can't keep their secrets forever. They'll slip up," Max told her.

"When was the last time that someone was actually revealed during the Aptitude Test? Years ago. Eight, I believe," Jeanine said.

That was a relief. Eight years ago was a long time. People had been slipping by for years. There must have been more people like Tori that wanted to protect people like me. "There will always be people trying to protect them. Divergent's are rare. There probably aren't even that many," Max tried to tell her.

"Don't be a fool. There are more than that. People are helping them slip by. They are just as dangerous," Jeanine argued.

Tori. I had come to really like the older woman. I didn't want to see anything happen to her. Not because of me. Even through his sigh, I could hear the exasperation in Max's voice. This clearly wasn't the first time that he had had this chat with Jeanine. It made me sick to think about everything that they had been talking about for what seemed to be months.

"What do you suggest we do, Jeanine? I will not be causing a panic in my Faction. Eric, the rest of the leader's, we all know how dangerous these people are," Max said.

My body gave a little jolt when I heard Eric's name. He knew how dangerous people like me were. But would he give me up? Would he kill me? Of course. That was what he believed in and I was still just his initiate. "It's not causing a panic. We can do this all quietly," Jeanine tried to tell him.

"But you forget. They are afraid. They will not be stepping out of the shadows. Not while the threat of their lives are hanging over their heads," Max told her.
"If they believe that they have the power, they will step out of the shadows," Jeanine said.

"You say they aren't stupid. They aren't. They know to stay hidden. The Factionless are the real problem here," Max tried to reason.

Without seeing Jeanine, I still knew that she was wearing her typical tight-lipped smile. "I have a plan. The plans are laid back in Erudite. There's a whole file on them. Just sitting there," she said.

It was very hard for me not to sprint towards the trains at that very moment. But there were things that I needed to do before I went. Still, I immediately knew what I needed to do. I needed to get into Erudite without being spotted and get my hands on that file. I needed to know what she was planning.

"It's laid out, ready to be executed. But I need Dauntless. I need you to be on my side. Just have a look at the plans. Then tell me that you aren't for it," Jeanine purred softly.

This was already done. They were already ready for the plan to be enacted. All she needed was more people. Dauntless. The room was silent and I prayed that Max would tell her no. "After Phase One of initiation ends," Max finally told her.

No. That gave me only a week to see that file before it was removed from Erudite and hidden somewhere here in Dauntless. "We can wait a week," Jeanine confirmed.

"People are watching too closely right now. If we want this done, it has to be done correctly. Keep the file. We'll look at it soon," he told her.

"I'm glad you're seeing things my way, Max," Jeanine told him. I could hear the smile in her voice. It sent chills down my spine. "Don't worry, this war will be fought in the shadows. These people, they will die in the shadows."

A lump formed in my throat. We would die and be erased from history. She wanted to keep Divergence as low profile as possible. "That's all that I ask for," Max told her.

"I only need one. Maybe the Amity girl," Jeanine said. My blood froze. Not me. What the hell did she want me for? This was not what I signed up for. "She's one. I know she is. That's the only reason they would have been in her home. So we befriend her for now. Keep a close eye on her. She'll be one to watch."

Her voice carried a little twinkle, like she was talking about a little prank, not genocide. "Eric is close with her. We have an eye on her already," Max confirmed.

My legs gave a little quiver. They were going to use Eric to get to me. "Does Eric care for her?" Jeanine asked.

"I'm not entirely sure. I think that he does, but Eric is a hard man to read," Max said. "He knows what his duties are here. He knows what is important for his position here."

"It matters not. The Divergent's. They will be nothing more than a memory. They have to die. All of them," Jeanine said, her voice losing the sweet edge.

There was something razor-sharp in the way that she was speaking. Almost like she wasn't just determined, but that she was genuinely furious with me. What had I done to make her hate me so much? I was horrified. They were going to kill everyone like me, and probably do something worse to me. Torture? Probably. So I did the only thing I could think of. I turned and ran from the halls, completely forgetting about my paperwork.
My mind raced as I thought about the conversation I had overheard. I had gone to planning the moment that I had gotten away from Max's office. I had swiped the train schedule from Sarah's office one day when I knew that Eric was keeping her away from work. I had to do everything possible to save my own life. And it started with a trip to Erudite today. I had a whole plan that had started with remembering the train schedule.

Heather already knew to keep everyone away from me and from asking about tonight. She didn't know what I was doing. I had just told her that it was an emergency. There was an Erudite train leaving three minutes after training ended today. I would have to sprint there if I wanted to make it on time. It was the only time that I could get out to Erudite. I had to get that file. I had to know what Jeanine was planning for the Divergent's. For my people. It felt like I was the one starting the war.

All I knew was that I had to get that file. The next train that would be going to Erudite wouldn't leave for another two weeks, and by that time, the file would be here in Dauntless. And it would be near impossible for me to get to it here. As I was running through my plan one more time, Dante's foot came up and connected with my temple. I grunted in pain and fell to the ground. I had stopped moving when I had thought about the train schedule. I had seen the kick coming, but I was still startled.

"Oh! Alex! I'm sorry," Dante yelped.

He ran over to me and offered a hand up. I shrugged him off. I had been an easy hit for me to block but I wasn't in the zone right now. My mind was on another planet. "Oh, it's good Dante. I just got a little distracted. Off in my own little world. I'm good though, seriously," I told him.

He still seemed a little concerned. Of course he was. He always kicked me and I always moved. Not today. Today was different. "Are you sure that you're okay?" Dante asked.

"Yeah. I'm fine. Nice kick. That hurt," I told him with a laugh.

It really had hurt. Dante smiled bashfully and I waved him off. As I looked around the room, I noticed that Eric was no longer here. That would make it easier for me to leave. But why had he left? He loved to watch us and yell that we were doing things wrong. I glanced up at the clock and noticed that we had reached the end of training. One minute left. I was itching to leave.

"Alex, watch out! Pay attention," Four yelled at me from the corner of the room.

I rolled my eyes at him but nodded anyways. "Yeah, I will. Sorry, I got distracted," I called back.

He merely nodded at me and turned back to correct Heather's stance. I had better things to be thinking about than moving out of the way during a sparring match. Like stopping a war. Once more I sighed. This was not what I signed up for when I came to Dauntless. I didn't sign up for Divergence, a war, Eric, Hunter, Jade, or Colt. I didn't want any of it. But I was here and I had to handle it. Dauntless were the protectors. Of everyone.

"Congratulations to everyone. Phase One is over. The official ceremony will be tomorrow. Celebrate. Say goodbye. You've earned tomorrow off. Get out of here. Enjoy your afternoons and your nights. Only three months left. They'll go fast. I promise," Four told us.

Everyone nodded as the cheers began to erupt. Most people were cheering, but not me. And neither was Heather. We both darted over to each other, hiding near the doors of the training room. I didn't want any of our friends coming over to us before I could leave. They wouldn't let me go without
questioning. That was the good thing about Heather. She did what I asked, even when it was insane. I did the same for her.

"You headed out now?" Heather asked me.

"Yeah," I said as she grabbed me for a quick hug.

As much as I loved her I was itching to leave. Time was not on my side. "Alright, I'll tell them all that you had to go do some paperwork for your trip to Erudite for the birth. Get out of here," Heather told me softly.

"Thanks, Heather," I said.

She really was my best friend. Iris would have raked me over the coals asking why I was going to the Erudite headquarters. "No problem," she responded.

"I promise one day I'll tell you what this is all about," I promised Heather.

She nodded once and said, "I'll told you to it."

The two of us gave each other another smile before I turned from her, making a quick walk towards the door while Heather called loudly to the boys, drawing all attention to herself. Once I had slipped quietly out of the doors, I took a few steps before speeding up into a dead sprint. Two minutes and counting until the train left. But it would take me longer than the normal thirty second sprint. I had learned the back halls so that I could avoid being spotted.

Faster than I thought was possible, I whipped through the halls. I was slowed down once and forced to turn back when I caught Max walking down the hall. I had been avoiding him at all costs since I had overheard his conversation with Jeanine. He wasn't working with her, but he was still dangerous. I had to get to the train. There would be a train coming through in three days, but it would be going to Candor. And I didn't know how far Erudite was from Candor.

Plus there was the fact that I wouldn't be able to slip away with training for Phase Two. This was the only day that I could slip away unnoticed. I ran out to the tracks and saw that the last two cars were currently pulling out of the station. Right on time. I went into a dead sprint and ran, catching the second to the last car. I barely caught the door and felt my arm stretch painfully before weakly and awkwardly pulling myself inside. I laid on the ground, panting. It had been close, but I had made it.

"How utterly unimpressive, initiate," a cool voice called to me.

Damn it. I jumped into a standing position faster than I usually did and turned to face the worst person possible right now. Eric was sitting in the corner of the car with a curious grin on his face. The color immediately drained from my face. What was he doing here? And today, of all days.

"Eric," I greeted awkwardly.

"You look a little surprised to see me."

"I am."

Everything that I said was through a mumble. "But I think I should be the one a little surprised to see you. Do we need to go over the Dauntless rule book again?" Eric asked.

"No."
"I was certain that there was a rule that said that initiates could not leave the compound without a member to escort them?" Eric told me, despite the fact that it sounded like a question.

Of course he knew the rules damn well. He knew that I wasn't supposed to be here without a member. I began to panic. How could he have been here? Why today? I knew that I couldn't just beg for him to forget about this. Eric hated weakness. He liked people that could keep him on his toes. And that meant that I had to be clever here. Him being here could completely ruin my poorly thought out plan. I didn't even have a plan once I got on the train. This was as far as I had thought out. I just hadn't been expecting him to be here. I didn't even know the Erudite compound. But maybe Eric did. I could use him.

"Well then I'm not technically breaking the rules. You're a Dauntless member, aren't you?" I asked Eric.

It was very hard to try and keep the shaking out of my voice. He could kick me out of Dauntless for this. He merely smirked. Eric was sitting against the back wall of the train with one leg crossed over the other. Even sitting in his chair he seemed to tower over me. He just had that type of personality. I debated moving forward to him but I stayed where I was. I was glad that he didn't stand. It made it easier to try and figure a way to weasel out of this.

"So tell me, little Amity," Eric growled. I rolled my eyes. That had become his new favorite nickname for me. "What are you doing on your way to Erudite?"

"I -" I stumbled over my words, unable to find my words.

"A little early to see your dear little sister, isn't it?"

I felt so stupid for having not thought of a cover story in case someone caught me. That was the one thing that was just as important as me being able to get to Erudite. Good thing I didn't go to the intelligent Faction. I was a fucking moron. I stumbled over myself once more, no words coming out. I couldn't tell him why I was really here.

"No. My mother hasn't gone into labor yet. She's only a few months pregnant," I said.

"I know that."

Find an excuse, Alex. "I'm coming because I need to fill out some paperwork of my own and give them some. I also need my mother's medical records," I lied, hoping that he would buy it.

Every inch of me hoped that he was going to believe my poorly thought out lie. But I knew that he wasn't. Eric was smarter than I liked to give him credit for. He stood from his spot on his chair and walked over to me. I sucked in a breath as he walked me back into the edge of the train car, the metal cold against my back. I was standing less than an inch from the opening and I tried to force it out of my mind. We were flying past the City and the ground was at least twenty feet below us. A fall from here would paralyze me if I was lucky. Or kill me if I wasn't. Nothing good would come from this.

"I think that you're lying to me," he told me lowly.

His hands flitted over my hips and I shook slightly. "I'm not," I whispered softly.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

One hand tightened around my hip, his fingers hooking over the edge of my pants. I wanted him to
punch me for my thoughts. I wanted him more than anything. "I don't believe you," he said.

Remembering myself, I slapped away his hands. "Don't touch me," I hissed.

But it didn't affect him. He was still touching me. "What are you really doing here?" Eric asked me.

Divert his attention. Make him think of anything other than the reason that you're here. "I don't know what you mean," I chirped, wanting to slap myself. That was stupid. "I'm here and so are you. I'm not breaking any rules."

Instead of yelling at me like I had thought that he would, he merely smirked down at me. "Is that so?" Eric asked.

"Yes."

My voice was as light as I could make it. I nodded brightly at him. How was he always one step ahead of me? "How did you know that I was going to be here?" Eric asked.

"Saw your schedule."

"When?"

"I was in the records office and I saw Sarah's notebook laying open. You should probably remind her to do her job a little bit better," I said, trying to distract him.

His hands tightened over my hips once more. "And we're back to Sarah. Still jealous?" Eric asked.

"I've never been jealous!"

Yes, you are. "And how did you get here on time? You must have sprinted here from training. Which meant that you already knew that the train was going to be here. And that means that you were planning this out ahead of time," he said, finding all of the flaws in my plan.

Why the hell couldn't he be a normal mindless soldier? "I just needed to get to Erudite and I saw that you would be here too," I said under my breath.

"What were you planning on doing in Erudite? And tell me the truth. Not some bullshit story about you being here for your mother's medical records," he snapped.

"That's why I'm here, Eric," I told him. I knew that he wouldn't believe me if I hesitated again. "Believe me or not. I don't care."

This was about more than our petty little arguments. This was about an impending war. One that very few people knew about. "I do not believe you," Eric said.

So I decided to try and change the direction of the conversation. "But I'm not breaking rules with you being here. No more than you've been breaking the rules recently," I told him.

His brows quirked, the silver rings in his eyebrows catching the light from the sun and glinting in my eyes. "Come again?" Eric asked.

One thing that I had noticed about Eric, in the five months that I had known him, was that he was incredibly well spoken. Better than most Erudite's even. I supposed it came with being a leader. Even when he was angry he always knew exactly what to say. He was always a mix between diplomatic and intimidating. Even with me. Especially with me. But I was not going to let him make me think that I was the only one breaking rules here.
"You heard me. You've been breaking the rules as much as I am, right now, by coming to Erudite," I snapped.

"Go on," he said.

"Coming after me like this. Touching me. Messing with me," I said. I could tell that he wasn't quite following what I was saying, so I took a deep breath, ready to finally tell him what was on my mind. After five months I needed him to know exactly how I felt. "You know the rules. No relations between Dauntless members and initiates." I thought about Damien but pushed him out of my mind. This was about Eric and me, not Damien and me. "But you don't seem to understand that."

As much as I liked him, I just wanted to know what he thought about me and what he wanted. Not just the mind games. "Then tell me, initiate. Tell me right now. Tell me to leave you alone and never speak to you again. If that's really what you want, I'll oblige. Just tell me that it's what you want," he ordered.

I froze in my spot. Not that I could have moved anywhere. He had me trapped. I knew what I should tell him. I should tell him to leave me alone. He was dangerous. But I couldn't bring myself to say it out loud. I wouldn't want that. As much as Eric drove me nuts, he kept my life interesting. I would never want him to leave me alone.

"Nothing to say?" he asked. I remained silent. "I thought not. Because as much as you hate to admit it, you like me."

His voice was still teasing and it drove me nuts. "You think that I'm alone?" I asked loudly.

No more screwing with my head. He cocked an eyebrow and glared at me. "Watch your mouth," Eric snarled.

"Come on, Eric. You're good at the whole tough guy thing but I'm not as stupid as I look. You like me too," I called him out. He merely scoffed at me. I knew that he wanted me. I just wanted to hear him say it. He had said it once, but not since then. "Just admit it! Admit it, and I'm yours. Tonight."

My heart was beating out of my chest. I couldn't believe that I'd just told him that. "What?" he asked.

"You aren't serious," he told me.

I shook my head. I was so serious about this it was almost funny. "I am. I'm done with these games," I told him.

There was a strange emotion that flitted through his eyes, but it was gone before I could tell what it was. All I wanted was for him to tell me the truth. With all of the bad in my life right now, I wanted something good. And Eric, even if just for a night, was going to be good. I already knew that.

"Just tell me the truth, Eric. For once in your life," I pleaded softly with him.
I hoped that he was going to say something soon. I didn't want to look like the fool here. He had made me look like a fool enough. He stood pressed against me for a moment before nodding. Was he really going to take me up on my offer? Even while I had said it, I hadn't thought that he would.

"If you're that serious, come to my apartment. Tonight. Ten," he told me.

I didn't bother to question it. I merely nodded at him. "Okay," I whispered

We were both done with this conversation for now. We would continue it tonight. We were both here for work. "We're here," Eric said, not looking away from my eyes.

Waiting a few beats, he still didn't look away from my eyes. I nodded at him but never bothered to look out of the compartment. I knew that Erudite was behind us but I couldn't bring myself to look away from Eric. He had that effect on me. Once I got close to him, I just found myself wanting to get closer. His cold gray eyes were boring into me and I found myself unsure of what to do. I wanted nothing more than to kiss him, but I knew that the timing was wrong. We would have all night to figure us out. We were still standing pressed together when another question popped into my mind.

"Eric?" I asked.

He was moving closer to me. His lips were inches from mine and our eyes were still connected. I wanted to kiss him more than anything but this wasn't the time or place. "It better be important," Eric growled making me laugh softly.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him.

The strange emotion akin to vulnerability left his eyes and I saw the hard leader that had once tried to kill me. I already missed the Eric that had offered me to come back to his apartment tonight. It was strange to think just how different he could be in a matter of seconds. Maybe I'd see a softer side of him tonight.

"A meeting with Jeanine Matthews. She was unable to come to Dauntless," Eric answered me.

I tensed at his words. I had been hoping that Jeanine would be gone today, visiting one of the other Factions. "Gross," I muttered under my breath.

It wasn't quiet enough. Eric noticed my sudden movement. "Not a fan?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Not at all," I said.

To my surprise, Eric laughed. "Me either."

That time I couldn't help but to smile. He backed away from me and motioned for me to get to the doors of the train. Not that it was a long walk. The train had slowed a little and I braced my knees as I made the short jump. I had landed a little forward and I tuckered into a roll, standing back up immediately. Eric jumped right after me and I was not surprised to see that he had stuck the landing without having to roll. It made me want to punch him in his perfect teeth.

For the first time, my eyes dropped to his waist and I noticed that he was carrying a gun. It was easy to see that it was the same gun that he had used to kill James. The same gun that could kill me if he found out who I was. The same gun that would kill me if he found out who I was. I shook those thoughts off while I walked up with him to the entrance of the Erudite compound. His hands were on my back, gently pushing me forwards. I had passed it before, but had never been up this close.

The Erudite compound looked extremely strange. Candor was a typical skyscraper. Abnegation was
a bunch of gray buildings. Simple, like them. Amity was an outdoor Faction with a huge oak tree in the center. And Dauntless was hidden down in one of the old buildings in the center of Chicago. But Erudite was odd. It was like a dome and the roof was entirely made of glass. The exterior was painted a pristine white. Eric led me up to the doors with one hand on my back. Even with just his hand touching me, I could tell that he was tense. He must not have liked Erudite.

We walked inside and I found myself surprised. It was not what I was expecting. There were bookshelves lining the entire compound. But no one stood near them. There were a few hallways that led into other parts of the Faction. Most people seemed to be milling at the tables near the bookshelves, all tapping furiously away on their tablets. Not one person was reading a book. And none of them looked happy. In the center of the room there was a receptionist desk with a huge portrait of Jeanine Matthews hung over it. I felt strange looking at it, like Jeanine was watching me. Like she knew that I was here. Why I was here. The words 'Knowledge leads to prosperity,' were engraved underneath her portrait.

Eric walked me over to the receptionist desk. It was an older woman sitting behind the desk. She looked up, seemingly unperturbed at Eric's presence. That shocked me. I would have thought that Eric would terrify her. But maybe he visited here a lot. On all of those days that Eric wasn't at training he must have been here. It would make sense. He seemed to know the compound well enough. She gave me a questioning glance, but one quick glare from Eric made her turn her attention back to him.

"Here for your meeting with Jeanine?" she asked.

"Yes," Eric said, nodding stiffly.

The woman's voice was boring, like the rest of the Faction. "She's in her office, waiting. Can I help you?" the woman asked me.

Stupidly, I froze. What should I ask for? I had no idea what to say. Hello, can you please show me where you keep your files on the attack on Divergent's? No. That would not be a good idea. Eric was watching me closely and I found myself blushing. He was watching me carefully, probably hoping that I would mess up.

"Uh, records? I mean, is there a records hall?" I asked awkwardly.

The woman stared at me for a moment, clearly not believing that I was here for records. But Eric was with me and no one would dare defy anyone that was here with Eric. That was the one good thing about him being around. The woman finally nodded at me and turned in her chair.

"Straight back. Stay out of the last two rows. Classified documentation is there," she told me.

"Okay. Thank you," I said, nodding at her.

She had no idea that she had just unknowingly told me where I needed to go. "And Eric, I'll let Jeanine know you're on your way back," she told him.

Eric nodded at her before leading me away from the desk. We moved off and I turned to head back to the records section. I only had so long to look around back there. If Eric hated Jeanine as much as it seemed, he would try to make the meeting as fast as possible. Plus I was sure that he wanted to catch me doing something that I shouldn't have been doing. But, before I could disappear, Eric caught my arm.

"Watch what you do in there. I'm watching you," he growled at me.
I nodded weakly. Something about Erudite made Eric edgier than he normally was. "Okay," I muttered.

"Stay back there. I'll get you when my meeting is over. Don't you dare touch anything other than your mother's medical records. Got it?" he asked, towering over me.

I knew that Eric was being deadly serious about this. "Got it," I said, waiting for him to let go of my arm.

It took him a few seconds longer than it should have, but he finally released my arm and let me go back to the records section. As I walked through the doors I prayed that no one would be back where I needed to be. But, to my pleasure, the section was empty. That made things ten times easier. I didn't have to avoid anyone. Everyone was out working in the main rooms. I let out a breath when I saw that there were at least twenty shelves stacked to the roof of files. It would take me all day.

There were records about people, the Factions, and everything else imaginable. But those weren't the files that I needed. So I walked straight back into the thankfully unguarded restricted section. I couldn't understand why it wasn't guarded. Anyone could get back here. They were all alphabetized and I walked straight for the D section. It was only a second before I found it. Divergent. It was a hard file to miss. It was huge. It had to be the biggest one I had seen yet.

All of the files were in glass cases to protect them from the air. I grabbed the handle of the case and went to open it before I realized that there was a mechanical lock. It was for a password. I let out a deep sigh. There went my idea that this was going to be easy. There were four numbers. What the hell were the four numbers? I stood there for at least ten minutes, thinking of dates and years, but nothing made sense. Until I remembered. I was in Erudite. They loved puzzles. This lock would be Jeanine's doing. And what was it that Jeanine always said?

Knowledge leads to prosperity. But this was a number lock. I stared at it for a while. The words made sense but it was a number lock. The words were the key. I knew they were. How did the numbers fit? And then it clicked. The first letter of each word would correspond to a number. It was the way that old keyboards and phones were designed. Knowledge. K. Five. Leads. L. Five. To. T. Eight. Prosperity. P. Seven. Five, five, eight, seven.

I sucked in a breath, afraid of what would happen if I entered the wrong pass-code. But I had to do this. I had to know. So I entered the numbers and held my breath. If I was going to die, I might as well die trying. I nearly laughed as the computerized glass case made a little ding and the doors fell open. I couldn't believe that I was smart enough to figure that out. Erudite wasn't as smart as they liked to think that they were. Maybe I would have been a good Erudite. I pulled out the file slowly, trying not to push anything out of order. Jeanine would know if something had been moved.

I dropped down onto the floor and laid the file in front of me, slowly opening it. The first few pages were something typical. It was explanations of what Divergent's were, how they came to be, and why they were so dangerous. There were pictures of known Divergent's, most long dead. The last death was over three years ago. I breezed by most of them, wishing that I could read their stories. But I couldn't. There were more important things to be doing. None of the names had an aptitude for all five Factions. Only one or two had an aptitude for four of the Factions. Like me. I gulped as I continued to brush through the files.

In a hundred years, when the file began, dozens of Divergent's had been tortured. Their families and friends killed because they had been hiding them. Like Tori was hiding me. As I read, I realized that it was Jeanine's father who started this. She was carrying his legacy. The more that I read, the more nervous I became. Nothing seemed too horrible yet. There was no plan with a mention to eliminate Divergent's.
But then I saw it. The beginnings of the plan to eradicate Divergent's. I saw the plans and pictures of prototypes of the machine that Buck had mentioned a few weeks ago. It was a scanner. It read off the percentage of Divergence. I sucked in a breath. It was already in the final design phase and had proven effective during trial runs. A Factionless woman had been killed when it had read that she was twenty percent Divergent. Jeanine wasn't just planning an extermination, she was planning an all-out war against Divergent's.

There was even a plan for where to attack. Abnegation. All because they helped the Factionless traitors. They were planning on using a compliance serum on Dauntless soldiers to attack. It would keep Erudite out of official reports. It would make Jeanine look innocent. They were using the same truth-telling machine that they used in Candor to expose mass groups of Divergent's. They were planning on cutting off Amity. They would know nothing.

Not a single damn Divergent was going to be able to survive this. Especially now that the Factionless had put us on parade. My heart was pounding in my ears as I looked over the plans for new weapons and serums. I flipped through more pages, trying to block out images of deceased Divergent's with bullet holes where their eyes should be. Near the end of the file were pictures of known Divergent's. Thankfully none were familiar to me.

But that was until I landed on a picture of myself near the end of the file. My eyes watered as I read over the note on the side. Hold until Dauntless Initiation: Phase Three. Acquire for testing. I felt tears rising to my eyes, threatening to spill. Jeanine knew. This was the final confirmation for me.

Hearing footsteps falling in the hall, I shoved the file back together, no longer caring if all of the papers went back in their proper order. If Jeanine was going to kill me she was not going to kill me without a fight. I knew her plans. I could do something with it. But not yet. Today I was allowed to cry. I placed it back in the glass case before sealing it and dashing back through the rows of files, trying to head into the member rows.

I stopped in the C section, walking through the files. Tears were falling and I wiped them away. Eric would never let me live me live it down. But this was not what I signed up for. I didn't want to be Divergent. I wasn't afraid of death but I didn't want to die. Not at the hands of Jeanine. I wanted more than anything to figure out a plan, but I couldn't do it alone. I needed help but I had no idea who to trust. Not Eric. He was too close to Jeanine. And not Max either. He already knew about the plan. I thought about maybe going to visit Johanna, but she was Amity. She wouldn't want to do anything. She wanted to avoid fighting.

Brushing more stray tears from my eyes, I began to paw through the files. I couldn't be crying when Eric came to get me. He could see right through me. I couldn't let him think that I had been here for anything other than my mother's medical records. I had to read something else. Something happier to get my mind off of the Divergent file. So I scanned over the files in the C section. Nothing looked interesting. Nothing could get my mind off of the dead bodies. I couldn't stop thinking that soon I would be one of them. My eyes finally flitted over a name. Coulter. I couldn't think of where I had heard it, but I knew it from somewhere. I picked up the file and held it gently. It was small.

Holding the file tightly, I flipped it open to look at the pictures of two people. Both were geneticists with titles that I couldn't even begin to understand. The man's name was Gregor. The woman's name was Margaret. They were in a domestic partnership. I frowned as I read down their file. They weren't married. But they had taken the same last name. Odd. Maybe it was to make files and whatnot a little easier to put together.

The couple were doing experimentation on raising children. Different types of parenting along with different strands of DNA. Some hand-picked to be the strongest and others to be the weakest. I didn't
understand most of the language that was in the files. But something about their situation was
distancing one's self from a child picked to be the strongest. I frowned once more. That wasn't fair to
the child. They used their own child, conceived through a test tube. That wasn't even a child. It was
an experiment. It was a boy a few years older than me. I turned to look at the picture and gasped. It
was a face far too familiar to me.

Had I not been holding onto the file tightly, I would have dropped it. There was no way that this
could have been him. Eric was born in Dauntless. I'd brought it up plenty of times during arguments.
He never once stopped me and told me that he wasn't Dauntless born. But looking at the picture, I
knew that it was him. The age was right and his name was Eric. That's why the name on the file
sounded so familiar. Eric Coulter. I'd seen his file in Dauntless and had tried to grab it, but he'd
stopped me.

I couldn't help but to wonder if this was the reason that Eric was the way that he was. I frowned once
more. It had become a common theme for the day. His personality wasn't his fault. It was theirs. I
glanced at the picture and smiled. It was a school picture. He had a full head of hair. It was darker
blonde than it is now and grown out a little, with the slightest hint of a curl. He had no tattoos and no
piercings. His face was a little pudgier and his eyes weren't as hard as they are now. He looked less
like a leader. He looked like a little boy. But not a happy one.

Unsurprisingly I heard his voice call out behind me. "I suggest that you put that file down if you
don't want to lose that hand," he called out.

I still couldn't help it. His dark voice had startled me slightly. I turned to him, fighting to keep a hold
of the file. Thankfully he was alone. I didn't know what I would have done if Jeanine were with him.
I continued to hold the file. He had a hard look in his eyes and I knew that he was pissed with me.
Probably because I had seen the file. He must have wanted to keep his birth Faction a secret from me
forever.

"Erudite?" I asked.


The last word was a snarl. A dare. He was not kidding. And now I knew why. This place held bad
memories for him. For far more than Jeanine Matthews. And now I knew why he was so
uncomfortable walking up here. This was his childhood home. He hated this place. It held no good
memories for him.

"You never told me that you were from Erudite," I said softly.

The second that the words had left my mouth, I wanted to slap myself. Clearly he didn't want to talk
about his life in this Faction, but here I was, pressing it. Still, I wanted to know why he had never
said anything. To his credit, he merely shrugged. Although he was looking at the file like he was
hoping to set it on fire just by staring at it. He took another step closer to me and I fought to stay
standing where I was.

"You never asked," Eric answered me. I nearly scoffed. That was a terrible explanation.

He wasn't going to back out on this one. I wanted to know why he had never told me where he was
from. "Eric, when we were fighting I must have mentioned that you had things easy, not having to
change Factions. I told you multiple times that you never had to adapt to somewhere new. That you
didn't have to leave anything behind," I told him.

His eyes didn't change once. They were the same typical cold that I saw whenever we had entered
the ground of something that he didn't want to talk about. "And?" Eric asked tonelessly.

"You're from Erudite. You aren't Dauntless born. Why didn't you ever say something?" I asked. Once more he stayed silent. Now I knew how he felt when I did this. "Correct me or something. You love to prove me wrong."

My joke didn't go over very well. He didn't laugh or crack something close to a smile. Not that I had been expecting him to. "Listen to what you just said," he told me.

I cocked my head at him. I wasn't sure what he meant by that. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"That I didn't have to leave anything behind. I left nothing behind," he said.

I was a little startled by how cold he was. Could his parents really have never cared for him? Had he never cared for his parents? "Eric..." I started, quickly being cut off.

"I take it you read the entire file?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, knowing that telling the truth was a better option.

"Then you saw that I had nothing here. Leaving was easy. I might as well have been Dauntless born," Eric answered me.

His voice had never wavered once and I never even saw a slight hint of emotion in his eyes. His voice was cold and so were his eyes. I could feel how much he hated this place. It was something that no one deserved. I wanted to say something to him, to hug him, to try and make things better but nothing I could think of would have made his life better. Still, I felt like I had to say something. Despite everything, he was a good man.

"I- I'm... I- About your parents. You didn't - No one deserves something like that," I awkwardly tried to spit out.

Nothing seemed like it was good enough to say. As much as I wanted to pretend that I knew something about Eric's home life, I knew absolutely nothing. I wanted to know more about his family but I knew that Eric would never tell me about his home life. It didn't even seem like something that he wanted to think about himself.

"Don't," he growled at me.

I immediately silenced myself. I knew that this was the final say in this conversation. "Okay," I whispered.

"It doesn't matter. They aren't my parents. Just people that I happen to share DNA with," he snarled.

My heart broke for him at his confession. He'd never had a real family. Part of me knew that it was stupid to continue pushing at him but I couldn't stand him thinking things like that. So I moved forward and resisted placing a hand on his shoulder. I knew that actually touching him would be going a step too far. Hell, I was sure that even this was going too far.


I couldn't quite realize or understand why I was saying what I was saying. I just felt like these were things that I had to tell him. Things that he needed to hear. Despite knowing that he didn't want me to touch him, I moved forward and placed a hand on the side of his face. He shied away from me slightly, but said nothing else as he gently pried my hand away from him. His voice was so quiet that
I barely heard him when he finally spoke once more.

"Not everyone," he growled lowly.

I wasn't sure what I should say to that. Was there anything that I could have even said? So I merely stayed silent as Eric grabbed the file roughly from my hand and closed it, shoving it back into its spot on the shelf. Briefly I wished that I would have taken the picture of him. I liked it and it reminded me that Eric wasn't always this way. Besides, he had a picture of me. I deserved to have one of him.

"So tell me," Eric began and I glanced up.

The same teasing look was back in his eyes. But they still looked harder than normal. "Tell you what?" I asked, prodding him on.

"Did you find the files for your mother?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, nodding at him.

"And tell me, when did she come to the Erudite Medical Center?" he asked.

It didn't take a genius to know that he was goading me into a trap. There was no doubt in my mind that he knew the date that my mother had been to the Erudite Medical Center, but he wanted to know if I actually knew. Eric wasn't stupid. He was from Erudite. He knew that I wasn't here for my mother's medical records. This was just solid proof. For a moment I wished that I had actually gone through the files and found my mother's medical records. In the event of something like this.

"Two weeks ago," I answered him.

I hoped that by some grace of god, I might have been right. But the look on Eric's face, and the sinking feeling in my stomach, told me that I was wrong. His eyes were sparkling now and I was somewhat grateful that we had at least gotten off of the topic of his family and his life here in Erudite.

"Really?" Eric asked.

The teasing lilt in his voice was back and it put me on edge. "Yes," I muttered.

I knew that I was caught and Eric was not the type to let things drop. "That's strange. Because Jeanine tells me that your mother hasn't been here in nearly a month," Eric teased.

In all honesty, I should have seen this coming. I blanched at him. I knew that Eric was slowly unraveling my lie. It wouldn't be long now before he figured out that I was Divergent. I was going to have to be careful. Eric was working with Jeanine. Maybe he didn't know about the attack yet, but it wouldn't be long. And then, as much as I hated it, we would be on two different sides. I couldn't trust him. Not yet. Maybe not ever.

"So tell me. What were you really looking for?" he asked.

There was no way that Eric was still buying my lie. He probably just liked watching me squirm. But if he didn't get the answer that he wanted, and soon, I had no doubt that he would force it out of me. But I had to stick to my story. I couldn't change anything that I had already told him.

"My mother's medical records. My old records," I told him, fighting to keep my voice steady.

It was easy to see that Eric knew that I was lying. He took another step towards me but I managed to stay in place. "Liar. Tell me the truth," Eric hissed at me.
I shook my head weakly and backed myself up against the shelf. "It is the truth," I muttered.

"I don't think it is."

"It is."

No matter what I said, nothing was working out in my favor. I had successfully managed to corner myself by the shelves and I wanted to slap myself. This was where he liked to be. Anywhere that he could trap me underneath him. He was leaning over me with one hand on each side of my head. There was nowhere to run and no more lies to tell. I couldn't tell the truth either. Eric couldn't know. Not until I knew where his alliances lay.

"Leave me alone," I hissed at Eric.

"No."

One of his hands lowered itself onto my shoulder. So I decided to play back. "Leave me alone, or do something about it," I said, tugging at his belt.

The two of us stared at each other for a while as Eric placed a hand behind my neck, yanking my head towards him so that he could speak in my ear. "I will. Tonight," he growled.

My heart was thumping in my chest. His hands caught on my hips once more to squeeze them before trailing back up my arms to come back to my shoulder. "Good," I whispered, barely able to say anything more.

"Now come on. Tell me why you were here. Or I'll pull it out of you. And you won't like if I have to settle with that," he told me, a low bite in his words.

There was no way that he was lying so I still kept my mouth shut. Whether or not I wanted to be Divergent, I was a part of this now. And that meant holding onto their secrets. For a moment, I feared that he might hurt me, but he never did. A figure stepped through the shelves and Eric glanced up. He didn't bother to back away from me though. I recognized her immediately. After all, I had just been looking at her picture.

"Eric?" she asked, a bored tone to her voice.

She did seem a little surprised though. Both Eric and I simply stared at the woman. She bore an incredible resemblance to Eric. But the eyes... The eyes were different. They held no life. Eric's always did. His mother merely stared at us, her even expression giving away nothing. She didn't look happy or sad. Just indifferent. And that made my blood boil. They should have never had a child. No one should have a child unless you would give them unconditional love. Not because of a science experiment.

A man stepped through the shelves a moment later and I knew that it was Eric's father. He looked very much like his father, too. "Eric, what are you doing in Erudite? Business, I take it," his father said blandly.

"Yes," Eric said through clenched teeth.

Neither one held any emotion in their eyes. Despite the strange position Eric and I were in, neither one seemed to even notice me. Eric nodded at his father with his jaw clenched tightly. Eric towered over both his mother and father and I knew that he could have killed them if he wanted to. I couldn't help but to wonder if there was any lost love there, or if they really hated each other.
The air quickly became awkward as Eric said nothing. He just stared at his parents, none of them seemingly willing to say anything. So I took the conversation into my own hands. Perhaps they were just startled. I shoved one of Eric’s hands down to the sides and walked up to his parents. "Hello. It's a pleasure to meet the two of you. My name is Alex. I'm one of Eric's initiates in Dauntless," I introduced myself.

His parents nodded as I reached out to shake their hands. "Pleasure," his father said.

"Good to meet you," his mother said.

Neither one of them sounded like they were really that happy to be meeting me. And they looked less than thrilled that I was touching them, but they shook my hands regardless. "He was just escorting me here so that I could look through my mother's medical records," I explained.

That actually got his parents attention. They each had the slightest hint of emotion in their eyes. "What's wrong with your mother?" Eric's father asked.

"Oh, she's not sick. Pregnant. Almost five months along," I said with a little smile.

Although I thought that it was happy news, it did not garner the response that I had expected. "How... unsanitary," Eric's mother said.

My fake smile dropped off of my face at her words. "Excuse me?" I asked, hoping that I'd misheard.

"Margaret," Eric warned.

My head titled to the side. He didn't even call her mom or mother. At my side, I could feel Eric tense more than I thought was humanly possible. "It's just a fact, Eric," Margaret said.

"It's rude," I put in, before Eric could say anything.

"I suppose it's a sweet sentiment though," his mother continued.

Maybe she was trying to make up for it. "They're very happy. My parents only ever had me," I told them.

"Are you a transfer?" Eric's father asked.

"Yes, sir."

"From where?"

"Amity."

"Amity?" his mother asked. I nodded. "I wasn't aware that many Amity transferred into Dauntless."

This time it was Eric that spoke up. "They don't. If she makes it through initiation - and she's in the perfect spot to do so - she will be the first Amity member to ever make it into Dauntless," Eric stated.

"Charming," Eric's father said, sounding not charmed at all.

"Your parents only had one child? That's impressive, coming from Amity. They don't seem to ever be able to show restraint," Eric's mother said.

That time my jaw dropped, and I was unable to say anything more. "Margaret!" Eric shouted, startling his parents.
He looked like he might hit them, so I placed a hand on his chest and kept him back. "It's alright," I mumbled to him. "For your information, my parents had fertility issues. They were lucky to even have me."

His mother merely huffed. "Eric never escorts initiates. There has to be another reason," she analyzed, changing the subject.

"We just happened to be going to the same place at the same time," I said.

They both nodded at me, not saying anything. They were such awful people. They made Eric seem like a Patron Saint. My teeth were grinding together as I forced myself to remain civil around these people. How could they be so heartless? So emotionless? Even Eric showed emotion better than them. And that was a hard thing to beat.

"Are you sleeping with him? You wouldn't be the first," Eric's mother said.

That time I couldn't help it. My jaw fell open at her words. I was floored at her words. Did she mean that I wasn't the first initiate that Eric had slept with? I certainly hoped not. I wasn't sure why, but I felt a certain possessiveness when it came to Eric. Like I wanted to be the only one to touch him. I knew that he felt the same way about me. Eric opened his mouth to say something, but I spoke over him, wanting to end the conversation.

"Not sleeping together. But we are together." It was a complete lie, but I enjoyed the look on his parent's faces. I grabbed his hand and entwined our fingers. His hand completely engulfed mine and was grasping tightly at mine. "We should be going. It's getting late. I'd like to say that it was a pleasure meeting you, but it wasn't."

I flashed his parents a sweet smile and turned to leave. What could I say? Some Amity traits never died. We turned and left the compound without another word. I dragged Eric behind me as we walked back through the shelves. When I turned back before we left the records section I saw that his parents were already pawing through the shelves of files, speaking softly to each other. I growled to myself. They were horrible people. Not once did Eric bother looking back at his parents.

We walked through the lobby before heading back to the train station. The train had to be close. I could hear it whistling off in the distance. The sun was already set and I figured that it was already either nine or getting close. The train roared around the corner and I jumped first, pulling myself easily into the compartment. It was a good comparison from earlier. Eric threw himself in easily behind me and took the seat at the wall of the train car right next to me.

Typically Eric was never one to shut up, as teasing me was one of his favorite pastimes, but that was not the case today. He was silent as he stared down at his hands. His face was an unreadable mask and I sighed. I wished that I could tell what was in his mind. He wasn't an easy man to read. But there was one way that I could at least know what he felt about tonight.

"So is that offer for ten still on the table?" I asked softly. I wasn't sure what kind of mood he was in right now.

Apparently he was still in a somewhat good mood. The corner of his lips quirked up and I smiled. "Come by and see what happens," he told me with a little laugh.

I grinned at him and nodded. "Okay," I said softly.

Despite the awkward encounter with his parents and the impending war on Divergent's, I was glad that I could be happy. Even if for just one night. "Initiate?" Eric called. I looked up at him. I hated
that I was now responding to that name. But I was working at it. One day he would call me by my name. "Don't think that the conversation about why you were in Erudite is over. I'm giving you a pass for tonight. But we will discuss it."

"I figured," I admitted, nodding at him.

He would eventually want to know why I was in Erudite and one day I would have to tell him the entire truth. I didn't blame him for wanting to know. He had every reason to be cautious of me. I was sneaking out of my Faction to go to the records department of another one. He had every right to believe that I was up to no good. I just had to come up with a better lie by then. I wasn't sure that I would ever be able to manage the truth.

"Eric," I said, making him look up at me. "About your parents -"

He cut me off before I could even think of what I wanted to say. "Don't," he sneered.

It was harsh, the way that he said it. It left no room for argument. So I nodded and silenced myself, glancing down at my boots. The rest of the ride was made in silence but it wasn't uncomfortable. We arrived back at the Dauntless compound and I jumped out first. I wobbled for a moment before steadying myself so that I didn't fall. Once more, Eric landed perfectly. I glanced up at the clock and saw that it was half an hour until ten. I felt like I should give him at least a few minutes to himself after his day. Besides, there was something that I had to do.

There was someone that I owed a major explanation to. Someone that had been a good person to me over the past few months. Eric seemed to be waiting to see if I would follow him back or not, so I turned towards him with a steady face. There was something that I had to do and I had to force myself to do it. Things were changing. No more lies. No more faking it. If I wanted to be truly Dauntless, this was where I started.

"Go back to your apartment. There's something that I have to do first," I told him evenly.

For a moment I thought that he might argue, but he merely nodded at me. "Don't fall asleep on me," he joked.

I nearly laughed. I was wide awake. I had a feeling sleep would not come easily tonight. "I'm not planning on it. I have something to keep me awake," I said, giving him a pointed look.

"One way or another, we're talking tonight. You're right. The games are over," Eric said.

For once, I liked the darkness in his eyes as he spoke to me. I nodded and let him walk back to his apartment. I didn't want for him to see me headed to Damien's apartment. I had a feeling that he still wanted to remove the man from Dauntless for ever being with me. Waiting for him to get back to his apartment, I walked into the Pit and stopped at the bar. I grabbed a shot from the bartender and downed it before turning back to Damien's apartment. Just a little liquid courage.

Peeking around the corner to Damien's hallway, I was glad to see that Eric must have already walked into his room. I approached Damien's door slowly, trying to steady my breathing. I almost didn't want to do this but I knew that I had to. He deserved to know the truth. Or, at least, the convoluted truth that I was going to give him. He couldn't know about Eric. But I still needed to tell him that he was a good person, and I saw that, but only as friends. I knocked quickly and the door almost immediately opened.

I gave a nervous smile to Damien. He was fully clothed and smiled when he saw me. I hated that smile. It made this even harder. "Alex. Good to see you," he said.
"Hey, Damien. I wondered if we could talk," I said, trying to plaster a smile on my face.

He wore his normal smile on his face but looked a little surprised that I was here. Not that I blamed him. It had been a few days since I had seen him last. But he knew that I was busy with the end of Phase One. My heart skipped a little when I thought about what Jeanine wanted with me after Phase Three but I shook it off. I didn't have to think about that. Not right now.

"Sure. Come on in," he told me, stepping to the side so that I could walk into his apartment.

"Thank you," I muttered under my breath.

"Want something to drink?" he asked me.

I turned back and nodded. He was a good man. He deserved someone better than me. "Water, if that's alright," I told him softly.

He nodded at me and walked behind the counter to grab me a glass of water. "Not a problem," he said.

I headed straight back to his living room but jumped when I saw that someone was already there, planted in my normal spot at the edge of Damien's couch. This certainly wasn't a conversation that I wanted to have with someone else listening in. I shrugged, figuring that I could come back another day. The person on the couch finally turned back to me and I had to suppress a gasp. It was Colt.

What the hell was he doing here? I didn't know that Colt even knew Damien.

"Oh - I, uh - I didn't realize that you had company. Look, I'll just come back later," I told Damien awkwardly.

Damien was perched behind the counter looking more than a little concerned about my sudden change in demeanor. Colt was still sitting on the couch, grinning up at me. "Alex, what is it? You can hang out here. Don't worry, Colt won't mind," Damien said.

Colt merely gave me a grin that made a sharp shiver shoot down my spine. "He's right. I don't mind, little Amity," Colt purred.

"Besides it's been a while since I've seen you," Damien said.

If I said what I wanted to say out loud, Damien would wish that I had left when I'd offered. And then Colt would know that I was breaking Dauntless rules. "Yeah, I know. But it's just that Colt and I don't really see eye-to-eye," I said.

"Oh?" Damien asked.

"Yes. But I'm not going to tell you who you can and can't be friends with. Just, enjoy each other's company," I said awkwardly.

Damien was watching me with mild concern and Colt was grinning, knowing that his presence was making me nervous. "Alex, are you sure that you want to go?" Damien asked.

After the Hunter fight, I tried to stay as far away from Jade and Colt as I could. "I'm sure. I'll come back later. I have something to tell you but I'd prefer it just be between you and me," I told Damien honestly.

He smiled at me and shook his head. He had clearly forgotten about my water. There was a glass of liquor that sat untouched on his counter and I found myself glad that he hadn't been drinking tonight.
He might need his wits about him if Colt tried something. The hair on the back of my neck was standing up and I tried to brush the feeling off. This was Damien. We were sort-of dating. He was a nice guy. There was nothing to be freaked out about.

"I think Colt's good at keeping secrets," Damien said with a smile that Colt returned.

"I'm sure he is," I muttered.

"You can stay. Seriously, I'd prefer if you stay. I mean what else do you have to do?" Damien asked. Eric. But I wasn't going to tell him that. Not right now. And I did not want to stay. I wanted to be in Eric's room. "And Colt here tells me that you're in the sixth place ranking. That's pretty impressive."

"Thanks, but I'm serious," I told him through tight lips. He was starting to press me and that wasn't something that I liked. "Colt and I; we don't get along and I'm not comfortable. Trust me, the conversation is best had in private."

I was slowly finding myself getting angry with him. Damien was usually understanding. He rarely pressed me for things. "Sounds like something's bothering you," Colt said.

Something was bothering me. Both of them were. I ignored Colt and looked to Damien. "I'll see you later. Maybe I'll come by tomorrow. I have the day off," I said, trying to placate him.

He said nothing to me and I took that as I sign that I should leave. Perhaps I had interrupted something between the two of them. The air seemed a little tenser than usual. Or maybe it was my knowledge of what was awaiting me three doors down. Or perhaps the impending war. I just knew that something was putting me on edge.

"Alex?" Damien asked before I could take five steps.

I stopped and turned back to see him standing in front of the kitchen counter. Colt had also risen from his spot on the couch. Maybe he was going to take the high road and leave. "Yes?" I asked.

"Can I tell you a quick story before you leave?" he asked me.

I didn't like the sound of it but I nodded anyways. I didn't want to start a fight with these two. "Sure."

"Did you know that I wasn't Dauntless born?" he asked. "I'm a transfer. Just like you. But I'm from Erudite."

That certainly surprised me. Not just surprised me, it stunned me. Damien had always told me that he was Dauntless born. He had told me stories of himself growing up in Dauntless. Was this some type of stupid joke? Maybe I was the stupid one. I should have asked Zeke. I could have asked Zeke. He would have known. But I was stupid. Blind.

"You aren't Dauntless born?" I asked, not knowing what else to say.

"No," he admitted, at least having the decency to look ashamed.

"But you told me that you were. Why would you lie?" I asked him.

I wasn't sure what to make of this. He had lied, but why? Could it have been an innocent lie or was this something dangerous? "I was afraid that you might not like me," Damien said softly.

I felt a wave of pity sink into the pit of my stomach. I didn't want to have to end things with him. He didn't always go about things in the best ways but he did mean well. He seemed like a good guy. I
knew that he was a good guy. But I just couldn't understand why he was telling me this now. Maybe because he knew the end was coming.

"Oh," I muttered, feeling extremely guilty.

"I was afraid that if you knew about my family you would want nothing to do with me," he said.

Part of me wanted to laugh at his confession but I was glad that I hadn't. Everyone had crazy families. And even though Erudite weren't very loving didn't mean that they were bad people. There were lots of people that had crazy families. And his couldn't have been any worse than Eric's.

"Damien, we all have crazy families. I have a crazy family and so do you," I told him. My family wasn't that bad but they certainly had their moments. "But I don't care."

The moment that I said it, I wanted to hit myself. Not that I was afraid that Colt would use it against me, he had no proof. But I could have just made things even harder to end. I'd never had to break things off with a person before. And clearly I wasn't very good at it. I should have just said something in the doorway. Every second I was here made it harder.

A little hint of amusement shot through Damien's eyes and I wondered if he was thinking about his family. "But, you see, it's not like normal families. I don't have crazy parents. No. It's my siblings," he said. I didn't like the way that his speech had suddenly become formal. I'd never heard him speak like that before. "I have an older brother. He stayed in Erudite though. But I have a younger brother too."

This time he wore a full smile on his face and I certainly didn't like it. Colt was wearing a smile that mirrored Damien's. "Okay," I said slowly and under my breath.

"He transferred out of Erudite. Just like his big brother," Damien said, his voice going slightly higher at the end of his statement.

My mind went blank as Colt came to stand on my other side, leaving me effectively trapped in between the two. They were both too close to me for comfort. I found myself wishing that I had a knife or gun. Not that I was sure I would be able to use either. I looked them over carefully, Damien's words weighing on me. A younger brother that transferred. Was he trying to tell me that Colt was that brother? He couldn't. They don't look anything alike. But as I was looking for any similarities I saw it. Damien's hair was a few shades darker than Colt's. But at the roots of Damien's hair I saw it. The same shade of hair that Colt had. I remembered the day that I had seen Damien in the salon. He wasn't there to get it cut. He was there to get it dyed. But why? Why the secrecy?

"Colt? Colt is your brother," I said softly, not wanting to believe it.

Damien was the good guy. I was so sure of it. But it was getting harder to believe that with every passing second. "Well spotted Softie," Colt purred at me.


"Honestly, I'm shocked that it took you that long to figure out. Come on, same eyes. Same figure. Almost the same hair," Colt said. As he listed the things off I felt more and more foolish. He was right. They had so many similarities that it was hard to ignore. "I guess it's a good thing you didn't come to Erudite."

He was right. It was a good thing that I hadn't come to Erudite. I wasn't intelligent at all. Jeanine had already proved that. She had found out that I was Divergent after only having two conversations with me. And now Colt and Damien were adding to the reasons of why I was a damned idiot.
"Why? Why are you telling me this?" I asked them, fighting to keep the fear out of my voice.

Alone, I wasn't afraid of Damien or Colt. But together they could do serious damage to me. And this time no one was here to stop them. "Because, Amity, someone had to show you just how stupid you've been. Sleeping with the enemy. Literally," Damien laughed.

Colt followed with the same heartless laugh. "What?" I asked, my voice shaking.

My blood ran cold at his words. Everything. It was all a lie. "You know, when Colt here first got to Dauntless and he told me about this little Amity, I thought he was just being over dramatic. But he kept talking about you and I agreed to meet you. It wasn't just chance that I met you at the bar. Colt had described you to me. The minute I saw you I went to you," he said. I nearly threw up. I remembered it now more clearly than ever. I should have caught it. The eagerness in his eyes. But I had ignored it because I wanted to prove that I was Dauntless. "I messed up but I managed to get back into your good graces. Until I had won you over."

His words had gone straight through me like a knife. A lump was forming in my throat making it difficult to breath. "So what was the point? To make me look stupid? Very well done boys. Both of you. You fooled me," I said, hoping I could leave. But I knew that this meeting was far more sinister. "And now I'm going to leave. Excuse me."

I had to get out of here. They had already made me look like a fool. That was enough. But they weren't going to let me leave just like that. "No, don't leave yet. We're going to show you a little fun first," Colt hissed at me.

My hands shook as he put me in between himself and Damien. They had me trapped. Eric had told me once that if I was ever outnumbered in a fight to not let myself get trapped. And that was exactly what I had done. "No, thanks," I said softly.

"You got Hunter, Jade, and I dropped to the bottom of the ranking board. It's your fault Hunter got the life beaten out of him," Colt snarled.

And just like that my blood began to boil. That was what this was about? "He knew the rules! You all did. We don't fight to kill each other, we fight to disarm. You all took that fight a step too far. Hunter got what he deserved," I sneered at him. It was true.

"He lost his place," Colt snarled at me.

The same would have happened to anyone that did something like that during a fight. "It was Eric, not me. I don't control what he does." They didn't bother to say anything but had smirks clearly planted on their faces. "So what happens now? You're going to kill me? You think your ranking is low now, just wait. You kill me and you'll be Factionless," I told them.

Not that I actually believed that either one would really do it. Colt was a terrible person but I didn't believe that he had it in himself to kill me. No, that was why he had had Hunter do the dirty work. I believed that they would attack me, but not kill me. Still though, I was fighting back my nerves. I had never been in a situation like this before. I should have just gone back with Eric.

"No. We aren't going to kill you," Colt said. I almost let out a breath at his words. I knew that he wouldn't do it. "We're going to do what we need to with you and then, then we're going to kill you. Toss you over the Chasm. By the time they find your body they'll think it was a suicide."

Ice ran through my veins at his words. They could do it. They could kill me and then throw my body down the Chasm. People committed suicide there all of the time. It wouldn't be surprising if another
one did. But there was a flaw in their plan. Cameras were all over Dauntless. Someone would see them carrying the body. My body. Hopefully Four. He would kill them for me.

"You'll keep your fucking hands off of me. Both of you," I warned.

A cold smile crossed Damien's face. "I've never heard you say that before," Damien teased.

Keep them talking, Alex. "There are cameras down there. You don't think that they'll see you dragging a body in there? There are worse punishments than being Factionless for killing someone. You'll be executed yourselves. Both of you," I said, looking over to Damien for the first time in a while.

I couldn't believe that he was just going along with this. I couldn't believe that he wasn't the man that I had thought that he was. I couldn't believe how stupid I was. There were so many things that I couldn't believe. I had been such an idiot this entire time. They had been planning this for months and I'd walked right into their trap.

"You think that we didn't think this through?" Damien snarled at me. Of course they had. They were still Erudite. "There are service hallways. Back doors out of this apartment. I have friends in the Control Room. People that can get rid of any footage and replace it before anyone can ask any questions. We already know what we're doing. We have the whole plan laid out and ready. And I didn't have to get you here. You just willingly came. Thank you, little Amity."

Now I couldn't help but to shake. They were going to kill me and I had no ideas how to get out of here. Damien was blocking the exit and there was nothing that I could use as a weapon. I was defenseless. They were both far too strong for me to take on, afraid and alone. The only thing that I could do was run and hope to catch them off guard. They were not going to kill me. Jeanine was not going to kill me. I was going to live.

Dashing away as quickly as I could, I bounded over the couch before making a dead sprint to the door. They had been expecting me to do that. Damien caught me before I made it to the door and grabbed my ankle, pulling me to the ground. I fell and cried out at the slight tug in my bones. Before I could make another move Damien grabbed me and flipped me over, punching me in the stomach. I tried to shimmy away, ignoring the throbbing as Colt walked over to us. He stepped down roughly on my knees and I couldn't help it. I screamed. I prayed that someone could hear me but I knew that everyone would be in the Pit. There was no way I was getting out of this. I couldn't fight both. I tried to grab Colt's weak knee but he stepped on my hand before I could.

Once more I opened my mouth to scream but Damien's hand clamped itself over my mouth. A tear fell from my eyes as I tried to get out of his grasp. I shouldn't have come here. I saw Colt's foot coming towards me and I tried to move out of the way. Damien's hold faltered slightly and I missed the boot the first time. The second time I was not so lucky.

His boot came down on my throat as hard as possible. I tried to gasp for breath but I couldn't. Air wouldn't come to me. Before I could regain my strength, another kick came to my head and I cried out. Colt grabbed me to sit up and I thrashed out. My thumb came in contact with his face and I jammed my finger as hard into his eye as I could. He screamed in pain before falling. I opened my mouth and let out another piercing scream but it wasn't long before Damien grabbed me by the throat.

He held me still for a moment and I was brought back to my fight with Hunter. I was in the same position. But I had lived through that fight. I was going to die now. Colt slowly stood back up and I saw that his eye was bleeding and swollen. Part of the cornea looked like it was protruding slightly from the eye. But he didn't slow down as he grabbed my throat from Damien blindly. He had one
hand on each side of my neck and was squeezing hard. I jammed my foot as hard into his stomach as I could, but he refused to let go.

Time after time I kept kicking him, but he wasn't letting go. And as he squeezed tighter, I was unable to fight. I couldn't breathe as he twisted my neck to the side. He was going to break my neck. He twisted once more and I could feel the bones crunching in my weak neck. Each twist was harder and I tried to gasp for air. I had been able to keep my neck steady enough to fight his twists but my resolve was dying with the lack of oxygen. I was going to die. He was going to kill me.

In the background I could hear fighting and screaming. Maybe that was actually me. I couldn't tell what was happening. Maybe someone had found me. My hearing wasn't quite right and my vision was nearly black. It didn't matter if someone was here. I was going to die first. As Colt twisted my neck one more I felt another vertebrae crack and a searing pain shot up my spine. The next snap was going to kill me. Or paralyze me. Maybe Colt would make it slow.

But it never came. His weight was thrown off of me and I fell to the ground gasping for air and crying out. My neck was straining with every movement and I let out a few loud cries. Tears were streaming down my face as my vision slowly came back. What the hell happened? I was about to die.

My vision was slowly coming back as I glanced around the room. Everything was still blurry as I noticed that Damien lay a few feet from me, bloody and immobile. Barely able to turn my neck, I glanced to the other side of me to see that Eric was kneeling over Colt's body. The boy wasn't fighting back and I could tell that Eric was not holding back his hits. Colt was twitching slightly with every hit that Eric continued to rain down on his body. I tried to stand but found myself barely able to do so. I still managed to hoist myself up and weakly walk over to Eric before falling back to my knees.


He seemed to finally snap out of his daze as he looked down to me. Fury was radiating through his eyes and off of his body. He was shaking and letting out deep panting breaths as he hovered over Colt. I turned back to Colt briefly, wondering if Eric had killed him. He certainly wasn't moving. He yanked on Colt's shirt and brought their faces together.

"You touch her, or anyone else in the compound ever again and I will not stop. You hear me?" Eric asked rhetorically. Neither Colt nor Damien were moving. They were either dead or close to it. "I'll beat you to death next time."

Eric got off of Colt before grabbing me. "Eric -" I tried, unable to find the words.

He didn't need me to say them. "Come on," he said.

As we left, neither one stirred at all. He walked me back to his apartment on shaky legs. His arm was underneath my own and wrapped around my waist, pulling me with him. Next to me, I could feel that he was shaking too. But not from fear. My back was groaning in protest as he seated me at a stool behind his kitchen. He grabbed a bottle off of the counter before grabbing a pill out of it. He handed it over to me with a glass of water, which he slammed on the counter. He was furious.

"Take these. They'll take the edge off," he said.

I said nothing but took the pill from him before swallowing it. The pill seemed to stick to my throat but I eventually got it down. I wanted to say something but I couldn't I wouldn't have even known what to say. I was horrified. I had almost died. Colt had only been a few seconds from killing me.
And he would have been successful had Eric not come to save me.

"I heard you scream," Eric said. His voice was low, like he was fighting the urge to not scream. "Wasn't sure that it was you. I walked out in the hallway and saw that it was coming from Roberts's room. Figured it had to be you. What the hell happened in there?"

But I wasn't able to say anything. Even though Eric obviously wanted me to say something. His comment wasn't a question. It was a demand for me to tell him. But I still didn't say anything. I still couldn't think of anything to say. He had saved my life. Eric had saved me. Eric, the man that was completely cruel and loved to watch me get hurt, had saved my life. I would be dead if it weren't for him. And, because of him, Colt and Damien might be dead.

"You don't go back there tonight. Not to the dorms," Eric said. Even though I was looking down at my lap and not speaking, Eric knew that I was listening to him. "He won't be moving for a while but you don't go back there. Not if his little friends knew what he was planning tonight. You can stay here."

All I wanted to do was sleep for the rest of my life. I should have been listening better, but I had barely heard him. My body was shaking so much that I thought that at any minute I might have a seizure. I had nearly died. It was finally hitting me, just how close I had been to death. Despite the fact that I didn't want to say anything, there was something that I had to know.

"Did you kill him? Either of them?" I asked.

I wasn't sure whether or not I cared. It was more just because I needed to say something. I found that I didn't even recognize my own voice. It was soft and strangling. Not teasing or strong like it normally was. It was like every word was a challenge to say. My neck was still killing me as I shifted in my chair slightly.

"It doesn't matter," Eric snapped at me.

His anger wasn't at me. I had known him long enough to know when he was angry at me, or when it was at a situation. I found myself shaking once more. At any moment I thought that I might just collapse. He could have killed me. He would have killed me. I should have known. Colt was a bad person but I had never thought that he was really a killer. Not really. I was a fool. For believing that and being with Damien.

"I told you not to go back there," Eric told me. His voice was low and dangerous. "I told you!" Eric was holding a glass in his hands and he turned to smash it against the door. The glass shards went flying but I didn't jump. I didn't move at all. He was right. I wasn't suited for Dauntless. "Why the hell didn't you listen to me? I was trying to help you."

Once more I said nothing. He was right. About everything. I should have listened to him from the beginning. He waited for me to say something, all the while seething. My hands were folded over the counter and I stared down at them. They were already bruising from where Colt had stepped on them. I could see that a few bones were probably slightly out of place. I would have to fix those later. Eric's hands were covered in blood.

"Aren't you going to say something? Anything? Since when were you ever at a loss for words?" Eric asked me after a long silence. I said nothing. I had nothing to say. "Come on little Amity. Say something."

That time I found myself saying something. "Don't call me that!" I shouted at Eric.
We were both shocked by how loud my voice had gotten. I hadn't thought that I was capable of that right now. Eric was glaring at me and I knew that he was furious. It wasn't just him. I was furious with myself. I couldn't believe what I had done. I couldn't believe that I'd actually thought that Damien might have real feelings for me.

"He called me that," I told Eric, softer that time. Tears were rising once more and I brushed them away. Not right now. "I get it! I fucking get it! I shouldn't have gotten involved with him. You were right. I was stupid. I wasn't being Dauntless, just foolish. You were right. I'm not suited for Dauntless. Dauntless are brave, not reckless. So congratulations. You were right."

My voice was much softer that time. I hated admitting to Eric that I had been wrong the entire time. He was right and I was wrong. About everything. He had gotten what he wanted. He was silent for a moment before he spoke once more. And his voice was quieter than it had been in a while.

"I never wanted to be right. I wanted you to prove me wrong."

I stayed silent. I didn't know what to say to him. I had let him down. I had let myself down. I had thought that I was invincible and I wasn't. I had gotten so caught up in the life of a Dauntless that I hadn't seen past Damien's appeal. I was foolish. I should have known that Damien was not a good guy. I should have turned from the room the second that I saw Colt. I did everything wrong. I let everyone down. Myself and Eric most of all. Once more I realized that I would be dead if it weren't for him.

But something occurred to me. "Did you know him? From Erudite?" I asked.

Eric looked over to me with something almost like a smile. "Why do you think that I warned you to stay away from him?" he asked.

Part of me wanted to laugh at myself. How would I ever get through mental initiation? I was weak. I'd had two people, technically three, try to kill me. Jeanine wanted me dead. There was a war brewing on the horizon. I was one of the only people that knew about it and I didn't know how to stop it. Eric thought that I was a blubbering fool. And I was. My parents had found something new to love. Florian and Iris had each other now. My friends here, they would always have each other. But I was alone with no one to turn to. I'd even lost Eric. If I'd ever even had him.

"Look at me," Eric ordered me.

It was an outright order, something that I couldn't ignore, but I didn't bother. I couldn't bring myself to look at him. Not after everything. I was staring at his counter. The picture of me in the red dress that he had stolen from my room back in Amity was lying there and I fought back tears. Where had that girl gone?

"Look at me, initiate." I couldn't bear to do it. I should leave right now. I didn't deserve to be here. "Look at me." His voice had gone completely hard now. The demand was clear in his voice and I knew that he was standing right in front of me. "Alex, look at me, damn it!"

His voice was so loud that it nearly rattled the walls. That time my eyes shot up. He had said my name. My real name. I knew that he did. It hadn't been a trick that my mind was playing on me. He had said my name. Or had I imagined it? But judging by the surprised look on his face, I assumed that he really did say it. And he probably hadn't meant to.

"You said my name," I told him. It barely came out as anything more than a whisper. I couldn't believe he had said it.
"You earned it," he said, referencing his words months ago that he would tell me my name when I had earned it. But how had I? I failed to see that. "Anyone else would have never even looked at me again after the Chasm. After I paired you with Hunter. But you did. You fought back against everything that I did to you. You never stopped. Not even when I said things that would have destroyed someone else. You aren't weak. You're a damn idiot. But you aren't weak." I almost cracked a smile. "Come on, don't get soft on me now. I told you earlier. These games, we're done with them. And tonight, it makes us even for the Chasm."

He was right. The games were over. Whatever had happened tonight didn't matter. He mattered. He had saved my life. He was more than just the cruel Dauntless leader. I had known it the entire time, in the back of my mind, exactly what he meant to me. But this had been my final confirmation. The last thing that I needed.

"No, it doesn't," I told him and he raised an eyebrow. "This does."

Without taking a moment to think about what I was doing, I grabbed his shirt and pulled him to stand flush against me. He smirked for a moment before I grabbed him and pressed myself completely up against him. I raised my mouth at the same time that he dropped his and kissed him. Just like I had always wanted to. His lips were soft but chapped. Probably from yelling at me. They captured mine in a kiss that screamed that I was his. For once I didn't bother fighting it. And even though he didn't say it, I could feel it. I'm sorry. From both of us.

The kiss was not gentle and it was not romantic, but it was what I wanted. It didn't take long before he pushed my body back into the counter. The sharp edge dug into my back but I wasn't going to dare stop him. I gasped in pain and he took the momentary lapse in judgement on my part as an opportunity to push his tongue into my mouth. We wrestled with each other but he won in the end. He was the dominant type. Not that I minded.

His hands were tight around my hips as they grabbed tightly to my skin and pushed me up onto the counter, stepping it between my slightly open legs. I bit his lip and he grinned into our kiss. My entire body felt like it was on fire as his hands wound up my spine before grabbing the roots of my hair and yanking roughly. I gasped as he briefly moved down my neck to bite roughly at the crease between my shoulder and neck. A spot that elicited something between a moan and soft cry. I reached down to grab the hem of his shirt before his hands grabbed onto mine.

"Alex -"

I waited for him to say something more, but he never did. I liked the way that he said my name. I wished that he had said it more often. I was extremely surprised that he had stopped me. I would have thought that he wanted it. But I could tell by the way he was staring at me that he did want it. His hands were shaking at my sides. I could feel them. I wondered if I said no if he would actually stop. But I wasn't going to say no. I didn't want to say no. We had come too far to stop. I had been waiting too long. I needed the comfort. We both did.

"Do it. I want it. I want you," I breathed.

"You're messing with my mind, Amity," he said.

I laughed softly as he grabbed me off of the counter and I gasped, wrapping my legs tightly around his waist. He threw me up against the wall and I gasped, leaning back down to his lips once more. He had gotten his confirmation. The only thing that either one of us had needed. He wasn't waiting long anymore. We had both waited far too long. I moved back from him and peeled his shirt off of his body before letting him do the same to mine. They were both tossed carelessly to the floor.
My nails dug into his back as his head dipped slightly lower than my lips. He broke it very suddenly as he grabbed me from his waist and literally tossed me a few feet onto his bed. I shrieked and bounced a few times before he climbed on top of me. I didn't miss the way that his movements were predatory. Like a tiger stalking its prey.

"Don't you dare move," he growled as he leaned back to my lips. I wouldn't have, even if I could.

My breath caught in my throat as he pressed his body roughly against my own. His hips ground down into mine and I knew that we wouldn't last long teasing each other. The last thing that I wanted was to drag this out. The only thing that I wanted was for the two of us to be on each other all night long. His hands dipped down to the waistband of my pants and I lifted my hips up into his, inviting him to slip them off. Our hips ground together for a few seconds and I moaned softly into his mouth.

Having him on me was so much better than I would have expected it to. Eric pulled my pants off of my legs, ripping them off as quickly as he could. He turned and threw them off of the bed like they had burned him. He dropped back down and brought his mouth back to mine. His kiss was bruising. He pushed through my closed lips for a moment and I groaned. His tongue was hot in my mouth and I smiled into the kiss as his hands snapped the clip of my bra open.

He didn't bother to hide the fact that he was blatantly staring at my chest. A blush rose to my face and trailed down my chest but I was grateful that he said nothing. He should have known that, at some point, I would have been a little embarrassed. But we had come this far. It was strange to think about. So don't think. His mouth left a trail of kisses down my neck and I groaned as he bit down on a few places that were more sensitive than the rest.

One in particular, just above my collarbone, made me give a loud moan. I was sure that someone outside could hear. He bit down on my neck before placing his lips there and sucking roughly on the spot. He was leaving marks all over me but I couldn't have cared less. My nails were digging into the skin on his back and he hissed in between pain and pleasure. We were marking each of us as the others. His head dipped down suddenly to my bare chest and I moaned loudly, not caring if the neighbors could hear.

His mouth completely encircled my nipple and I groaned as his teeth grazed them. I arched my back so that he was pressed harder against me and he complied, knowing what I wanted. His teeth tugged at the peak slightly and I let out a little hiss. It was much rougher than anything that anyone in Amity would have ever done. I was panting quickly, feeling like, at any moment, I would overheat. But it was damn well worth it.

One of his hands went up to weave in my hair, tugging my head back while the other worked at the nipple that he wasn't currently gently biting. He knew exactly what to do. He twisted and pinched, leaving me somewhere in between pain and pleasure the entire time. My entire core was throbbing and I wanted nothing more than for him to finish this. But he wouldn't. He was going to make me his in every way first. And that was exactly what I wanted.

My hands worked down at the button to his pants, suddenly utterly aware that he was wearing far too much clothing. The only piece of clothing that he was missing was his shirt. I didn't want him to have anything on. I wanted it all off. But he knew what I was doing and he wasn't ready yet. He grabbed my wrist with bruising force before holding it above my head. He wasn't going to let me pull his clothing off until he was done with me. I tried to struggle against his grip, but his hands were like iron. He took his free hand and grabbed the waist of my underwear. With one swift motion, he tugged them free of my hips, tearing the black lace.

At least I didn't like them very much. The side of the underwear ripped and he was able to toss the
offensive garment to the side. They hit the floor, out of sight and mind. I was dripping onto the sheets and the inside of my thighs and he knew it. His finger slid across my folds and I gasped at the feeling. My legs locked up as Eric shoved them apart. We were really going to do this. His mouth was back on mine as he slid the first finger into me. I cried out into his mouth and he grinned, biting down on my lip roughly.

He sure as shit knew what he was doing as he slid his finger in and out of me. He wasn't slow and he wasn't caring. But it was everything that he wanted. Amity were the people that went slow and sweet. All I wanted was the real Eric. He was fast and harsh the entire time. He bent his finger and curled it as he went, moving out of me slowly. I gave a strangled cry into his mouth and I felt him smirk into the kiss. No one had done that to me before. And it hit something I couldn't describe inside of me.

The feeling was better than anything that I had ever experienced. It wasn't long before he placed a second and third finger in me, stretching me more than I had been expecting. He always had had large fingers. He hadn't stopped the curling motion and he hadn't slowed down. If anything, he was moving faster than before. My hips lifted from the bed as he pumped particularly roughly into me. I watched, slightly confused, as he moved his mouth down.

If I had thought that I knew exactly what he was going to do, I was wrong. He kissed down my entire body, making me sigh softly. But, as I thought that he would stop, he continued down my legs. He was pressing kisses against my inner thighs before a new move completely threw me. His tongue slid right above where his fingers were currently residing inside of me. He licked at my clit and I yelled loudly, moaning his name loud enough for the entire Faction to hear. Not that I cared. It was something that no one had ever done to me before.

It was something that I couldn't believe that I had gone for so long without. As he continued to pump his fingers in and out of me, he twirled his tongue around my clit, his thumb pressing it down. His tongue was swirling around and I gasped softly as he began to suck on the spot, his teeth gently grazing me. His name, mixed in with a few profanities, slipped from my mouth. I felt the all too familiar sensation of bundling nerves and I tried to release the tension in my body as my vision began to fade.

He was getting me so close, much faster than anyone else had ever managed it. My fingers were gripping his sheets so tightly that I thought that they might tear. But I had a feeling that he wouldn't have cared. We were both getting everything that we wanted. Just as I began to quake and shiver under him, he retracted his fingers and sent his tongue completely up my core, dipping into me briefly before sitting up. What the fuck was that? Why had he stopped?

"What -?" I asked, being quickly cut off.

"Not yet. My turn," he said.

And I suddenly knew what he meant. It was only fair. I nodded and threw my hands up to his chest, shoving him back onto the mattress. He looked extraordinarily surprised, but said nothing. He merely smirked and leaned back on the bed. Normally he would have shoved me back, and probably clear off of the bed, but today was different. I was still a little shocked that he was going to let me control him in such a way, but I didn't mind.

I finished opening the button on his pants before tearing them free from his legs. Legs that I had never seen bare before. They were pale, like the rest of him, but strong. His boxers were the only article of clothing left between us and I was fast to remove them. He was hard, not surprising to me in the slightest. I grabbed him in my hand, pumping his impressive length once. He had a larger girth than any man I had been with. Was there really a chance that I could take all of him? I would sure as
His eyes rolled back in his head as I continued to pump up and down and his fingers wrapped around my hair, letting me know that he was the one in control. Of course. Even in a position like this, he wanted to be the one in control. I didn't fight him on it. I egged him on. Without warning, I squeezed him once before opening my mouth and taking him in. I heard him suck in a breath above me and I smiled, pushing my mouth down as far as I could, almost all of the way.

He was a little too large for me to actually take all of him. One hand was cupping his balls underneath him and my other was running my nails in patterns on his inner thighs. His hands were tight in my hair as I bobbed up and down on him. Every once and a while I would completely retract from him and swirl my tongue around his tip or place a tiny bite on his hips. I noticed that each time I did that, he tensed up a little more. As I dropped down to him once more, he slammed my head down on him, forcing me to take all of him. It was hard but I refused to stop him.

It wasn't long before he pulled my mouth off of him and he sat up, throwing me back underneath him. "Fuck this," he growled.

I'd never been so happy for him to say something like that. I knew what he meant. We had waited long enough for this. We wanted each other more than anything. I wanted him inside of me. Far more than I had ever realized. How I had waited this long was beyond me. He easily complied with my wishes. Without warning, he slammed into me and I cried out. It wasn't painful but it was slightly uncomfortable at first. His lips lowered back to mine and our tongues swirled together as I adjusted to him. The moment that I had, I bucked my hips up to his, groaning as we rubbed together.

He needed no more warning than that. He retracted so that only his tip was still in me before forcing my legs completely apart and slamming back into me. It was a good thing that I was flexible. He shoved into me roughly, without mercy, and I groaned loudly. God, he was better than anything. Everything that he had done to me was well worth it as he rushed his pace, not taking any time at all. Not that I wanted him to take his time. The only thing that I wanted was to savor this.

For what felt like hours, he rode me, making grunting noises and every once in a while lowering to my lips or chest. His hands were clinging at my hips and I could see the bright red marks forming under the pressure. He was making me his in every way, marks that would last even after tonight. My nails were raking down his back as I felt my release climbing. I knew that his was too as his thrusts became more desperate and curses began to spill from his lips.

But just before I could scream out his name, he pulled out of me and sat up, grabbing my hips and pulling me on top of him. I nodded and placed myself above his waist, lowering onto him and sitting back on the balls of my feet. It took me a moment to gather my balance before I could bob up and down on him. He was stretching me as far as I could go and I moaned loudly, kissing him desperately. He was doing things to me that I had never felt before. They were things that I was praying that someone would one day make me feel. And here I was, feeling them right now.

To my surprise, Eric let me take control of our time together. He laid back and let me go at a fast pace, my breasts bouncing in front of him. His eyes were locked onto them as I threw my head back, reveling in the feeling of him. We bounced together for a while before he grabbed my hips and lifted me up slightly. My vision went blurry as he slammed into me at a faster pace than I thought was humanly possible. For such a large man, he was extraordinarily agile.

"Oh fuck. Eric! Fuck," I gasped desperately, looking for something to grab onto as I felt a pressure higher than anything I had ever experienced rose in my core.

My nails dug roughly into his back once and that was all that it took. My vision blurred and I
screamed his name time after time as my body shook. Eric was the one that was doing all of the work as my body erupted into spasms, leaving me almost useless to do anything more. But that didn't seem to bother him. In fact, he looked thrilled with himself that he had done such a thing to me. While I leaned back, exposing my chest to him, Eric leaned down and placed his mouth there.

My arousal only became stronger as a slick wetness slid down my thighs. My walls were clenching around him tightly, and that was all that it took for him to release himself into me. He groaned expletives with my name mixed between them as he spilled himself into me. The feeling shocked me as he jerked into me. We were both panting heavily as he thrust a few more times into me, emptying himself. His mouth released my chest as he looked up to me with dark eyes.

The two of us said nothing. There was nothing that we could say. Instead we panted against each other, chest against chest. I leaned forward slightly, placing my forehead against his. I felt one of his hands come up to tangle in my hair as he pulled my head back, pressing a long kiss against my mouth. His hand was keeping our heads together as we exchanged a long kiss with each other. We stayed together for what might have been hours before he fell back onto his back, still inside of me. I fell with him and laid on his chest for a few moments, my legs on each side of him.

We caught our breath before I raised up, finally letting him fall out of me. Evidence of what we had been doing not a minute beforehand slid down my legs as I laid next to him. We were both breathing heavily, neither of us saying anything to the other. I wasn't quite sure what to say or do, but it didn't seem that he knew what came next either. Maybe that was just something that we had to deal with in the morning. Maybe that was something that we never had to deal with. It didn't matter. I just knew that, right now, we didn't have to think about what had happened.

The two of us stared at each other for a moment before he leaned over to me and we gave each other another lasting kiss. It was almost romantic. Not that Eric knew what it meant to be romantic. He tasted like me and I tasted like him as our tongues swirled together. We stayed like that for what felt like all night. I never wanted to leave him. But, eventually, I pulled back from the kiss and turned away from him, not bothering to grab my clothes.

Mostly I had done it so that I wouldn't need to talk to him or think about what was going to come next. There would be the price to pay in the morning for what we had done, but it wasn't something that I had to face right now. If I was lucky, I would never have to face it. I knew that I should have left, but I couldn't face reality yet. I didn't want to face the impending war, Damien or Colt, or what had just become of Eric and me. Because something had definitely just changed between the two of us. There was no coming back from what we had just done.

So I merely laid on my side for a long time before feeling Eric shift to face away from me in his bed. He laid there for a second before throwing the sheets over us and settling onto his side. We said nothing as he leaned over to the bedside table and shut the lights off. Even despite that, I could still hear his heavy breathing. We weren't looking at each other or acknowledging what had just happened, but judging by the fact that he hadn't kicked me out yet, I assumed that it was a good thing. I felt his back touch mine softly and I smiled, shutting my eyes. For the first time in what seemed like forever I slept soundly, the pleasant throbbing in between my legs a good reminder of what had happened for the first, and hopefully not the last time.
Chapter Fifteen

When the morning came, I wasn't quite sure what to think. I wasn't really even sure what had happened last night. What part of it had been a dream and what part had been real. Had any of it been real or was it just an elaborate dream? Part of me wanted it to be a dream, but the other part of me hoped that it was real. At least, I hoped that the ending was real. Not the beginning. Because that would mean that Damien and Colt really had tried to kill me.

The only thing that I knew for a fact was that everything was wrong. The bed that I was curled up in was far too soft and the blankets weren’t scratchy enough. I could feel the soft blankets laying over my bare skin and I knew that the bed was far larger than the tiny ones back in the dorms. The ones that the larger initiates usually fell out of at least once. My back and neck were throbbing and my throat felt tight, like someone had stuffed a sock down it. It felt like dried syrup was on my thighs and there was a dull throbbing in between my legs. The air here was warmer too. Everything was wrong. This wasn't the dorms. The pillow was odd too. It was harder than the completely flat one I typically used.

There was no way that I was in the dorms. So was there a chance that I was in Eric's apartment? It made me nervous to even think about. Maybe I was actually in Damien's apartment and I'd just had a crazy dream. But I knew that I wasn't. His blankets were heavier than these. So where was I?

Yawning softly, I opened my eyes and was immediately met with a strange sight. It was a person that my head was currently using as a pillow. Or rather, a person's leg. A bare leg. A leg that I was sure that I had seen before. It didn't help that my head was far too close to something else that was also bare. What the fuck? I jumped slightly, startled by the sight, and realized that it really hadn't been a dream.

Eric was sitting right above me, seemingly not bothered at the fact that my head in his lap. I moved slightly, grabbing the sheets and pulling them tighter around me. Maybe he had already seen me, but I couldn't bring myself to let him see me again. He, like me, also wasn't wearing any clothes. It was absolutely mortifying. He looked like he was unperturbed by the entire incident when I was having an internal crisis. Eric was staring at his tablet and paying me no mind. But I knew that he was hyper aware of me. The corners of his lips were turned up in amusement. Could last night have been real?

"Trying to figure out whether last night was real or not?" Eric asked me.

Despite looking rather awake, his voice was husky and riddled with sleep. "Yes," I whispered, nodding stupidly at him.

He still hadn't bothered to look away from his tablet. "It was." Oh no. What the hell had I done?

"You know, you're much nicer in your sleep," he said.

Was I really? Florian used to tell me that I would kick and elbow him in my sleep. Iris had told me the same thing. So had Damien. Damien. I was so damned stupid. How could I have let something like that happen? I should have known who he was. I should have known that he was a bad man from the second that he had ignored my no all of those months ago. Once more, I nodded dumbly at him. I realized with an awkward start that I was still laying in his lap and I sat up slightly. His arm raised with me and I realized that it had been draped over me.

Was he really acting like nothing had happened? Perhaps that was the good thing. He was such a pig that he would act like it hadn't ever happened. I thought back to last night and found the memories easily flooding back. It had been better than anything that I had ever had. I had needed it. I was glad
that it had happened, but I knew that it was over now. We had both gotten what we wanted. And now I felt stranger than the first time when I had walked into the Dauntless compound. Here I was, completely naked, laying in Eric's bed. Neither one of us said anything for a while as Eric flipped through his tablet. I felt sick to my stomach. Should I move or lay here until he told me to leave?

A few minutes went by before he dropped it on the table and he stared at me, clearly expecting me to speak. "So what happens now?" I asked softly.

The moment that it came out I wanted to punch myself. He was probably silently telling me to get out of his apartment. I couldn't have sounded more idiotic. And he knew it. Eric clearly knew that I was uncomfortable as he smirked down at me. He was sitting straight up and I was slumped over slightly. Grabbing the sheets tighter, I pulled them up a little higher on my chest. He wasn't seeing anymore of me than he already had.

He had once told me that he wouldn't drop me if he ever got the chance to sleep with me, but I knew that it was a lie. He didn't want me at all. He had already gotten the one thing that he wanted. And now it was time for me to leave. Glancing around the room, I tried to find my clothes, but I was shit out of luck. They were flung all across the room. The closest of my clothes to the bed were my pants. And they were jumbled over the couch. Eric's clothes were the same way.

"You're kidding. Try not to sound like such a girl," Eric said.

Despite being both angry and humiliated, I laughed softly. He really did have the best way of putting things. Eric laughed and shook his head at me, turning around and placing his tablet off to the side. He was right. I was acting like a girl. Grow up. You wanted this now deal with the aftermath. But I always had been bad with the morning after talk.

"Sit up," Eric ordered me after a beat of silence.

For whatever reason I listened to his order and sat straight up, keeping the sheet wrapped around me. He moved behind me and I tensed as his fingers brushed over my tailbone and made their way up my spine, stopping at the base of my neck. It was very hard for me not to make a noise at the touch.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

Eric's hand was trailing over my neck, his thumb coming around to gently brush against my throat. My heart was thumping loudly in my chest. "Don't move," Eric said.

We weren't doing this again. Never again. "Get off of me," I snarled.

His lips gently trailed over my throat as he moved the sheet completely off of my back, barely allowing it to hide my front. "Don't stroke yourself. He popped a vertebrae slightly out of place," he told me.

My heart lodged into my throat. He really had been that close to killing me. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"You're lucky. Take a deep breath and don't move. This won't feel good," Eric said.

No part of me doubted him. I nodded and took a deep breath. That must have been why my neck was still throbbing in pain. But he was right. I was lucky. If Eric had been only a second later I would have been dead. It only took a beat before Eric's thumb pressed into the vertebrae and jammed it towards the left, popping it back into place. Thankfully he did it quickly. But he was right. It did hurt. A hell of a lot.

A searing pain shot down my spine, but almost immediately it felt like the pressure had been taken
off. A few soft cries escaped my mouth and my hands shot back at the pain. My hands caught his bare thighs and, without thinking, my nails dug into his skin. He didn't protest but I did feel him tense. My nails were long. They couldn't have felt good. I let go of him quickly and sighed. My head dropped back against Eric's chest and he allowed me to stay there.

"Thank you," I breathed out softly, turning back to rest against the pillows for a second.

Eric nodded at me. "You're welcome," he said.

We were on thin ice right now and I didn't like it. Eric and I almost never stayed silent when we were together. But this was different. We had done the most intimate things that two people could do together, and it wasn't like we were just strangers who were having a one night stand. We knew each other. Better than each one of us wanted to admit. Particularly after he had gotten the chance to spend an hour with my parents and I had met his parents.

He was sitting slightly to the side of me and I blushed at his piercing stare. Like everything else, it was different this time. The way that he was looking at me was a way that he had never looked at me before. It didn't help that he still wasn't wearing anything. As much as I enjoyed looking at him like that, I wished that he would put some clothes on. Or at least cover up. It was hard to look at him like that and not want to do anything with him.

Without saying anything, Eric grabbed my face and pulled it to his. He kissed me roughly and I sighed softly into it. Maybe things were going to change between us. The kiss was possessive and I hated that I wanted more of it. This wasn't a good thing for me to be doing. I wanted to be with him, but he wasn't the type for relationships. And I couldn't forget that he worked with Jeanine. He was a dangerous man to be around. He always would be.

Eric finally pulled away from me and looked deep into my eyes. "We go on like normal," he said, referring to my earlier question about what would happen between us.

In all honesty, I couldn't have been surprised by his words. But that didn't stop me from feeling a little stab of disappointment shoot through my chest. I had hoped that maybe he would prove me wrong. But of course he wouldn't. It was Eric, after all. I would just have to pretend that it didn't bother me. He stood from the bed and I looked away while he slipped on his boxers. It made things a little easier. He waltzed into the kitchen without giving me a second look.

"But just know, you're mine now," he growled at me without looking back to where I was sitting.

A heavy blush popped up on my face and traveled down my chest. Maybe this really could be the start to something real. "Okay," I muttered, unsure of what to say.

Neither one of us would be able to rush the emotional, but maybe with time that would change. Maybe we could be a good thing. But just as my fantasies began to fill my mind I remembered the one thing that had always bothered me before we had slept together. Sarah. Eric and I still couldn't be out together in public. Three months were left in initiation. I would not be his secret. I couldn't be. I would not be the woman that he hid in his apartment while he dangled another one off of his arm. I couldn't be out in the Pit and watch her all over him.

It was bad enough even long before anything had happened in between the two of us. I turned over in his bed and kept the sheet up around myself as I reached for the first piece of clothing on the ground. Enough was enough. It was time for me to leave. I grabbed his shirt from yesterday and pulled it over my head. I was going to go to the bathroom and wash myself off before I left. And never came back. That was the important part. I stood and watched as the shirt fell to my mid-thigh.
Eric wasn't even looking up to me. "I don't know why you bothered to cover up. Not like it's anything that I haven't seen before," Eric told me. I blushed once more and averted my gaze from him. He was right.

He hadn't even bothered to look over at me. "I'm not showing you again," I snapped.

"We'll see," Eric said.

It made an irritating bubble form in my chest. He was such an ass about everything. Last night neither one of us had hidden anything from the other. But that didn't mean that I was going to do so again this morning. Or ever again, despite what he thought. He had gotten what he wanted. So did I. This thing between us was over. As much as I wished that it wasn't.

"I'm going to wash off and then I'm leaving. Thanks for last night, Eric. I had fun. See you in training," I said quickly, turning back to the bathroom.

Every single time that I tried to make a move, Eric would surprise me with how fast he was. I would have thought that someone that large would be much slower. He dashed up to me and caught my arm in a vice grip. It almost hurt. It told me that he really didn't want me to leave. He actually looked a little confused at the sudden change in my demeanor.

"Where are you off to in such a rush?" Eric asked me.

He managed to keep his typical smirk on his face, very much infuriating me. He was such an ass. I knew that he was never going to let me forget about what had happened last night. He thought that just because he had slept with me I would stay his little secret. Another damned notch in his bedpost. Just like I had tried to promise myself wouldn't happen.

"Back to the dorms," I snarled.

"Why?" Eric asked, sounding genuinely confused.

"I'm not going to be your dirty little secret, Eric. I'm not someone that you can just hide and have your fun with whenever you want," I snapped.

"Who said that I wanted to hide you?" Eric asked.

It was obvious. We were breaking Dauntless rules and he still had Sarah. Why would he want to parade me around? "I think you have. More than once. You've told me that I mean nothing to you," I said, almost depressed at the thought.

Eric hesitated, staying silent for a while. "What are you getting at?" he finally asked, cleverly avoiding whether or not I meant something to him.

"Last night, it was fun. It's not happening again," I said determinedly.

He merely laughed at me. "That's a lie," he scoffed.

It was not a lie. "You already have someone. I'm not going to be someone's number two. Especially not yours. Like you said, you could have anyone you wanted. So why would you settle for just one?" I asked.

A little wave of shock went through his eyes before he managed to steady his face. "You're talking about Sarah," Eric said.
"Yes."

He already had his stupid little girl. He was not going to have me too. But I couldn't help the little wave of jealousy that shot through me at the sound of her name. He could be out there in public with her. Not with me. Never with me. We weren't meant to be together. No matter what I wanted to think. First of all, we would never be able to work together. We fought far too much. But there was also the simple fact that I was not going to stroke his ego like that.

Eric merely grinned at me. "That's cute. You don't want to share," he laughed.


I knew that he was going to tease me. "You didn't strike me as the jealous type," Eric commented as I walked away.

Irritated beyond belief, I whipped back around to him. "I'm not jealous, you ass! But I refuse to be the other woman. I'm not going to come when called to hide out here while you parade Sarah around on your arm. Last night wasn't a mistake," I said, my voice wavering slightly, "but it's not happening again."

Surprisingly Eric didn't stop me as I walked back to the corner of the apartment. He went back to the kitchen. "What do you think I did last night?" he asked.

"What?"

"After I left you?"

I didn't understand whether or not this was a trick question. He had come back here, hadn't he? He could have gone somewhere else. It was about ten minutes before he came to my rescue. "You came back here?" I asked, more than said.

He was clearly getting impatient, waiting for my answer. Eric seemed to know that I was going to say that. "No. I didn't. I went to Sarah's apartment," he said.

What the hell did he just say to me? I took in a sharp breath. "Did you really sleep with her just to sleep with me minutes later?" I asked him, feeling absolutely horrible about myself.

"You think so little of me," Eric commented dryly.

"You've given me no reason not to," I snapped harshly.

"How about this? She's just in the next hall over. I went to her and told her that it was done," he said.

A heavy weight lifted off of my chest at his words. "You ended it with her?" I asked.

"Yes."

He had ended it with her. Did he want to be with me? I couldn't understand him. "Why?" I asked.

"Because I knew what would happen when we were in here together. I know the kind of person that you are. I knew that it wouldn't mean anything if I was still with her."

For a long time the two of us were silent. We were both just staring at each other. "What does that mean?" I asked softly.

"Do you remember that night in Defying?" he asked.
It was the restaurant that I had gone to with Damien. A bone-chilling shiver shot up my spine at the memory. I had thought that he was a good guy. "Yes," I whispered softly.

"I brought Sarah because I knew it would make you jealous. I kept her around because I knew it would bother you. But last night I knew. I finally had you. And that meant that I didn't need her anymore. So I went and told her that it was over. I was walking back to my apartment. That's when I heard you scream," Eric explained.

"Oh," I said dumbly.

The second that it came out of my mouth, I knew that it was the least intelligent thing that I could have possibly said. Even staying silent would have been a better option at that point. Did this mean that he wanted to be with me? I couldn't get a good read at him. I never could. It was one of the many things about him that bothered me.

"Thank you... For saving me."

We stared at each other for a moment as Eric nodded at me. "You're welcome," he said.

"So tell me. Why did you do it? Do you want to be with me?" I asked. Eric was staring at me but not saying a word. It made heat rush to my cheeks. "Come on, don't make me look stupid. I don't get you, Eric. I don't know what you want."

He seemed to have finally snapped out of it as he turned away from me to fill up his coffee maker with coffee grinds. I wanted to cry. Or maybe scream. Probably both. All I wanted was for him to give me a straight answer and not leave me standing here like some blubbering fool. But he wouldn't. If I really wanted to be with Eric, I would have to learn to deal with him like that. Finally Eric turned back to me, staring at me with dark eyes.

"Well?" I asked.

"You. I want you," he answered lowly.

We were silent for a moment as my breath came in short gasps. I knew that he wanted me. I wanted him too. But I had to know exactly how he wanted me. He had to tell me one last thing. I knew that I was pushing him further than he was comfortable with, but I was uncomfortable too. This was the strangest way that I had ever started a relationship before. If that was even what this was.

"That must have taken a lot to admit," I said softly.

Eric laughed and I couldn't help but to smile into my lap. "It did," he muttered.

We both knew that it was true. "But are you sure that it's me you want? Do you want me or do you want me in your bed? Those are two very different things," I told him.

He stayed silent for a little while, never once looking away from my eyes. If there was ever anything that I had to credit Eric with it was the fact that he never backed down. Not even when it was a topic that he didn't want to think about. I tried to keep any emotion out of my eyes as I waited for his answer. Eric didn't like weakness and I didn't like being weak. Not for him. Not for anyone. Particularly not in the precarious position that we were in right now.

"I don't know," Eric finally answered.

I appreciated his honesty, even though it wasn't what I wanted to hear. But it was better than I had expected. And it was better that he told the truth than lied to me. "Are you willing to find out?" I
asked, quieter than I had meant to.

This was absolutely ridiculous. I couldn't believe that I had actually asked him that. In our brief stare down I had walked to stand directly in front of him. My heart was pounding in my chest and I wondered if he could hear it. The emotions were conflicting in his eyes and I knew that he was having a problem admitting it. He wanted to be tough and didn't want to admit to me how he felt. It was exactly what I had expected. After what seemed like an hour he finally nodded at me. I couldn't help the large smile that snuck its way onto my face.

To say that I was surprised would have been an understatement. "Alright then," I said awkwardly.

Now that we had gotten that out of the way, I wasn't unsure of what I should say. But thankfully, Eric did know. He grabbed my arm and pushed me back against the counter. He caught my mouth in a deep kiss and I tilted my head backwards, letting him put a hand underneath my neck, keeping me against him. I groaned softly into his mouth as his hands came around to my waist and kept our hips roughly together. My heart was hammering in my chest. No matter what happened between the two of us, I would always be excited to be pressed against him.

As strange as it was, I enjoyed this more than I did last night. Instead of rushing to undress each other in a frenzy we were relaxed. Well, somewhat relaxed. Here he was, wearing his boxers and nothing else with his hair mussed slightly. And here I was, dressed only in his shirt with my hair knotted from Eric tangling his hands in it last night. We were standing in his kitchen, kissing each other like we were in a real relationship. Maybe one day we actually would be in a real relationship. Whatever this was, it was the halfway point. And I could deal with that for now.

Eric's arms ran around the back of my waist to keep me flush against him. Our mouths tangled together as he pushed me back roughly against the counter. His kisses always said the same thing. I'm in charge. But tonight I was going to show him that he wasn't always in charge. His hands grabbed at the bottom of the shirt that I was wearing and pulled it up, trying to take it off. I grabbed his hand and pulled him away.

"I don't think so," I purred.

After all that he had put me through I was more than happy to tease him a few times. He had it coming. He scoffed at me and bit my lower lip roughly before stomping away. I grinned brightly and watched as he walked away. I followed him over to the coffee maker and poured myself a cup. I felt a bit strange as he stood against his counter, sipping the drink. I was standing in Eric's kitchen and wearing his shirt. Maybe this was a little more like a real relationship than I thought that it was. I grabbed the mug tightly before hopping up onto his counter and settling back.

"I hope you know I'm not going to take it easy on you," Eric told me.

I laughed at him. That much was obvious. He'd probably make it worse. Smiling at him, I took another sip of my coffee. "I wouldn't want it any other way," I told him, my voice deeper than normal.

"Don't worry. I never would," he said, grabbing roughly at my hips.

He knew the hidden meaning to my words. And that was exactly the way that I had intended it. He moved back to stand in front of me and moved in to kiss me. I waited until he was directly in front of me before moving the mug up in front of my lips to cut him off. He rolled his eyes at my childish antics and called me a few choice curses as he moved away. I merely grinned. He was about to find out just how annoying I really was. As he walked back towards his bed there was a sudden itching in the back of my mind. He had never kicked me out.
"I have to ask you something," I said, making Eric look at me. "You didn't kick me out last night. Why?"

Eric cocked his head at me, not understanding what I was talking about. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"You don't exactly seem like the type of guy to let girls stay the night," I said.

He laughed at my words, telling me that I was right. He wasn't the type to let girls stay in his bed. So why was I any different? Or maybe I wasn't. Maybe we had just fallen asleep. "You're right. I'm not," he said.

I hadn't thought so. "Why did you let me stay?" I asked.

"Because I wasn't about to let you go back to the dorms. The last thing you needed was being near any of them." I knew that he meant Jade, Colt, and Hunter. Still, I wished that he had let me stay just because he wanted me to. "You're the first person I've ever let stay in my bed," he muttered.

My head turned to him and my cheeks warmed slightly at his statement. I had never thought that I might be the first person that he had ever let sleep in his bed. I figured that from time to time he must have just fallen asleep with whatever girl he was sleeping with. But I was the first one. It seemed a little strange to me. Not that it should have. I had only let one person ever sleep in my bed. Florian, who had always been kicked out before the morning came. Unless Iris and a few other female friends counted. But I didn't have sex with them.

This time when he crossed the room and came to stand in front of me, I leaned over and kissed him. My hands wound their way around his neck as his hands pressed with a bruising force on my hips. He was not a nice kisser. He wasn't nice about anything in bed. But it was the way that I liked it. He hummed against my lip as I toyed with the string on his boxers. We may have settled one thing between us, but there was still one more thing to address.

"So now we have a problem on our hands," I said against Eric's lips.

He pulled back and raised his brow. "What?" Eric asked me.

I knew that he wouldn't understand what I was talking about. "What tattoo should I give you?" I asked him sweetly.

He scoffed, tightening his hands around my thighs so much that it was almost painful. He clearly hadn't been thinking about the bet last night. Of course, neither had I. "What are you talking about? I won the bet," he argued.

"Like hell you did!" I snapped. Eric scowled at me. "You invited me back here. I won the bet."

That was the bet. Whoever made the first move won. That made it my right to put a tattoo on him. "You did not," Eric argued.

"The minute you invited me to your apartment was me winning the bet," I said proudly.

Eric leaned into me and pressed my back against the cabinets hovering behind me. He was trying to intimidate me and I hated to admit that it was working. Eric didn't scare me as much as he used to, but from time to time he still did. I knew what he was capable of. A lot more than I was comfortable with.

"I believe the bet was the person that physically made the first move. And that was you. You
grabbed me and you kissed me," he told me with the same shit-eating grin I had given him a moment before.

Was he right? No way. He made the first move. He just didn't want to admit it. "Oh that's such shit. I won and you know it," I huffed at him.

"No you didn't," Eric said.

"Yes I did."

"No."

"Yes!"

"You did not, Amity."

We glared at each other for a few minutes, neither of us budging. We kind of gave in at the same time. "Or maybe neither of us won," I said begrudgingly.

All I wanted was to put a butterfly on his ass. But Eric would kill me if I put a butterfly anywhere on him. "Tell you what. If we both lost the bet like you say, we both owe each other tattoos," Eric said.

That sounded fair. "Keeps us from doing anything too terrible to the other," I muttered.

"I'd be careful what you decide to put on me," he growled. I knew that if I put anything bad on Eric, he would make it ten times worse for me. "Do we have a deal?"

It sounded fair enough to me. "We have a deal," I said.

"I'll think about what I want to do," Eric teased.

He was leaning up against the counter next to me and I smiled. Even while I was up on the counter he was still a little bit taller than me. "Damn. I was so looking forward to a nice butterfly tattoo on your ass," I laughed.

Eric laughed with me as he stole the coffee mug out of my hands and drank the rest of it. "That'd just be your excuse to look at my ass," Eric said, making me bark out an ugly laugh.

"Eric?" I asked. He hummed in response, still looking down at the cup. "What's going to happen with Damien and Colt?"

I had no idea what had happened to them. They both looked half dead when Eric had taken me from the room. And if they weren't dead, I had no idea what was going to happen to them. Maybe someone would kill them. Would they be thrown out? Or would nothing be done to them? Eric stiffened at my question and I almost immediately regretted asking.

"They aren't dead if that's what you mean," Eric snarled.

Some part of me was glad that they weren't dead. A very tiny part. "I meant what's going to happen now," I said.

"I've been talking with Max and Four all morning. There's no proof of what happened to you." I scoffed loudly. "No solid proof," Eric corrected himself. "Max can't do anything and neither can I. Not on trial at least. I can't throw them out of Dauntless but their punishment lies with Four and me. We've decided that Colt will be dropped to the bottom of the ranking board. It will be hard for him to rise back above the red line. I intend to see him gone from this Faction. We don't want people like
him. He will be put into isolation like Hunter. You will only train with him and eat meals together." Only two more months before I could be rid of Colt forever. "Roberts is being sent to full-time Fence duty. Max approved the transfer request an hour ago."

Despite the fact that I was angry that more hadn't been done, I understood that Max couldn't take sides. Eric was right. There was no solid proof of what had happened to me. But I couldn't help but to wonder if Max might not want to do anything because of what I was. The thought made my blood boil.

"Well thank you for doing as much as you can. Four too," I told Eric.

I probably should have said something about Max but I couldn't bring myself to. He was working with Jeanine. But so was Eric. It made my insides twist painfully. I was in way too far over my head. "I'd do more if I could," he said.

"I know. What is full-time Fence duty?" I asked, trying to keep my mind off of anything to do with Divergent's.

"Roberts is going to die at the Fence," Eric answered quickly.

My eyebrows rose at his words and I had to suppress a shiver. His voice held no emotion. Having someone die was just another day on the job for him. "What does that mean?" I asked.

"Full-time Fence duty is for those accused of crimes when Dauntless is unable to prove them guilty. So they put them on the Fence. They live there in barracks. If he proves himself hostile or unwilling to work he'll be executed. If not, he'll work there until the day he dies. The only time he'll be able to come back to the compound is on Visiting Day. You'll never see him again," Eric said.

The last part of his explanation held a possessive tone. At least I wouldn't have a constant reminder of what a fool I had been walking around the compound all of the time. "What if the person is innocent?" I asked Eric.

He said nothing as he walked over to the pot that was on his stove. I sighed at the look on his face. There was my answer. It didn't matter. If you were sent out there you stayed out there. Guilty or not. At least I was positive that Damien was guilty. Eric grabbed a plate of eggs and handed it to me. I took it and nearly laughed.

"A gourmet chef too," I teased.

Every second that I was here Eric surprised me more and more. "There are things about me that might surprise you," Eric said.

He went to sit on one of the stools on the other side of the counter. We ate in silence for a while, before another thought popped into my mind. "How does Phase Two of initiation work?" I asked, interrupting Eric from thumbing through his tablet.

He glanced up at me from over the tablet with a little glare on his face. "Don't think that I'm going to tell you how everything works now," he growled at me.

"Of course not," I said with a little smile.

"You'll be with Four almost all of the time during Phase Two. The only time I'll be there is if Four has prior engagements. Usually it's only a day or two," Eric said.

I couldn't help but to feel a little mix of both relief and disappointment. I would miss seeing him
every day, as surprising as that thought might have been, but, in another way, I was glad that he wouldn't be around. Tori had once told me that most Divergent's got caught during Phase Two. I had a feeling that Four would be more lenient than Eric. He might actually help me.

"He'll give you a serum to put you in a sim. It will show you a fear of yours. Every day for two months you'll face them and learn to conquer them. The average person has between ten and fifteen fears," he said.

A pit formed in the bottom of my stomach at his words. Ten to fifteen fears. I couldn't even think of one of my own and I wasn't sure that I wanted a serum picking around my brain to figure them out. I had a feeling that any fear I had would be a dead giveaway about who I was. I really hoped that Four couldn't see my fears.

"That's a lot of fears," I muttered.

"Sometimes more," Eric put in.

"How many did you have?" I asked Eric curiously. He didn't answer me.

After a few minutes, Eric spoke up once more. "They change," he said. Of course they changed. When I was a kid I was terrified of the trains. They looked like steel monsters to me. Now that I was Dauntless, I loved them. "The fears that you have now might not be the same as the fears you have a year from now. You'll have to slow down your heart rate to get out of the sim. Solve the problem. It normally takes initiates twenty minutes or so their first few times."

Twenty minutes once a day didn't sound too bad to me. Although when facing your deepest fears, twenty minutes might feel like two hours. "Alright. I think I can handle that," I said.

I didn't want Eric to think that I was weak, but I wasn't really sure that I could. I didn't want to reveal myself to anyone. Even Four. I glanced up to the clock in the corner of the room and jumped up. It was already mid-morning. Heather. She was probably tearing her hair out worrying about what had happened to me last night. I had to go to her. Besides, there were things that I had to tell her about. I jumped off of the counter and walked around the room, picking up my scattered clothing. Eric was watching my every move closely. Once I had them all in hand I walked over to the bed and dropped them near where he was sitting.

"Turn around," I ordered him.

The incredulous look on his face was enough to make anyone else laugh. But not me. I was dead serious. "You're kidding right?" he asked me with a bored voice.

I knew that he wouldn't like that. "No I'm not kidding," I said.

I waited for him to turn to look away from me. We weren't quite to the point where I wanted to dress in front of him. "You do realize I've seen it all before," he snapped.

I blushed and shrugged my shoulders. "Don't care. Turn around," I ordered.

He merely shook his head and came to stand in front of me with his arms crossed over his chest. I waited for him to make a move and, when he did, I certainly wasn't expecting it. He tore the shirt over my head and threw it away before grabbing me and tossing me down onto the bed, giving me no chance to argue against it. The sudden blast of cold air made my back arch and my entire body convulse with a shiver.

"Eric!" I yelled.
All I wanted was to get under the damned blanket. It was freezing in here now. But his body was warm as he climbed on top of me, pinning me against the bed. His lips found my own and I groaned into the kiss. He was pressing me so hard into the bed that I thought that I might slip into it. I wanted him more than anything, but there were things that I had to do. As he moved his hands over my body, reaching lower and lower, I shook my head and pushed him off.

"Later, big guy," I told Eric as I detached my lips from his. "I've got things to do."

His hands had been in the middle of pushing my legs apart as his hand dropped, brushing my inner thigh softly. I shivered but refused to let him show that the accidental movement had affected me. I closed my legs as much as I could with Eric leaning over me. His eyes were dark and his mouth was set in a thin line.

"Yeah. Me," he responded.

"No. Not you."

"What the hell do you have to do?" he snapped.

I hadn't thought that he would like being told no. Rolling my eyes, I pushed him off. Getting to Heather was the priority. No matter how much I would have liked to stay with him. "Tell my friends that I'm not dead," I snapped at Eric.

He scoffed and didn't bother to move, keeping his weight down on me. "It's not that important," he said.


I saw the brief flash of amusement shoot through his eyes. "You will, huh?" he teased.

"I will. And don't you have work to do? I swear, you're a leader and you do absolutely nothing," I said.

"Now that's not true."

"Yes it is."

"There's plenty of things that I do. Keeping you alive," Eric teased, making me laugh.

It was true. As stupid as it was, I had no idea what it was that Eric really spent his days doing. What I might be doing one day if I could raise my ranking a few spots. He scoffed at my comment and moved back. Not enough that I could move. So I spread out my arms and sunk into the bed for a moment. If nothing else, this was enough to make me want to stay in his bed forever. It was so much softer than my own.

"Also, your bed is unfair. Even my bed back in Amity wasn't this soft. Now that you've gotten me in your bed you might not get me out," I said with a wink.

He gave me a sleazy smirk. "I don't mind that," he said. I couldn't help but to smile. That was probably one of the sweetest things that he had ever told me. "You can stay as long as you like as long as you let me do what I want."

I couldn't help but to roll my eyes at him. There went the somewhat sweet part of him. "Yeah. You'd like that, wouldn't you?" I asked.
"I would. As for taking the day off, it's part of the benefits of the job. I can take days off and as long as I need to get things done," he said. I rolled my eyes once more.

"That's not fair," I mumbled.

"Life's not fair. Go. Do whatever it is you need to do. And don't you dare go telling your friends about this. I will throw you off the Chasm," he hissed.

Of course. "I don't have a doubt in my mind about that," I told him honestly. But I also didn't bother to tell him that the first thing that I was going to do once I left here was tell Heather everything that happened. "Don't worry about it. I'm not stupid. I don't want to get kicked out because of you."

He merely smirked as I swung out from underneath his leg and grabbed my clothes in hand, changing back into them. Despite the fact that they were normal day clothes, I felt like I was going to be doing to walk of shame. Eric watched my every movement through lidded eyes. Once I got my shirt back on I turned back to Eric and moved closer to him, leaving just a little gap.

"I'll be back later," I said.

He nodded at me, keeping an even look on his face. He was wonderful at disguising his emotions. I turned to leave, but before I could take a step, I heard Eric speak. "Just know, I still don't like you, Amity," Eric sneered, accentuating Amity.

I turned back to see that he had an even look on his face, but there was a playfulness in his eyes. Two can play at that game. "Good. Then we're on the same page, Erudite," I snarled back at him, knowing that it would push his buttons.

Eric took a step forward and closed the gap between us. He shoved me back against the wall and captured my mouth with his. It was the same possessive kiss that he had used before, making my knees go weak. He knew what he was doing. I smiled into the kiss and ran my fingers up his spine and through his hair. It was softer than I was expecting. But I liked it. I gave a gentle tug and he growled deep in his throat, moving his fingers to the waistband of my pants.

Before he could take it any further I broke the kiss and slipped away from him. His eyes were dark as he glared at me. Clearly he had been hoping that I would forget why I wanted to leave. But I was determined to let Heather know where I had been last night and what had happened. I gave Eric a quick wink before turning to the door to leave. I only made it two steps before a sharp pain shot through my backside.

"Ow!" I yelled, turning back to Eric. He was tossing a towel over his shoulder with a mad grin on his face. He had smacked it against my ass in retaliation. "Asshole. Stop messing with me. Do your fucking job."

As I walked through the doorway to leave his apartment I heard him laughing behind me. I grit my teeth and forced myself not to go back and slap him. But still I couldn't help but to grin slightly as I walked out into the hallway. There wasn't very often that I saw the genuinely playful attitude from him. Usually it was dangerous and playful.

A Dauntless man was walking through the halls and he gave a little start as he realized which apartment I had just come out of. I smiled bashfully at him and the man smiled back at me, looking a little concerned for my well-being. I sighed and quickly headed back to the dorms. I took the shortcut through the Pit and the Chasm, neither of which had many people hanging around. Most people must have still been asleep. Today was one of the few days that most people got off of work. I walked through the secluded hallway that led to the dorms and went in. Everyone was asleep, bar Cole. Colt
was nowhere to be found.

Cole glanced over at me and his eyes widened. He hadn’t seen me since training yesterday, when I disappeared without a trace. I felt bad about it. I should have said something to them. But my mind had been in a completely different place. He was about to walk up to me when I glanced over and spotted Heather fast asleep in her bed.

"Hey, Cole," I said softly.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"I'll explain everything later, okay?"

"Okay."

I began to pull my clothes off, considering I had been in them for far too long. Cole was respectful enough to turn and pretend to do something else as I grabbed clothes for the day. I grabbed a pair of black shorts and buttoned them up, along with a looser dark gray tank top and pulled that over my head. I went to put my boots back on but, for once, I was allowed to be a little casual. So I stayed barefoot. Another leftover trait from Amity.

"Heather!" I yelled, slightly louder than I had meant to.

Everyone shot up in their beds and Heather went tumbling to the floor. All eyes were on me, looking very panicked. Heather looked like she had seen a ghost. They had all been wondering where I’d gone yesterday. "Alex?" Heather asked weakly.

"Uh, sorry guys. Go back to bed. Heather, come with me," I told them meekly.

Heather opened her mouth to say something but I didn’t give her the chance. We had to talk in private. I grabbed her hand, thankful that she had been wearing pants. I yanked her off of the floor and pushed her out through the door. A few people yelled behind us but I ignored them. We walked through the halls, getting a few strange looks along the way. Probably because of Heather. She was stuttering and complaining about how I couldn't even give her a second to get changed.

She would get her chance later. I walked us through the back of the compound near the loading bay, where I knew that no one would be. We headed over to the net and I pulled myself up and over, falling into it. I nearly laughed. I would have never been able to do that five months ago. I gave Heather my hand and she used it to help herself up onto the net, landing near me.

Heather only took a moment to compose herself before tackling me into a hug. We went sprawling back, me on my knees, as she embraced me tightly. I was a little stunned at the sudden action. I knew that Heather loved me, but I had never thought that she would be this concerned with me.

"Oh my God. What the hell is wrong with you?" Heather snapped.

For a moment I thought that she was going to slap me. I would have deserved it. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"I thought you were dead! You have no idea how hard it was keeping your secret and not knowing what had happened to you. Four kept asking me where you were and I kept having to lie to him and everyone else!"

Why did Four care where I was? He was my trainer and responsible for my whereabouts. "I'm sorry, Heather," I muttered.
"I thought that you were just going to Erudite. But you never came back," she said, softer this time.

A little pang shot through me. Her eyes were watering. I should have told her what was going on. I would have gone ape shit insane if she had done the same thing to me. "I'm sorry, Heather. I'm so sorry. I had a weird day," I told her pathetically.

The scowl never once faded from her face. She had to know everything. "That's a good excuse," she growled.

"I need to tell you everything that happened yesterday. It's a lot, so get comfortable," I said.

She nodded with hard eyes and leaned back, gripping the rope of the cross-sectioned net. I took a deep breath and launched into the story of one of the strangest days of my life. I told her about the trip to Erudite but skewed the details, telling her that I was there at personal request of Jeanine Matthews. I was glad that Heather didn't press the issue. I told her that Eric was in the train car and that he had cornered me. I told her that Eric had coerced me into coming back to his apartment that night. It was easy to see that Heather's eyes brightened at this. She was rooting for Eric and I to get together.

As I went through the story of my Erudite visit I made sure to exclude the part about it being Eric's original Faction and his parents. That was his past to tell. I told her about getting back to Dauntless and heading to Damien's apartment to end things. I told Heather about how Colt is Damien's brother, transfers from Erudite that had been planning my demise for weeks. My voice dropped as I told her about their plan to kill me and make it appear as a suicide. Heather looked horrified as she grabbed my hands tightly. I told Heather about how Eric had saved my life and how we had gone back to his apartment and stayed there for the night.

My entire story had taken forever to get through and not once had her attention faltered off of me. Finally, when I had finished my story, Heather managed to get the heartbroken look off of her face as she took a moment to compose herself. I could only imagine what she would have thought if I had told her about Jeanine's plan to use me for something for the war against Divergent's.

"Oh my God. Remind me to thank Eric the next time that I see him," she told me softly.

"Don't worry, I already said it."

"I'm so glad that you're alright. I hope they both get kicked out of Dauntless. Or executed. Or worse." Had I not been thinking about what had happened to me last night I would have laughed. "Alex I'm so glad that you're alright. Seriously. I love you," she said.

She was the best person that I could have asked for. "Thanks, Heather. I love you too. You have no idea how scared I was. I really thought that I was going to die. They're not going to be executed," I said.

"Why not?"

"No solid proof. I wish they were. Eric and Four moved Colt to the bottom of the leader board. Eric thinks that he won't be able to bring his ranking up by the end of initiation. He'll be Factionless." Her eyes brightened at this. "And Eric got Max to transfer Damien to full-time Fence duty. He'll live there. He won't ever come back to the compound," I explained.

I flopped back into the net and Heather followed me a moment later. The sun was warm and beating down on us from the break in the ceiling above and I smiled. "Good. For all of Eric's faults he did a good job," she said.
She had no idea just how much of a job he had actually done on them. "I'd be dead without him, so, yeah," I muttered.

"I just wish that he would have killed them," she snarled. As pissed as I was with those two, I didn't want to see them dead. Factionless was good. "Well then, I'm sorry for yelling at you."

"You don't have anything to be sorry for."

"So what happened? Eric just let you sleep on his couch?" she asked.

I forced the blush down. I had to tell her. She would kill me if I didn't tell her that Eric and I had slept together. "That's the other thing that I have to tell you. I couldn't find anything to say to him. He was in between yelling at me and asking me what the hell I was even doing with him in the first place. He just wanted me to say something but I couldn't. He said my name. He actually called me Alex. I couldn't believe it." I still couldn't believe it. Heather's jaw dropped in shock. "But, uh, I didn't sleep on his couch," I said awkwardly, keeping my voice as low as possible.

Part of me didn't want to have to tell her but I knew that I did. I was just glad that I didn't have to say it out loud. Heather was a smart girl, she would figure it out on her own. It wouldn't take her long. I could see the gears turning in her head and the dots connecting quickly. A curious look crossed over her face and she began to mutter slowly.


"Shut up!"

"Oh my God. You slept with him! You actually slept with him!" Heather continued to yell.

She was laughing hysterically and tears were building in her eyes. Heat was rising in my face. "Yes, I did. Now knock it off!"

"Oh God, tell me everything! Don't you dare leave any details out," Heather pressed.

She had jumped up to sit on her knees. I merely rolled my eyes and covered my face with my arms. I didn't want to see the look on her face when I told her everything. I obliged and told her every detail about what had happened between Eric and I last night. Every time I said something new I would peek out from behind my arms and see that her eyes had brightened. That was the thing about girls. We could give each other excruciatingly detailed recounts of our sex lives and never think that it was anything strange.

"So this morning we decided to give it a try. I mean, I'm not really sure whether or not we're actually dating. I don't think we are. But we're kind of together. If that makes any sense," I said.

"It doesn't," Heather teased.

We both laughed. "I know. He broke things off with Sarah because he knew that I wouldn't want anything to do with him if he didn't," I added, almost forgetting that part.

Heather smiled slightly as we both laid over the edge of the net. I wished that we could be out in the sun more often. It was one of the few things that I missed about Amity. The warm and inviting air. "That's surprisingly sweet of him," she said.

"It definitely surprised me."
"Alex, this is great! You and Eric are about as close to being together as the two of you can get," she told me.

I laughed at her. She was right about that. "We're never going to be those kinds of people. This is as close to a relationship as we can get. But that's okay," I said.

"That's so great though. You've gotta let me know how that turns out," Heather teased.

I rolled my eyes at her. "Sure thing," I groaned.

"So, tell me, what was it like?" she asked curiously.

I didn't blame her. If she had told me that she had slept with Four I would want to know how it went. They were guys that were so strangely secretive that it was almost impossible to think about what they were like in bed.

"It was great. Honestly, it was the best I've ever had," I said, blushing softly. He really was. "I mean he wasn't nice about it. He was rough and he was possessive. But it was exactly what I was expecting. And I was so happy that it happened. Seriously, it was great. I never wanted to stop. And neither did he. He was trying to get me to do it again before I left. But I had to go. I had to talk to you."

She merely gave me a devilish smirk. "Well I would have excused you if you really wanted to go round two," Heather teased. We both laughed loudly. I was starting to regret not going round two with him. "I won't say anything about it."

"Thanks. What we're doing is still against the rules."

That was the reason that I was telling her this. I trusted her just the way that I knew that she trusted me. "Just let me know if he hurts you," she said, cracking her knuckles.


There wasn't a doubt in my mind that Eric would hurt me. Maybe over something between us or maybe because of the Divergence. But I knew that Eric would hurt me. It was clear that Heather didn't like what I had said. She grabbed my hands as she leaned up a little bit to look me in the eyes. She was shaking her head desperately at me.

"Alex, don't say that," she practically pleaded with me. I felt my heart breaking. She didn't understand. Eric was dangerous. He was dangerous for me. "He cares about you. More than it seems like he cares about anyone else."

She was right. But Jeanine wasn't going to care when she orders him to capture me. "I know he does, Heather. He wouldn't have let me sleep in his bed last night if he didn't at least care about me a little bit." I wanted her to know about the Divergence but I knew that it was a bad idea. This was my battle. Not hers. "But I don't doubt that at some point Eric is going to hurt me. I'm not being negative. I'm being realistic," I said.

"Well fuck that," Heather snapped.

I jumped slightly as I sat up. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"I think that Eric might just prove you wrong. And I hope he does," she said.
"I hope he does too."

"He's a good man. I know that he is, under that tough demeanor. And it sounds like you're already on your way. It'll take a long time, but you guys will make it. I believe in you."

She was right. We could make it. But that meant that I had to work on this first. I had to beat Jeanine to the punch and I had to get Eric on my side. But how did I break the news that I was Divergent? They were questions for another time. I brushed those thoughts from my mind and grabbed Heather for a hug. She was always the type of person to talk to when I needed it.

"Thank you. I needed to hear that," I said.

"Of course. They're saying goodbye to Raven and Skylar. Wanna go?" Heather asked.

My heart dropped at the mention of the two girls leaving. I hadn't even remembered that they had to leave today. I was sad to see them go. They were both good girls. And I hated thinking that they were going to have to live as Factionless. I would have rather seen Hunter, Jade, and Colt go.

"Not really. But we should. Come on," I told her softly.

Heather nodded and we both flipped over ourselves, out of the net before dropping in crouches to the ground. I remembered with a fond smile that five months ago I had practically needed to be pulled out of the net by Four. Or as I had cleverly called him, Net Guy. We made the short trip to the loading bay to where all of my friends were standing with Raven and Skylar. It was easy to see that Jet was hanging on tightly to Raven. I walked up to the two girls, keeping my voice soft.

"Skylar, Raven? It was really great to meet the both of you and I'm sorry that this happened to you. I wish you could stay. But you're both tough and you'll make it," I told them honestly.

They might not have been tough enough to make it in Dauntless but I knew that Factionless life wouldn't be too bad for them. They were strong girls. It wouldn't be a problem. I just wish that they could have stayed with us. I hated that Dauntless kicked initiates out. It wasn't fair. But that was the way that life was.

"Thanks, Alex," Skylar told me with a smile. "I'm glad that we met you too. And I'm so glad that this is working out for you. You might have been raised Amity, but you're Dauntless to the core."

She wasn't wrong. But she sort of was. I was almost everything. "I appreciate that," I said.

"Oh, and if by some chance I ever see Colt, Jade, or Hunter out there, I'll say hi for you," she said with a grin.

I couldn't help it. I laughed loudly. "Thank you."

It was good to see her in high spirits even after being told that she was going to have to live Factionless. I grabbed Skylar and gave her a hug. Skylar kissed my cheek as she backed away and her place was taken by Raven, whom I hugged tightly. I had never spoken much with Raven but she had always seemed like a nice girl to me. She was better than some of the people that were getting to stay.

"It was really nice to meet you, Alex. This Faction is tough but you belong here. I'm glad that you came. Amity didn't suit you," she said.

Part of me wanted to smile at her but the other part didn't. She was just like Skylar. They were both too happy for what was happening to them. It was a good thing for them to be happy. Being
depressed would only make today worse. "Thanks, Raven. I wish that you could stay here. I'm sorry that you can't. But you have Skylar and you two will do well out there. I know you will," I said.

She smiled at me. "Thank you for that," she said.

I hated that she had to leave. And I hated the look that was on Jet's face. He loved her. "And don't worry about Jet. We'll take care of him," I told her softly.

She moved in to hug more once more. "Thank you," she whispered.

Taking a step back, we watched as everyone else said their goodbyes to each other. Heather and Dante stood with me for the most part, watching the goodbyes with the same sense of guilt that I was feeling. Even though we had earned our spots here in Dauntless, it was hard to watch other people leave. People that had fought just as hard as we had. I turned and watched the Dauntless born saying goodbye to their friends too. They seemed much more emotional. These were kids that they had grown up with. They were family. It broke my heart.

I turned to look away and watch as Jet finished up his goodbye with Raven. He had taken the longest to say goodbye to her. I prided him deeply that he didn't kiss her. I would have if I were him. I grabbed Jet's arm gently and pulled him away from her. It was time for them to leave.

Jet leaned his weight on me and I let him as we watched seven friends leave the compound. Only a few were crying. Raven and Skylar looked strong as they left. Jet should be proud of her. They were walking out in a large group and my friends and I stayed with Jet until they were out of sight. Once they had finally disappeared over the road I grabbed Jet's shoulder and gently tugged him into the compound once more. It was lunch time. He didn't look happy to leave, but it was time.

As we all grabbed our food and sat in the corner, near the initiate tables, I realized that even with only seven gone, it looked extremely empty. Of course Hunter, Jade, and Colt were still nowhere to be found. Not really paying attention to what I was doing, I grabbed whatever Heather was having and followed her back to the table as we all took our seats. Heather and Cole were in their usual seats on my left. Buck was on my right and Draven, Jet, Jax, and Dante were on the other side of the table.

While everyone else tried to cheer up Jet for what we had just had to do, I was softly talking with Heather about the celebration last night. There had been some massive party to celebrate the end of Stage One of training. It sounded fun. I wished that I had been there with them. But I had gotten my own little celebration.

"Alex, where were you yesterday?" Buck asked through the soft conversations.

I was a little startled at the sudden question and hoped that I didn't look like I had been caught in a lie. "Oh, I got some news from the Erudite Medical Center," I said awkwardly.

"Come on Alex, think. Make up a good lie. My friends all looked worried for me. I had told them that my mother was pregnant the minute that I had gotten back that night. I had also told them that she would be going there when it was time to give birth. Heather knew that it was a lie but she still put a nervous look on her face. I was so glad for her in that moment. She wasn't going to give away my lie.

"They thought that something might be wrong with my Mom. I was there all night with them. This morning they ran more tests. She's fine," I answered quickly, hoping that it answered any plot holes. They all smiled once more. "I just got back an hour ago."
Dante was the first one to recover from my story. "We're glad to hear your Mom is alright," Dante said, placing his hand on my thigh.

"Thank you," I said softly.

Even though my story was a blatant lie I was glad to see that they all cared about more than just me. They cared about my family too. They were my family. Everyone was silent for a few minutes as we all went back to our meals. I appreciated the silence. After everything that had happened today, I realized that it was a very heavy day for everyone. We'd lost some of our own friends and family today.

"Hey does anyone know where Colt, Jade, or Hunter are?" Dante finally asked.

My head perked up. I was actually rather curious about what had happened to the three of them. Hunter was still allowed to eat lunch with us and so was Colt. But neither were here. I hadn't even seen them when we were saying goodbye to everyone. I assumed that wherever they were, Jade was too.

"I saw Colt this morning actually," Jax said.

My eyebrow popped up. "Where?" I asked.

"I couldn't sleep so I took a quick walk. He was limping down to the infirmary with some Dauntless member. They both looked beaten half to hell." Damien. Everyone looked shocked. Heather was the only one that didn't."I helped them down and asked what happened. They didn't say anything though. Just said that some guy jumped them near the Chasm. I guess Jade and Hunter are with him," Jax said.

It was a damned lie. I was curious why Colt hadn't told the truth, but I assumed that it was because Colt was now terrified of Eric. Or maybe he was afraid of accidentally condemning himself by admitting that he'd tried to kill me. All I knew was that he had to be scared of Eric now. I was scared of him too. We all were. Anyone with half of a brain was.

"Jesus. I hate them but I can't believe that someone would just jump them," Draven said softly.

I wanted to scream at him, to tell him that they had both deserved it. To tell them that they had tried to kill me. But I didn't. I stared awkwardly down at my plate, mirroring Heather. We were the two that knew the entire truth. We both knew that Colt had deserved it and that he had lied.

"Maybe they had it coming. I mean Colt isn't exactly the most friendly," Draven said.

He had no idea how right he was. "I'd do it if I got the chance," I muttered.

"We all know that you would," Cole teased.

I merely stayed silent and didn't bother to tell them that Colt and Damien had had it coming. That would open up a whole other can of worms. I went back to eating my food and talking with Jax and Heather about the upcoming stage of training. Heather seemed to be extremely nervous. Jax didn't sound nervous but I knew that he was. Everyone was. No one knew exactly what was coming. The sim for each person was different. It wasn't like one person could go through it and then explain what was coming to everyone else.

"Hey, you guys," Cole's voice broke over the group. Everyone looked up to see what he was talking about. "Looks like Eric had a good night last night."
There was a little smirk on his face. I immediately stiffened. What the hell did that mean? Did he know that something had happened? Of course not. There would have been screams from all over the table and I'd probably be dead. I looked over to see that Eric was talking with Zeke, Four, and Cameron. Eric looked less than thrilled to be talking with them all. I fought the blush that came to my face as I remembered him, without clothing, climbing on top of me last night. I searched all over his body with my eyes before I saw it. Nail marks. They were on the back of his neck and were barely peeking out of his shirt. I dropped my hands into my lap and paled as my friends all began to snicker.

"Dear God, who would be crazy enough to sleep with Eric?" Jet asked.

Me. But I didn't dare say that out loud. Heather's hand was tight on my thigh and I silently thanked her. I tried to drink some water to drown out their comments but my hands were shaking too badly. I nearly spilled the water on myself. Placing the water back on the table I stared at the boys and tried to put a smile on my face.

"Apparently a lot of girls here like him. I heard some of them talking about it. He takes lots of girls home but never lets them stay the night," Buck said. All of the guys laughed as both Heather's and my lips twitched slightly in amusement. He let me stay. "I heard some girl, seriously pissed off this morning. She was apparently with Eric. I guess he broke it off for another girl."

I hope none of them were looking at me as my face paled once more. My back stiffened to the point where I thought that I might break it. I had thought that Eric had just ended their relationship without reason. And I had never thought about how Sarah might feel. I hadn't cared. And now I felt shitty for never once thinking about her.

"Did they say who the girl was?" Heather asked.

I could have kissed her for asking. But I also could have slapped her. She might have just well given them the indication that it was me. But the boys, even the ones from Erudite, were morons. What else could you expect from sixteen and seventeen year old boys?

"In their words. 'Some whore.' But I can't imagine that Eric would want a sweet little girl," Buck said.

The boys laughed once more and I saw Heather's jaws grinding. "Man I wish they'd said who she was," Cole added.

"Insane. That's who," Dante laughed.

I knew that Heather wanted to say something so I grabbed her leg and shook my head at her. They were right in their own ways. If I had never seen the sides of Eric that I had had I would have been laughing right along with them. But my blood boiled at Sarah's words. How dare she call me a whore? Of course, she didn't know who I was. She probably thought that Eric had just found some new lay. It was a good thing that she didn't know who I was.

They were all laughing and I forced out a fake laugh so I didn't look too strange. I had to keep laughing. I was always the one to laugh when the joke was at Eric's expense, considering that we had constantly been barking back and forth at each other for the last few months.

"Hey, shut up! Eric is looking over here," Draven snapped.

The laughter died quickly as we all looked back down at our plates. Conversations started back up slowly, many about the second stage of training, before I dared to look back up. Eric was watching our table with narrowed eyes. I could only hope that he hadn't overheard what we had just been
talking about. He gave me a quick wink before his eyes hardened once more and a glare settled over
his features.

Hopefully he hadn’t heard any of our comments. I grinned and looked back towards my table. As my
head turned, I noticed that Four was watching me closely. A lump formed in my throat and I gulped.
He knew. I wasn't sure how he knew, but he did. And I knew that he was going to say something
about it tomorrow. Trying to shake that thought from my head I turned back to the conversations and
sunk into them happily. Every once in a while I would notice Eric watching me but he never said
anything to me and I never said anything to him. We had to act normal. For now.

Eric P.O.V.

Eric was currently bored out of his mind, speaking with some higher up Dauntless members. He had
no clue what they were even talking about. This was typically Max's forte. But Max was currently
on an extended trip to Erudite, leaving Eric in charge. He knew that it was something about bettering
the relations between the rest of the Factions. It made Eric want to explode. The other Factions were
pathetic. Especially Erudite. But, of course, they were who Dauntless worked with the most.

They were also talking about having Stage Two of initiation ready. Not that he cared. Eric typically
wasn't present through it. Just for a few days. Or if the initiates were slower than usual he would split
them up with Four. Eric was a leader. He had to be here but he didn't have to listen. And he wasn't.
He couldn't really even focus. He was thinking about last night. He was still steaming over the
Roberts brothers. He had known that they were bad news for a long time. He had even warned her.
But she hadn't listened. She was stupid. They would have killed her if he hadn't come through. He
should have killed them.

His mind was swarming with all sorts of things and part of them was Jeanine's proposal about the
Divergent's. She had told him just yesterday when he had gone to Erudite. He didn't even really
know what they were. They were just people with more than one aptitude. But Jeanine seemed to
think that they were dangerous and she was a powerful figure with Eric under her control. She had
warned him to watch out for the initiates during Stage Two. She was confident that one of the
initiates this year was one.

Eric couldn't help but to wonder if maybe his Amity was. It might make sense with the way that her
Aptitude Test story kept changing. But it couldn't be her. It couldn't. Not when Jeanine wanted them
all dead. It wasn't her. In the meantime Eric would work with Jeanine. She had essentially ordered it.
He had to work with her. Max hadn't given him another choice. One day he would know more.
Jeanine had said she would eventually divulge more of her plans.

The trip to Erudite had just continued to make Eric curious what his Amity was doing in Erudite
yesterday. She had told him it was to get her mother's medical records but he knew that it was a lie.
She hadn't even known what day her mother had last been there. It made his suspicions only increase
that perhaps she was one of them, but she couldn't be. If she was, she would have been stupid to
walk right into Jeanine's lair. But she had never been the brightest bulb in the bunch.

It didn't matter. He would find out the truth. It was killing him that he didn't know why she was lying
to him. He was always good at finding out the truth. With everyone but her. He would get it out of
her. He just had to wait. He was not a patient man. But this time he had to be. There was no other
way.

He had to stop thinking about Erudite. It was driving him insane the way that Jeanine felt that she
needed someone else to do her bidding. So instead he thought about the night before. It was the first
night that he had ever let someone sleep in his bed. At least not while he was in it too. Sarah had
once slept in his bed and he was furious when he had seen her still there.
But his Amity was different. He hated that he didn't mind that she had slept in his bed. He nearly laughed when he remembered her actions in the middle of the night. She had rolled over half on top of him, who had been sleeping on his back, and take one of his legs in between hers. It was the friendliest that he had ever seen her towards him.

Eric had never been so happy to have a girl finally sleep with him. He'd had to say her name but it was well worth it. The look on her face alone was worth it. But what had happened in his bed was what made it the most worth it. He had known that she would be good in bed. And he was right. Although her nails hurt like hell. He knew that they were showing from the top of his shirt but he wore them as badges of honor. And he hoped that if she saw them she would be embarrassed.

The way that she had acted in the morning had surprised him slightly. She had seemed so vulnerable. But they had finally agreed to keep it going and see how it went. It wasn't a real relationship but it was something. And Eric felt like it was the most profound relationship that he had ever been in. He could listen to her without wanting to strangle her. At least most of the time. And he found himself not completely hating that she knew as much as she did about him. Still, he wished that she knew less.

Not even Cameron knew as much about him as she did. The speaking stopped and Eric knew that they were all done debating. He called an end to the meeting and he turned to leave. Immediately he caught her laughing loudly with her friends. She was half leaning onto the Candor transfer, Buck, and Eric ground his teeth. Whatever. She could do what she wanted. He would always show her who she really belonged to. Eric rolled his eyes and headed to his apartment. This was one of their few days off and he knew much better things that they could be doing. Contrary to what she though, Eric had work to do. He had to finish Roberts's transfer to the Fence.

"You look oddly happy. What's going on?" Cameron asked, appearing at Eric's side. If there was anything that he was good at, it was sneaking up on people.

Eric's gaze snapped over to his friend and he narrowed his eyes. He hated that he couldn't let the slightest emotion slip through his eyes without Cameron noticing. "What the hell are you talking about?" Eric asked.

It wouldn't be long before Cameron figured out what happened. He was once Erudite, too. But Eric still managed to keep a cross look on his face. Cameron's eyes narrowed as they walked into Eric's apartment. Eric wanted nothing more than to kick Cameron out but he knew that even if he said to leave, Cameron wouldn't. That was the type of man that he was.

"They might not have seen it but I did. You were keeping a closer eye on the initiates than normal. You and Four," he said.

Eric stiffened. He had noticed Four watching her closely and he didn't like it. "No we weren't," Eric snapped.

He didn't give a damn if Four knew. But he didn't want him trying to deter his Amity from him.
"Sure you weren't," Cameron said. "What happened? And why were one of the transfers and Damien Roberts in the infirmary this morning?"

For a moment Eric wished that Cameron would have stayed in Erudite. Or gone to Candor. "I don't know. I don't keep track of them," Eric sneered.

"They keep insisting that they were jumped near the Chasm. But no one would do something like that. And they're afraid to say their attacker's name. Which means that they're powerful. Or someone they're scared of," Cameron reasoned.
It didn't take a genius to know that Cameron was insinuating that Eric had been the one to attack them. He might as well admit it. It would get him to finally shut up if nothing else. "They attacked her. Last night," Eric said.

Cameron's eyebrow quirked in questioning. "What do you mean?" Cameron asked.

"I was walking by Roberts's apartment and I heard her scream. They'd cornered her. Tried to kill her. The transfer wanted her dead. I guess because her fight with the other transfer got him beat half to hell and all of them dropped low on the rankings board."

Even though Cameron kept his face steady, Eric knew that he was horrified and furious. What Colt had done was cowardly. Cameron had become very fond of her in the past few weeks and Eric knew that he would hate to hear that she had been hurt, nevertheless nearly killed, by someone.

"She looked alright to me. No underlying injuries?" he asked.

"One bone out of place. I fixed it."

"Good job, man. I'm glad she's alright. I hear Roberts if getting a transfer request to full-time Fence duty."

"Couldn't risk having him here," Eric explained.

"I thought that might have something to do with you. What are you going to do with the initiate?" Cameron asked.

Eric shrugged, despite the fact that he was furious that he couldn't at least make Colt Factionless. But he would. Four had actually believed Eric. It was one of the few things that Eric had ever been able to thank Four for. They were going to make sure that there was no way that Colt could raise his ranking above the red line.

"We have no solid proof that anything happened to her. So I can't throw him out of Dauntless. But I dropped him to the lowest ranking and I'll be sure to make it as hard as possible for him to raise it. He'll be gone after Phase Two," Eric said nonchalantly.

He didn't care about the people that were only here temporarily. Like the seven initiates who had left this morning. A few months ago he had thought that the smart-mouthed Amity would be one. But now he was thrilled that she was staying. "Good. I've always thought Erudite were sketchy." Both Eric and Cameron laughed loudly. It was an old joke between the two of them since they had decided a few years ago that they would be coming to Dauntless. "But that's not why you're happy. That would be why you were pissed. Something else happened. What was it?" Cameron asked.

Eric stayed silent as they both walked over to the couch. Eric picked up a liquor bottle and held out two glasses. It wasn't often that he got the chance to drink with his oldest friend. But he did not want to talk about her with him. He knew that Cameron would pressure him to tell him what they were. And Eric didn't know.

"Eric?" Cameron pressed.

"You can leave me the hell alone about talking to her," Eric snapped, hoping to end the conversation.

Of course he should have known that his defensive attitude would only encourage Cameron. He loved to talk about things that made Eric uncomfortable. Especially when it came to her. Mostly because he was rooting for them to get together. "You did something. You told her how you felt?"
"There are no feelings," Eric said.

He didn't completely hate her. That was about the extent of his feelings towards her. "Uh-huh. Or you showed her how you felt," Cameron said with a smirk. He finally seemed to understand what had happened the night before.

Eric merely shrugged as he looked over to Cameron. He hated how well his friend could read him. "You told me to sleep with her," he said with as little emotion in his voice as he could muster. And that was pretty close to nothing.

Cameron's eyes widened slightly and his grip on his glass faltered. But he didn't drop it. He merely suppressed a laugh. "Damn man, you didn't," he said with a faint hint of shock in his voice.

"You sure?"

"You did!" Cameron yelled with a little laugh.

Eric joined in on the laughter and took a drink of the amber liquid that he had poured. "Sure did," Eric said.

Cameron joined him with a proud smirk on his face. Eric had finally done what he had wanted him to do all this time. "Cheers to that," Cameron muttered. Both men raised their glasses to each other before draining the glass. "It's good, Eric. You two are good together. You will be good together," he said more to himself. But his head quickly popped up and he glared at Eric. "Please tell me you didn't just sleep with her and kick her out."

If there was one thing that Cameron wanted in Eric's relationship with Alex, it was that they actually stayed together. Not that they just enjoyed each other's company in bed for an hour before leaving and never really speaking to each other. Eric merely laughed at his friend's plea. He knew him too well. But what Cameron didn't know was that Eric felt a strange mixture of feelings for his Amity. Certain emotions that he was sure he would never admit to her.

"I let her sleep in my bed," Eric told his friend.

Cameron's straight face fell into one of shock. Not that Eric blamed him. Cameron knew as well as anyone else that Eric never let any woman stay in his bed. "You did what?" Cameron asked.

The room was silent for a moment and Eric hated the look that Cameron was giving him. "You heard me," Eric snapped.

"You're serious?" he asked with a low voice.

"Yeah."

"Well damn. Buddy I never thought I'd see you like that with a girl," Cameron said with a little laugh.

Eric scowled and took another drink. He would never change for a girl. Not for her. Not for anyone. That was not the type of man that he was. He didn't have it in him. "I'm not like anything with her," Eric snarled under his breath.

"I don't mean that you're going to walk hand-in-hand with her down the hallway or get married or anything like that." Eric snorted. He wasn't ever going to get married. "But I think that you should be
with her. Be happy with her. When initiation is over, show her off. She's hot," Eric said.

She was. "I know she is," he said.

"And from what I heard her saying to her friend, the Candor transfer, she's bendy," Cameron joked.

He waggled his eyebrows slightly and Eric laughed loudly. At least she hadn't lied to her friend. That was the truth. She was bendy. And he intended to find out just how bendy she was tonight. "I don't really know what we decided to do but she's coming back tonight," Eric said honestly.

He didn't like the idea of relationships. They sounded childish to him. And he hated thinking that one person could have control over another one's life. He hated that. "That's good," Cameron said.

"She can't keep spending the night though. Her friends will notice if she's gone," Eric said.

Cameron glanced up from his glass and raised an eyebrow. "You sure you want her sleeping in her dorm because her friends will notice. Or maybe it's because you don't want to get too close to her?" Cameron asked.

Eric scowled and downed the drink that he had in his hands. "I'm not getting close to her," Eric snarled.

Of course it was because he didn't want to get too close to her. He couldn't. "It wouldn't kill you," Cameron said.

Her sleeping in his bed was just a fluke. He couldn't let her keep doing that. No matter how much he thought that he might want it. "Well it's not happening," Eric said quickly.

Cameron let out a soft sigh. "Eric, I've known you for a long time. You're my best friend. You're my brother and I want to see you happy. And I can see it with her. You're happy. Just... Don't let her go," Cameron said.

Eric and Cameron had never been the types to have heart-to-heart conversations and when they did they were always one sided. Neither man ever wanted to confront their feelings, so when it came time to, the other one had to be the one to get it started. It was part of what made them so close.

"You're starting to sound like a damn woman," Eric growled.

"I'm not the one in a relationship," Cameron shot back.

"Or getting laid," Eric added.

Both men laughed once more and took a few more drinks. He'd probably be at the very least slightly intoxicated when she came back but Eric didn't care. He was bored with nothing to do. He had never realized just how much more fun she made his days. She annoyed the hell out of him and sometimes he really wanted to kill her. But he sure as hell didn't want her to leave. And that was what scared him. He had never found himself attached to a woman's personality as well as their mind.

They were silent for a while and drank glass after glass. But they could handle their liquor. Eric knew that when Cameron left he wouldn't have to wonder if the man had gone and accidentally pitched himself over the edge of the Chasm. He had seen it happen before, and it was sure to happen again.

"So tell me," Eric looked over at Cameron who was looking back at him with a wide smirk, "Is she as bendy as she looks?"
Today had been one of the best and easiest days that we had all had in a while. All day long my friends and I had teased each other relentlessly. I had laughed more today than I had since training had begun. It was needless to say that since the weight of being kicked out of Dauntless had lifted off of everyone's shoulders we all felt much more at ease. Even Jet had started to laugh a bit at our jokes. We were all glad that our bodies were no longer going to be bruised and everyone was happy to hear that Eric wouldn't be as large of a presence during training anymore.

For a long time I had sat with Jet to comfort him over the loss of Raven, but now that he was in a deep conversation with Dante I had moved off. Most of the day I had been thinking about Eric but I kept trying to push him out of my mind. I don't want to think about him right now. Instead of thinking about tonight, I was leaning over a sleeping Buck, trying to draw a mustache on him.

"Yo, Alex!" Heather yelled, breaking my concentration.

Buck sat bolt upright in his bed and smacked his face with the marker. I panicked and tossed the marker off to the side, hitting Cole with it. He grabbed it and tossed it under the bed, before Buck could realize what we had all been jumping around for. I stood quickly and smiled at Buck, who now had a huge mark across his face. I tried to fight back the laughter as Buck glared at Heather and laid down to go back to bed.

I turned back to Heather with a grin. "Yes, Heather?" I asked.

"You made me go get a tattoo after the first fights. Now after Phase One, I want you to go get a piercing with me!" she yelled.

Heather had to be joking. We had just finished with physical training. I had wanted to wait a while. "You're kidding," I groaned to her.

But I wanted to take a quick nap. There was no doubt in my mind that Eric was not going to let me get any sleep tonight. "I'm not kidding," Heather said.

"I did say that after Phase One was over I wanted a piercing that no one could use against me in a fight," I admitted.

Heather looked excitable. I knew that she didn't want to go by herself. "Exactly!"

Besides, I happened to remember something that Tori had once told me. That when Eric admitted something I had to tell her first. Now I knew exactly what she meant. Tori had known the entire time that something was going on between Eric and me. And this was the perfect opportunity to tell her.

"Alright. Come on!" I yelled.

We dashed out of the room, shouting goodbyes to the boys. They had all yelled for us to get something crazy pierced. My favorite suggestion was Buck's, who told us to put horns on our heads. If only he was standing in front of a mirror. He would get me back for it eventually. And I would retaliate with that mustache. Heather and I walked out to the Pit, laughing loudly and shoving each other around.

There was still danger waiting for me, but I missed the days of careless laughter with Heather. When my greatest worry had been whether or not Eric was going to kick me out of Dauntless. We arrived at the tattoo and piercing parlor and I dragged Heather to the back of the store, where Tori was propped up and playing on her tablet. It looked like she was talking to someone on it.
She turned back to us and waved. "Got customers, talk you later," she muttered to whoever was on the screen. She tapped it quickly and stowed it before looking back to us. "Hey, Amity!"

"Hey, Tori!" I chirped.

Tori was funny like that. And I wouldn't want her any other way. "Good to see you again. Hear you were in sixth place at the end."

"I sure was."

"Not bad girl," she said.

I smiled at her and said, "Thank you."

I intended for that ranking to go up in the next few months. "And Heather right?"

"Yep!" Heather chirped.

"Glad that you both made it. Phase Two can definitely be worse. It can be really draining but at least you aren't beat to hell," she said.

My body was thanking me for the end of physical training but I was not looking forward to what my mind would go through. Eric and Tori had told me that it would be the worst part of training. "No bruises and beatings sound good to me," Heather said happily.

"Good to hear," I joked. "I know that they replenished our credits based on the ranking that we came in and I wanted to get something done. A piercing," I said.

She had a few piercings and her hair was a little crazy, but it was always her tattoos that got me. She had them literally all over her. "We can do that," Tori said.

"Now that physical training is over I thought it would be a good time to do it. No one can grab onto it and use it against me. Can you do it?" I asked.

I needed the chance to talk to her with no one else around. "Good thing that you waited. Trust me, I was stupid when I was younger. I got the nose piercing two days before my first fight. Guy I fought punched me in the ring. I thought he was going to rip it out," she said.

Both Heather and I cringed and I grabbed the side of my nose. I could practically feel how painful it was. And judging by the look on Tori's face I assumed that she was remembering the hit. "Oh that's awful," I said, pressing my hand against my nose.

"It sure was. That's why I always recommend that no one get anything pierced during Phase One," Tori said.

"Good choice," Heather muttered.

"Anyways, yeah I can do it. I don't usually, but I swear I won't screw it up," she said. Both Heather and I laughed. "Heather you want a piercing too?"

"Yeah. The side of the nose," Heather said.

"Not a problem. Corey is right over in the next room. He can do it for you. Tell him I sent you."

"Okay," Heather said. As she walked off, she called back, "Get something that your man will like!"
"Man?" Tori asked.

At least Heather would make it less of a surprise. "I really wanted to come here and talk to you. But I wanted a piercing too. Maybe navel?" I asked Tori.

She nodded as she went to getting the piercing gun ready. It looked extremely painful. "Navel works for me. It'll look good on you. You've got the stomach for it. And I'm sure that your man will like it," she told me.

Her voice carried a little bit of a teasing lilt to it and I smiled. "I know that he will," I said.

We sat in silence for a while as Tori got the piercing gun out and set the needle up inside of it. "Stand up for a minute." I followed Tori's order and watched as she drew two dots where the bar would come out and the needle would go through. "All good. Lay back on the table and lift up your shirt," Tori ordered.

I nodded at her and plopped myself down on the table, taking a deep breath. A few days ago Lisa had told me that the navel was her most painful piercing. And she had a lot. It made me nervous. She buzzed around the room for a moment and I turned to look at her. Not that I could really entirely see her.

"Tori?" I called.

"What's up?"

"Do you remember when I came to you for my first tattoo and you told me that you wanted to be the first person to know when Eric admitted whatever it was that you thought he would admit?" I asked her quickly.

It sounded like it had come out as almost an entire word. "I do," she said.

The corners of Tori's lips pulled upwards as she grabbed a box to show me a few starter rings. There was one pretty one with a small crystal in the top and a black rose in the bottom. "That one," I pointed and Tori nodded as she pulled it out. "Anyways, I wanted to tell you, I get it now. What you meant."

My voice was soft enough so that no one could hear me. Even through Tori's braids were in her face, I could see the large smile. "Oh, do you?" she asked.

I could tell that she was going to push me to tell her what had happened between Eric and me, but she was also the type of person that would want to see if I would admit it first or if she would have to drag it out of me. It might be a combination of both. She cleaned the area around my stomach and I shivered at the sudden cold.

"Yes. I do," I told her. Tori smiled and I watched as she loaded the piercing gun. "Eric and me, I guess we finally admitted that we liked each other last night. Maybe not like but we uh, don't completely hate each other. If that makes any sense?"

"It does."

"I mean we aren't really together but we kind of are. I mean... This doesn't go past us, right?" I asked suddenly.

Tori smiled and said, "Of course not. Head back."
"We slept together yesterday. And he actually let me spend the night," I admitted.

Right as I said it, Tori's piercing gun punched out the piece of skin where the piercing would be and I yelped in pain. I hadn't been expecting it and I hadn't been expecting it to hurt that badly. How did Lisa have so many of these things? Tori merely smiled bashfully at me and pushed the ring into place, wiping away a little bit of blood.

"Sorry about that. I was going to wait but you startled me. I promise it's straight," she told me and I smiled.

We both laughed. "I trust you," I said.

"You didn't surprise me with him sleeping with you," she told me and I scoffed.

"Well that's embarrassing," I laughed.

"But he let you stay the night?" Tori asked.

A soft blush fell over my face. Apparently it was a really big deal that Eric had let me sleep in his bed. He had told me himself that I was the only person that he had ever let sleep in his bed. "Yeah. I didn't really think that he would but we just rolled over and went to bed," I said and she smiled.

I wanted to defend myself and tell her that I was tired but I figured that it would make me look even worse. "Is that so?" she asked.

"He didn't look angry this morning either so I assumed that he was fine with it. I don't want to question him on it. I don't think that he'll like that," I said softly.

Tori nodded at me. "I agree. Don't mention it to him," she said.

"It was probably just a one time thing," I muttered.

"We'll see. I'm just impressed that he didn't kick you out. He kicks all of his guests out at night. He never lets them stay," she said.

Part of me wanted to ask how many other guests he had ever had, but the other part of me told me that I wouldn't like the number. "He told me that," I said.

"But I can't say that I'm totally shocked. You're different to Eric. He likes you more than I've ever seen him like anyone else. And I can see it in you too. You like him," she told me with a bright grin.

I blushed slightly and stood to let Tori jiggle the ring slightly. There was a dull throb as it moved in my stomach but I kept calm. It really hadn't been as bad as I had thought that it would be. I was glad that Tori had done it without counting down. It would have just made me nervous. Tori let me look and I smiled. With my other tattoos and red-tipped hair, I looked good. But my Dauntless look wasn't done.

"Thanks, Tori. Looks good," I told her and she beamed. "And yeah, I do. I just don't want to do anything to screw it up. Eric isn't the type of guy for relationships so I don't really know how to take this."

The whole thing was awkward, but it was the truth. I had no idea how to approach a relationship with Eric. Tori was cleaning up her materials but she stopped and walked up to me, grabbing my hands in hers. She reminded me of an older sister and I smiled at her. I hoped that one day I would get a chance to be this way with my sister.
"My advice to you. Take it slow. Take it super slow. With the emotional stuff anyways. Let him decide when he's ready to take a step forward. I don't know a lot about Eric's life before Dauntless but I do know that he didn't have the same happy childhood that you did," she said.

Thinking back to my meeting with Eric's parents I scowled. He was never a child. He was an experiment. It made me happy that he had met my parents. I hoped that they had all been good to each other when they had walked off.

"Just take it slow. He'll appreciate it. And it looks hot by the way, the piercing. Get out of here. Show it off to Eric," she continued.

Laughing loudly I pulled Tori into a hug and waved her off. Thanking her profusely for the piercing I left the older woman to clean up her materials and headed to the front counter to pay. Heather was already there and watching as the woman took away her newly earned points for a new silver stud in her nose. It was small and I smiled. It suited Heather well.

"Hey!" Heather yelled and I waved to her. "What did you get done?"

"Navel," I said, lifting my shirt to show her the new piercing.

"Cute! I was thinking about getting one but I really liked the nose," she admitted.

She had been about to tap her nose when she stopped herself and I laughed. I assumed that it probably hurt. I told the woman my name and she nodded as she docked the points that I had just earned. Heather and I had to be the worst two at managing our points.

"I like it too. It suits you," I said.

"Thanks."

The woman waved us off with a reminder to come back for more. We laughed, seeing as we definitely would. We headed into the Pit together. "And Cole will like it too," I told Heather with a wink.

She laughed and nodded at me. "Eric will love yours," she teased.

He damn well better. "I was thinking about maybe doing the nose but I really wanted a belly button piercing. Maybe next time. Or another tattoo," I said.

Tori had once told me that they were addictive and she was right. "You can come back and get the nose when I come back to do the navel," Heather said and I nodded. We shook hands with a little hint of laughter. "Hey you should go show that off to Eric."

There was a suggestive smile on her face and I blushed, smiling at her. She knew exactly what had been on my mind. "You sure about our girl day?" I asked.

"No worries, I was thinking about finding a broom closet or something for Cole and I," Heather shrugged.

I laughed loudly and threw my head back. I felt for Heather. She couldn't go to the dorms even when they were empty. There were cameras there. And she didn't know another Dauntless member to use their bedroom. At least she only had another three months before they could have a real bed. I was glad that I wasn't the only one doing things that we shouldn't have been doing.

"Just go to the corner of the Pit, no one ever heads over there," I half-joked.
She laughed and shoved me roughly as we walked down the first of the hallways that would lead us
to the fork where I could go see Eric and Heather could go hunt for a secluded spot for her and Cole.
"You coming back to the dorms tonight?" Heather asked.

"As much as I'd like to stay with him, I should come back to the dorms. I need a good night's sleep
for the first day of mental training," I said.

"Alright, I'll let them know you headed out with the Dauntless born for a little while," Heather told
me.

She turned back to leave and I smiled after her. "You're an angel, Heather!" I called loudly after her.

She laughed and turned back to me with a quick smile before walking through the halls and heading
to the Pit. She had a swagger in her step that wasn't normally there. I probably shouldn't be in the
member hall without an excuse as to why, so I just hoped to not to run into any members. A small
knot in my stomach formed as I looked over at Damien's door. I couldn't help but to wonder if he
was already at the Fence or if he was still here. I wouldn't find out. I passed the other doors quickly
before knocking on Eric's.

For a moment I felt stupid and wished that I hadn't come here. I didn't even know whether or not
Eric wanted me here and I sure as hell didn't know if he actually wanted me to come see him this
soon. Maybe he only wanted to seek me out when he wanted me. I was about to turn from the door
when I heard some shuffling and I froze in my spot. I smiled as the door opened but the smile
immediately dropped off of my face. It wasn't Eric. It was Cameron. My mind was screaming at me
to run but I stayed rooted to my spot.

"Ah, Alex," he greeted.

"Hi, Cameron," I said awkwardly.

"It's alright, I should be leaving anyways. I have to head out to Abnegation in the morning. Have a
fun night you two. Careful, the walls aren't soundproof," he said.

Cameron winked at me before brushing past and disappearing out the door. It was easy to see that he
was stumbling slightly. A blush was prominent on my face and I rolled my eyes. I had blushed more
today than I had my entire life. Of course he had told Cameron. I had told Heather, too. But he had
told me not to tell anyone. Dirty liar. I scowled as I walked over to where he was draped over the
couch. He was sitting with his legs slightly open and a bottle on the counter. An almost empty bottle.
Were they really just drinking all day?

"Productive day you've had," I said as I walked into his view.

He smirked up at me. "Just as productive as yours," he said.

"And what happened to not telling anyone?" I asked with my hands on my hips.

Eric shrugged at me. "You told Heather and Tori, I told Cameron," he told me nonchalantly.

I tried to think of something to say but nothing was coming out. I simply stuttered stupidly. How the
hell had he known that I had told them? "What?" I asked dumbly.

He moved to sit up a little straighter on the couch. "There are cameras all over Dauntless. By the net
and in the shops. The smiles on their faces, not many things that would have caused those," he told
me.
I should have known better. There were cameras everywhere in Dauntless and Eric was patrolling them. I should have known that he would figure it out if I told someone. Oh well, at least he didn't seem mad. "Very clever," I told him snappily.

I waited for him to say something. He was just sitting on the couch with a lazy grin up at me. I wanted to smack him. He had just been drinking all day with Cameron and was now drunk. "Come here," Eric growled.

"Have you seriously just been sitting here and drinking with your friend all day?" I asked.

"I had a meeting earlier," he said, grabbing the back of my bare thighs, bringing me closer to him.

I squeaked a little bit as I tripped over him. His fingers splayed themselves over the back of my thighs. His fingers were rough but I liked it. But I could also smell the liquor on his breath. "Damn Eric, you've had way too much to drink. Just the two of you nearly emptied that whole bottle. Go to bed," I told him.

The snarl on his face told me that there was no way in hell that he was going to listen to me. "Not without you," he growled.

His words were the tiniest bit slurred but he was steady enough on his feet to stand. I wasn't going to admit it I was glad that he didn't listen to me. "Eric," I groaned through a laugh.

"You know this is the only day we actually had off. And you could have stayed here," he told me darkly.

"I know. But I had things to do," I said.

Eric grabbed the bottom of my shirt and I let him pull it over my head. His eyes immediately dropped to the piercing and he smiled. "A flower? How very, Amity," he sneered.

I rolled my eyes at him. Even half-drunk he knew how to get on my nerves. "Yeah, Erudite. I might be a little Amity, but at least I'm not acting like a Stiff right now," I snapped back.

I knew that if there was one thing that Eric would hate being called more than an Erudite, it would be getting called a Stiff. Something that he was most certainly not. But I wanted him to make a move and I didn't want him to wait. All hints of his previous drunken behavior had vanished. I knew that it would get to him. He whirled on me and shoved me back into the wall near his bed. My head smacked the wall and I groaned softly. That hurt.

"What the fuck did you just say?" he growled.

"You heard me," I said through a smirk.

Anything to rile him up. "I'll show you Stiff," he growled into my ear.

He kissed me roughly, enough to bruise my lips. The kisses were openmouthed and fierce. His lips moved from mine to my neck and I moaned as he bit down roughly and lifted me up. My legs were wrapped tightly around his waist as he left a large bruise on the top of my chest. There went wearing any low cut shirts tomorrow. I groaned throatily as I fingered through his hair.

He quickly grabbed my hand and forced it out of his hair and grabbed the roots of mine so that he could yank it back. I knew that he was telling me that he was in charge, and I didn't mind in the slightest. I just wanted him. His hands yanked my zipper down roughly before slamming me onto his bed.
He wasn't soft with me at all as his head came down to mine and our teeth mashed together. It actually hurt slightly and I sucked in a breath but Eric didn't stop. His kisses were stealing my breath away and I gasped as his head pulled away from mine and he kissed down the front of my body. His lips trailed down the valley in between my breasts and his hands grabbed my hips tighter than he ever had. There was no doubt that it would be bruise them.

As he rose back up from the valley between my breasts, I could smell the alcohol coming off of his breath, but it didn't both me in the slightest. It made his kisses sloppier. He came up to give me a brief kiss, our tongues tangling together as he locked our legs together. Once he released my mouth, he worked his way back down my body to my unbuttoned jeans. His hands were desperately tugging them off of me.

It was rather nice to feel everything from him. I was glad that things were no less intense than they had been last night. The wet kisses felt good as he worked his way down my body. My hands wound their way into his hair, but it didn't last long. One slap from him made me draw them back. He was not having anything from me tonight. It would only be him picking what we would be doing.

I tried to wrestle his shirt off of his body and he finally let me, tossing it off to the side of the room. Leaning back onto him slightly, he fell back against the bed in his half-drunken state. He must have been extremely out of it. But he was still managing well enough. I took his momentary weakness to take advantage of his current state. He sucked in a breath as I raked my nails down his chest, through the bits of hair he had there.

He hissed in something in between pain and pleasure as I kissed down his torso and tugged at the belt on his pants. Not that he allowed me to do that for very long. It seemed that my sudden movement had finally snapped him out of his drunken stupor as he grabbed me and flipped me over myself. I landed on my back and groaned as he popped the bra off of my body, tossing it elsewhere. He wasted no time in getting to work on my chest.

His tongue flicked on my nipples and I groaned as he bit down on them softly. My breaths started to come in pants, as I definitely hadn't been expecting him to do that. No matter how possessive he was, he never seriously hurt me. His spare hand was underneath my back, digging into the soft skin there.

"God Eric," I groaned, as one hand dropped to push my pants off.

He always did surprised me with everything that he did. I helped him slide the pants off of my body and it shocked me when he bit down on my hips. There was no doubt that it would leave a bruise there. He teeth were gently grazing over the skin there and I thrust my hips upwards. Fuck, I wanted him more than I had last night. He squeezed my other breast roughly and I moaned at his touch. His hands were all over me but the one place he wouldn't go was the one place that I wanted him the most.

"For God's sake, just fuck me," I panted.

I'd never been that desperate before, but he made me that way. All I wanted was him. "Shut up," he snarled.

But, at my words, he pulled my pants all the way off. I yelped as he literally tore my underwear from my body after struggling with it for a moment. There was no way that I was getting those back. I knew that he was far more drunk than he was letting on. He couldn't even get my underwear off, something that I doubted that he normally had a problem with. One finger twirled around my entrance and I tried to push my hips up to his finger. But he retracted it at the last second.
"Do you want it?" he asked me.

I nodded with pleading eyes. "Of course," I said.

"Too bad."

Honestly, I should have been expecting that. He would never let me have it as easily as that. I cried out softly as Eric thrust two fingers inside of me and began to pump them slowly. My breath began to come in short gasps as his spare hand grabbed my thigh and tightened his grip on me. I waited a moment for him to speed up, but he wouldn't. He kept his place at a tortuously slow pace as he pushed my legs as far apart as they could go, reaching even deeper in me. My legs began to shake as he leaned down and flicked his tongue against my clit.

"Eric," I moaned loudly.

And they didn't stop there. I knew that my pants and yells were louder than normal, but I didn't care. I wanted him. Being drunk was only making him even better than he had been last night. He kept his pace slow and I moaned, letting out a few desperate groans as his fingers curled inside of me, reaching the place that only he had ever been able to find. My arms began to quiver as he sucked roughly at my clit.

He went back and forth between rubbing against me and sucking at my clit. He pushed in a third finger and bit lightly at my clit, something that made my entire body jerk in a quick spasm. My yells were getting louder as Eric pushed my hips roughly into the bed so that I couldn't move. Not even try to get the friction that I wanted so much. I was trying desperately to wiggle my hips, but I couldn't. He briefly lifted his head to bite at my hipbones and I cried out. I was so close. I was right there.

"Don't stop," I moaned as my walls began to contract.

And just like that, he stopped. He retracted his fingers from my body and moved his face away. What the fuck was he doing? Why had he stopped? "Not yet," he growled in my ear as he nipped behind it and on the lobe.

My breath was coming in gasps and I wanted to cry at the sudden loss of him. "What?" I asked softly.

This was what I got for teasing him. "Not until I say so," he said.

My body twinged at his words and I nodded. I supposed that I had asked for that one. Eric's pants were still on and I immediately went to his buckle. I had expected him to do something, but he did nothing. Instead, this time, he didn't stop me as I unbuckled his pants and tore them off of his legs, his boxers coming with them. His length freed itself and I went to go down on him before he grabbed my hair and roughly pulled me back.

I almost cringed in pain, but managed to keep myself silent. "No. Turn around," he growled.

He was definitely drunk. I followed his orders and turned around in the bed. He stood up out of the bed and yanked at my ankles. I went flying back off of the bed and landed awkwardly half in and half out of the bed. Eric pushed his hand down onto my back and bent me over the edge of the bed, forcing me to look down at the pillows. It was something that I had never done before. No Amity would have ever done something like that. Not with that kind of control.

His hands were roughly on my back, keeping me face-down, as I felt him tease my entrance. For nearly a minute he rubbed himself against me and I cried out. As much as I wanted him to do something, I knew that he wouldn't. He was not making this easy on me. I shoved my hips back
towards him, but he knew it was coming. He backed away from me slightly before shoving me forward, back against the bed, slapping my ass roughly. I heard a few curses stream from his mouth at me and I gasped softly.

No one had ever done that before. "Spread your legs," Eric demanded.

I did so without question. "Eric just -" I growled before he unexpectedly slammed into me.

The scream that came out of my mouth was much louder than I had intended it to be. I hoped that Cameron was wrong about those walls not being soundproof. Or his neighbors would have just gotten a very rude wake-up call. Eric shoved himself all the way into me and I panted with short breaths as he plunged in and out of me at a painfully slow pace. My body jerked forward with each thrust as I breathed heavily.

He was barely moving in me and I cried out so that I could beg for him to move faster. It took him a few minutes, but he finally did. He began to thrust harder than he ever had before, nearly tossing me forward. I moaned loudly as his hips smacked against my backside and his fingers found my clit, wrapping his arm around my body. He bit at few places on my back as he pushed into me as far as he could possibly go. My entire body was shaking as I got closer and closer, screaming out for him. Every time he pushed into me, I cried out as my entire body gave a small spasm. I was so close. So damned close.

My body began to spasm and I waited for it as my vision began to go white. This was better than anything that I'd ever had before, and I had definitely had a fair bit before. But, to my surprise, my vision never went white. Eric pulled completely out of me and I turned back to look at him with a hint of desperation.

"Not until I say so," Eric growled.

He turned me over so that I was facing him once more and kissed me at a furious pace as I tried to lift my leg to push him back inside of me. But he knew what I was doing. And he wouldn't let me do it. He grabbed my thigh tightly and shoved it away from my body as he pushed us back into the bed, our bodies tangling together.

At his sudden movement, I fell backwards as he pressed one leg away from my body and the other straight up so that my thigh was touching against my stomach. It made me feel something that I had never felt before. I shouted his name loudly and dug my nails into his back as he slammed himself into me once more, this time at a near-furious pace, not giving me any warning and stretching me out as far as I could go.

"Don't you dare come," Eric ordered.

I tried to follow his orders, but it was tough with everything that he was doing. My body was shaking intensely and I knew that at any minute I was no longer going to be able to control myself. And judging by how desperate his thrusts were getting, I knew that he was getting close, too.

"Please," I begged softly.

He groaned my name into my neck, giving it another rough bite, before flipping us once more so that he was plunging into me from behind as I was on all fours, just as he had been doing before, hitting a spot deep in me that I never knew that I had. It made me yearn that Eric and I had done this rather than fight all of those times that we had.

"Please, Eric," I begged once more, hearing his grunts becoming louder.
They were loud enough that I knew that he was enjoying this just as much as I was, if not even more. His name came pouring out of my mouth as he pulled my torso up for my back to meet his front. It was even better than it had felt moments before. One hand went to my breast and he began to pinch my nipple as the other went to my clit, rubbing it.

His name was pouring from my mouth as if it were a curse. The two of us panted together loudly as his mouth clamped around my neck, leaving his mark. My hands wound back to tug at his hair as his name began to turn into something that was more of a desperate moan, the knot in my stomach growing and feeling like it might explode at any minute. He kissed at my throat before pinching my clit roughly, making me scream lightly.

"Come. Now," he ordered huskily in my ear.

And that was all that it took. All sorts of profanities and moans escaped my mouth as my walls clenched around him and I came harder than I thought was possible. My vision went fuzzy and my entire body erupted into spasms. Eric followed a moment later, pumping slowly and jerkily into me. The two of us panted against each other and we both collapsed once we had slowed down, merely leaning against each other.

I fell forward and he fell onto my back, panting and moaning from what we had just done. He placed a small kiss on the back of my neck, making the hair stand on end, and as he pulled himself out of me. That had been surprisingly sweet. It made us both quiver as we dropped down into the bed, me falling beside him. He turned to give me a quick kiss before laying back down, our heavy breathing the only sound in the now far too silent room.

A few minutes later I was panting heavily as I stood from the bed to grab my clothes. My legs were throbbing and I found myself hardly able to stand. It had been a bad idea for me to tease him as much as I had. He had gotten me back and he had done so relentlessly. He had barely let me find my own release and had only let me done so after a lot of begging and at his demand. One of these days I would get my revenge on him.

But that wasn't today. So I grabbed my slightly torn underwear and laughed as I pulled it on with my stretched out pants over them. I turned back to tell Eric goodnight, but he was already asleep. It made me laugh. He was unceremoniously splayed out on the bed, showing everything. I grinned softly and grabbed the comforter, tossing it over his bare form. Once my shirt was on, I flattened my hair and grabbed one of his bottles of water before leaving. Today had been wonderful. It was one of the easiest days that I had been through in Dauntless, but it wouldn't be like that for long. Tomorrow would be back to work. But I had today.
Chapter Sixteen

Eric's P.O.V.

The morning sun was streaming through the few windows behind Eric's bed and he groaned. One day he was going to use his abundance of credits to buy the blackout curtains that Cameron was always suggesting. His head was pounding slightly and for a moment he wished that the initiates were still going through physical training. He would love to beat the holy hell out of one of them today. The only thing that made his predicament slightly better was the fact that the comforter had been laid over him and his clothes had all been neatly folded over the couch.

It definitely wasn't the way that they had been left last night. He smirked to himself. She was good company to have. No other woman would have put the comforter over him and folded up his clothes after their intense night. He sat up slowly and turned to yell at her to get to training. But there was a problem. She wasn't there.

His eyebrows knitted in confusion. Had he kicked her out last night? Even through the alcoholic haze, he knew that he hadn't kicked her out. So where was she? He let the comforter fall around him and stood up to look for her. Maybe she hadn't left. But his office was empty as was his bathroom. She was nowhere to be found. She must have either left early in the morning or stayed the night. Eric found himself mildly upset at the thought that she had left without letting him know. Perhaps it was because she left on her own free will, not because he had told her too.

He wondered if he could catch her before she went to training. Like most mornings she would probably be down in the dining room within the next twenty minutes or so. As he swung his legs over the edge of the bed he realized that there was a dull throbbing in them and the roots of his hair were sore. He nearly laughed. No woman had ever left him sore before. He was always the one that left them sore.

But they were rough last night. Rougher than he had ever been with anyone else. But he liked rough. It was what he thrived on. And he was thrilled that she could give it to him. He hated it when girls complained that he was too rough or too fast with them. He liked that she could keep up with him.

Shaking out the dull throbbing in his thighs he stood and walked into his kitchen, grabbing the empty bottle of brandy and tossing it into the trash can. He grabbed a bottle of rum from the back of the counter and took a small swig. A few of his Dauntless born friends had taught him that the best way to help a hangover was to have one more drink. The Erudite part of him knew that it wasn't true, but he wasn't one to complain about drinking.

As he took a bottle of water out of his fridge he laughed softly at the memory of the night before. She had wanted him to go to bed. He knew that she was glad that she had broken and let him sleep with her. She would have been missing out on something great. It was so cute that she had thought that she was going to be in charge last night. She would never be in charge.

Eric walked into his bathroom and grabbed a towel, wrapping it around his waist. It was cold in his room. It was boiling last night when he had fallen into bed. She must have turned down the air. He walked back into his kitchen and started to pour himself some coffee. He needed to snap himself out of his daze. He had a meeting with the other leaders soon. A knock sounded on his door but Eric ignored it. It wasn't her. She would be getting ready for the first day of mental training. And he was dead curious to know what she was afraid of. The door swung open and Eric turned to tell Max that he would be ready soon, but it was Cameron.
"Hey, man," Cameron greeted.


Cameron was dressed in finer clothing with none of his tattoos showing. He'd even taken out his lobe earring. He would be visiting Abnegation, obviously. "Saw your girl last night," Cameron said.

At Cameron's words, Eric perked up slightly. That meant that she hadn't stayed the night. He wasn't sure whether he had thought that she would or not. She must have picked up his clothes and thrown the blanket over him before leaving. That was the most that someone had ever done for him. Maybe she really did care more about him than he thought that she did.

"Yeah?" Eric asked, trying to sound disinterested.

Cameron nodded back. "Yeah. She was walking through the Pit," Cameron said.

"You must have seen her while she was leaving," Eric said nonchalantly.

Cameron immediately smirked. He knew that Eric hadn't ordered her to leave. Despite the fact that he acted tough when it came to her, Cameron knew that she was slowly melting the ice around his heart. It would take a long time and it might never thaw completely, but he knew that Eric felt more for her than anyone else. Eric definitely hadn't kicked her out. She seemed just fine when saw her in the halls. But she had been walking with a slight limp. No one had ever known Eric as the gentle type.

"She was limping a little bit. Poor girl. I hope she didn't get in a fight," Cameron said.

Both men smirked at each other. "She never did pick her fights wisely," Eric said, making them both laugh.

What had happened after Cameron left the night before was obvious. "That makes two of you," Cameron said.

"Wiser than you," Eric snapped back.

Cameron had to know that Eric hadn't done something stupid. "You kicked her out last night?" he asked with a little scowl.

Eric knew that Cameron was fond of Alex. Many Dauntless members were. It was one of the things that bothered him. He hated that the one girl that he had found himself drawn to was also the one that attracted attention from nearly everyone in the Faction. He wanted to be the sole person to own her affection, and he was.

"No. She left on her own," Eric snarled, trying not to sound bitter.

Cameron's eyebrow quirked at his admission. No girl ever left Eric's apartment on their own. Eric always kicked them out. He was shocked that Alex had left on her own free will. When they passed each other in the halls last night she had looked like she could barely walk. He would have thought that she would be more comfortable passing out in his bed than limping back to the dorms.

"Did she?" Cameron asked.

"Guess so. Must have been after I passed out," Eric mumbled.

They were silent for a moment as Eric steamed over her leaving. He'd make sure that she stayed
tonight. "Sad that she left you without another word?" Cameron asked Eric with a smirk.

His voice carried a teasing lilt to it. "I don't give a shit," Eric snarled.

Of course, it wasn't the truth. He was pissed that she left. Not that he was going to tell her that. "Now you know how the girls that you kicked out through the years feel," Cameron told Eric, who scoffed loudly. Cameron had done the same thing to women during their time in Dauntless. "She should be heading to breakfast soon if you want to catch her."

Not that he hadn't known that she would be heading down to breakfast soon. Eric nodded at his friend and moved towards the back of his apartment. He wanted to go bother her one last time before she had to leave for the day to do mental training. Now that they were out of physical training he wouldn't see her much during the day.

"I think I might just go do that," Eric said.

Cameron smirked as he turned to the coffee maker and dumped some into his thermos, heading over to the door. "Tell her I said hello," Cameron called.

"Sure. Have fun with the Stiffs," Eric teased before Cameron could leave.

He turned back with a nasty snarl on his face. "Shut the fuck up," he snapped.

Eric nearly laughed. He knew that besides Erudite, Cameron hated having to visit Abnegation the most. And Eric didn't blame him in the slightest. He had only visited Abnegation once himself and it was terrible. It made him feel like the life had been sucked out of him. He couldn't understand how people lived there. It was even worse than the constant cheer of Amity. At least they had life in their Faction. And Amity's were known for being lookers. Abnegation were boring and dull.

"One of these days Eric, I'm gonna get myself a girl like you have," Cameron said, making Eric look up curiously. "I need one. They all whine that I'm not soft enough."


Despite the fact that Cameron thought it was a joke, it was the truth. Cameron laughed loudly and the two said their goodbyes. Cameron would be gone for a few days before heading to Candor. It would be about a week and a half before he was back in Dauntless. As he turned to leave, the door slammed shut behind him and Eric walked into the bathroom, shutting the door.

Alex's P.O.V.

Despite the fact that there were no windows in the dorms, I seemed to always know when morning came. Perhaps this morning it was because my friends were already awake and moving around. I wasn't surprised that I had overslept. Eric had kept me up late into the night. There was a soft throbbing in between my legs and I bit back a groan. Eric had been rougher than I was expecting but I had done nothing to stop him. I liked it.

I liked it far more than I wanted to admit. It was hot the way that we tangled together. I desperately
hoped that Heather wouldn't ask about last night, because I wasn't quite sure that I wanted to admit what had gone down between Eric and me last night. I liked his domineering side, but I wasn't sure that Heather would. I just knew that it didn't work on everyone. But it did on him.

The stickiness was still residing in between my thighs and I sighed, moving so that I was leaning out of the edge of my bed. It was so much harder than Eric's. His was nice and soft, like laying on a cloud. Mine felt like laying on stone. My eyelids were heavy as I glanced around the rest of the room. My vision was still bleary but I could make out what most people were doing. They were all moving slowly too. I assumed that most of them had just woken up. Cole seemed to be the only one moving normally.

He was the only person, save myself. I briefly wondered what Eric had thought when he'd woken this morning to see that I was no longer there. He was probably grateful that I had let myself out. I had thought about leaving a note that I would be back tonight but I was pretty sure that it would have been pushing it. So I had left with nothing more than a blanket over his bare body and grabbing his clothes together, leaving them in a neat pile.

Standing from my bed, I tugged the shirt that I was wearing a little lower on my thighs. It wasn't even my shirt. It was Buck's. He had given it to me to sleep in a few days ago when he realized that his arms had gotten too big to fit in the sleeves. He had needed the new points to buy a new wardrobe. On the other side of the room Cole called for the girls to shower first and I stood with Heather.

Jade stood as well but she huffed and left without a word. She rarely showered with us. Normally she waited until the middle of the day. She now spent as little time as possible in the dorms with her cohorts missing. It made me happy. I walked with Heather into the showers and we both stripped before stepping under the freezing water. I was going to start showering at Eric's. These showers were too fucking cold.

As we stood under the water I noticed that Heather was shaking, just like me. Neither one of us were fond of the cold water. And it occasionally reminded me of my fall at the Chasm, something that I hated thinking about. Heather's eyes darted down to my legs and I rolled my eyes. It was easy to see that I was standing with my legs slightly apart and the tiny limp that I was walking with. Heather smirked brightly. She knew what I had been doing last night. And now she knew to what extent.

"I see that he was gentle last night," she teased.

I mumbled a few very rude profanities under my breath as I rinsed off, trying to stop my body from trembling. "Shut up and stop looking at me like that," I muttered.

"Tell me, what happened?" Heather prodded.

She had a childish tone to her voice and I rolled my eyes. "God you're so nosy," I teased.

We both laughed loudly, knowing that the boys had already left the room. "We both know that you'll do it to me when the time comes," she said.

"You're right."

And she was. I would want to know everything. This was one of the few chances that we had to talk without the boys listening in. It was good to have an open talk where I wouldn't have to worry that Eric would see me talking to Heather. Now if only I would have thought of the showers the other day, to tell her what had happened that night.
"It was so hot, Heather. When I was with Florian back in Amity he always let me lead and was as gentle as could be. Every guy in Amity is that way," I told her.

Part of me couldn't help but to wonder if he was any different with Iris. Or if they had even done it. "That sounds boring," Heather scoffed.

"It is. And, you know, he was rougher but now I see it. He wasn't into it. Not really," I said sadly. I still felt like a damn moron when I thought about Damien.

Heather patted my back gently as I rinsed out my hair. "You didn't know," Heather said softly. All I knew was that I didn't want to think about Damien. "Eric is so different. He doesn't let me be in charge and he's rough. It's like being with a real man," I said, feeling very stupid.

Heather smiled and I laughed, knowing that I sounded stupid as hell. Heather seemed to read my mind as she said, "Hey it's not stupid. It's not."

"You so sure about that?" I asked.

"Yes, I am. He's a real man. You know, the kind of guy that only a few girls are crazy enough to take on," she said, nudging me.

I laughed once more and smiled at her. "Thanks," I deadpanned.

"It was a compliment. I bet it was hot. I don't like Eric, but I imagine sex with him is probably the best," she said.

I knew that Heather wasn't an Eric fan. Not since he had called her out in front of everyone a few months back when training had first started. The things that he had told her were completely uncalled for. Now I wondered if it was because he was looking to get a rise out of me. But Heather was good about our relationship.

"Sex with him is the best," I said brightly.

"I mean Cole is great too but he's gentle," Heather said.

A broad smile fell over my face. I hadn't known that she actually had slept with Cole. I thought that they were fooling around. "Well if you'd like I can go out there and let Cole know exactly how you want it?" I offered.

"Absolutely not! He doesn't know that I've told anyone," she said quickly.

"Don't worry, your secret is safe with me." We were quiet for a little while before I looked back at her. "What exactly is it like with him?" I asked.

If she wanted to know what Eric was like I wanted to know what Cole was like. "But, seriously, I might take you up on the whole telling Cole what I want thing," she chirped.

We both laughed once more. I was surprised to realize that the boys were still in the dorm room. I could hear them chatting in the main room, laughing and probably wrestling with each other. I really hoped that we weren't being loud enough for them to hear us. That would make for an awkward conversation.

"But I mean it's great seriously. It really is," Heather said. I just wanted her to be happy. "We went to this little broom closet and it was so funny. We were falling over brooms and each other and it was
messy but it was still great. Like he was just rough enough to be Dauntless but not so much so that I'm walking with a limp today."

Her eyes flashed teasingly as she looked down at me. Heather looked extremely proud of herself at her last comment and I rolled my eyes. Reaching up to her shoulder, I shoved Heather lightly, making sure that she wasn't going to fall on the slippery floor. The boys were terrible about leaving soap residue on the floor of the showers, making it damn near impossible to stand sometimes.

"Shut up. Bitch," I muttered. Heather laughed as we rinsed the soap suds out of our hair. "Are you nervous for today? I am. I mean I don't even know what I'm afraid of."

It seemed that my comment hadn't thrown Heather in the slightest. "I'd think you were insane if you weren't nervous for today," she said and I nodded at her. "I mean I know what my first fear is going to be."

A little shiver shot over her spine. "Drowning, right?" I asked.

She nodded weakly at me. I reached over and grabbed her hand. That wouldn't be a fun fear to have to face. Especially one that she already knew was coming. But I still thought that it was worse having to face the unknown. It seemed that neither one of us were going to have a good day today.

"Don't worry. They aren't really going to let us die," she said.

I scoffed at her. "That is not comforting," I said.

She laughed at me once more. "Eric would go nuts if something serious happened to you. You know that he would," she said.

As much as I wanted to deny her, I knew that Heather was right. Eric would hate for anyone to hurt me. Other than himself, of course. Sometimes it seemed that he got the greatest joy of his day by torturing me. At least he wasn't going to be around during this part of training. All I knew right now was that I wanted to change the topic.

"At least you know what you're going to be facing. Eric mentioned to me that we face a new fear every day for these two months, but sometimes they'll repeat themselves. It's different for everyone," I said, making her blanch.

This wasn't something that any of us were looking forward to. "Sounds great," Heather muttered.

"We just learn to conquer them. I don't think it will be too bad. I really don't," I lied. "Eric said that they only take about twenty minutes to get through for most people their first few times. And you know how twenty minutes can fly by."

She nodded but I was sure that she didn't believe me. I was only trying to make her feel better. Secretly I was petrified of what was coming. It was best not to worry her. We shut off the water and stepped out of the shower with towels wrapped around our waists. The boys saw us when we made our way out into the main area and we scowled at them, waiting for them to leave. Buck gave us a sleazy grin and I rolled my eyes. We had a system. When the girls came out to get changed, the boys had to leave.

"Chill, we're leaving. We'll save you girls a seat," he said.

"Thanks," I said, walking towards my bed.

"Come on, Cole. You have the rest of your life to convince Heather to let you see her like that,"
Buck told Cole.

The boys all laughed as they shoved Cole out of the room. I said nothing but I did laugh loudly, Heather joining in. Apparently Cole hadn't told anyone that they had slept together yet either. Not that I blamed them. When it did come out that Eric and I were sort of together, I did not intend to tell the boys that we had slept together. Maybe I could convince them that we were completely chaste. Yeah, right.

As the boys turned to leave, I saw that a hint of color was rising to Cole's cheek and I smiled at him. They were so cute. If it wasn't against the rules, I was sure that Eric would go parading around and telling everyone what we had done. He was clearly very proud of himself. And I was sure that no one would believe me if I tried to fight against him. The door snapped shut and I turned to Heather. We were both grinning at each other.

"God, they're so stupid," I said through a laugh.

Once our soft laughter had died down, we went to putting ourselves together for training. Not that either one of us wanted to. If it were up to me, I would spend the day hanging out with Heather and join Eric tonight. I dragged on a pair of black, knee length pants and a tight black tank top before tying up my wet hair. Leaning over the sink I washed off my face before standing upright and walking over to Heather.

Neither one of us looked as nice as we had yesterday. Not that it mattered. No one was putting as much effort into their appearances today as they had been before. Not when we didn't know what was coming. I grabbed my trainers and slipped them over my feet, motioning to Heather that I was ready to leave. She was wearing a pair of black cargo pants and a loose black shirt with her boots. I could tell that she was already shaking with nerves.

Silently we walked from the dorms and headed into the dining room. The boys were already seated and eating their breakfasts, laughing between themselves. Heather and I walked into the food line and grabbed ourselves breakfast. I only took a small portion of eggs with a bottle of water. I was nervous that if I tried to eat anymore, I would end up throwing it up. And I was sure that Four would not appreciate that. My mind was mostly occupied with the fear of letting slip to Four what I was.

"Move it. Initiate," I heard a familiar voice growl.

Slightly nervous, I glanced up to see that Eric was standing over me. Underneath his hard demeanor there was a slightly teasing look in his eyes. I merely stared back at him with a hardened scowl. Heather shifted awkwardly next to me and I glanced around. We were the only three in the food line. Without saying another word, Heather grabbed her food in her hands, along with mine and my water. I went to ask her what she was doing but she beat me to the punch.

"I'll go bring this to them and save your spot. See you in a few minutes," Heather rushed out.

"Thank you," I said softly.

"Good morning, Eric," she chirped softly before ducking out of the line awkwardly.

Eric said nothing as she left, but I knew that he was grateful that she took the hint and left. He motioned for me to follow him and I did. We walked past the register at the end of the line and into a little alcove, similar to the one that he had pressed me into all of those months ago on our separate dinner dates. The thought almost made me smile. I backed easily into the wall as Eric placed his hands on either side of me, effectively trapping me in between him.
"Proud of them, huh?" Eric asked me, a smirk clear on his face.

My eyebrow quirked in confusion. "What are you talking about?" I asked.

His eyes were down near my chest and I glanced down, realizing with a start what he was talking about. Bruises lightly littered my skin up and down my chest and neck and I panicked, yanking my hair from its hold and throwing it down around my shoulders. Thankfully I was pretty sure that no one else had noticed. Eric laughed softly before his face went hard.

"You left last night," he stated.

Slowly I nodded at him. "Yes I did. Can't be staying in your apartment every night. People will get suspicious. Plus I somehow doubt that you want me in your bed every night," I said softly.

He nodded at me and stayed silent, his eyes not once leaving mine. I had figured that he didn't want me staying with him every night. I knew that his piercing gaze was making a little hint of color rise on my cheeks. Part of me couldn't help but to wonder if he actually did want me to stay with him. Of course not. That was stupid. And not the type of man that Eric was.

"I might be able to work it out if you want me to stay. Only for your bed though," I teased.

To my relief, a smirk popped up on his face, mirroring the one on my own. We both knew that my statement was a lie. His bed was an added bonus. "That's alright. The only thing that I keep you around for is your body," he said.

I snorted as he leaned into me, his mouth dropping over my ear. "What are you doing?" I asked, my body shaking slightly.

"Or maybe it's the way that you say my name," he breathed into my ear. "The way that you moan it."

My body gave a slight quiver as his lips traveled over the back of my ear and he nipped lightly at the skin behind it. Before I could say anything he leaned back up and kissed me. I sighed and dropped against the wall as he pressed his body roughly into my own. We moved together for a moment, his tongue slipping into my mouth, as my hands wound their way into his back pockets. I tugged him into me and he smirked into the kiss, tilting my head back.

One of his was on the back of my neck and the other was gripping my hip tightly. His hand ran up the base of my spine before reaching into my hair, tightening around my roots and yanking it backwards. I gasped softly, only furthering his allowance of exploring my mouth. Our hips ground down together and I forced myself to keep from yanking him further into the out cove and having my way with him. We moved together for a few minutes before I finally managed to pull away from him.

"What?" Eric asked.

"If you don't stop, I'm going to bring you back there and end up being really late for training," I said.

I hooked my thumbs in Eric's back pockets. "You can afford a few minutes and I'll be fast," Eric said, keeping us crushed together.

He smirked and let his hands run over the back of my pants, tugging my lower half closer to him. "Then you can explain it to Four," I said, shoving him gently.

"He listens to me," Eric growled against the skin of my neck.
"I can - uh... I can come back after training today. If you want?" I asked, feeling extremely awkward.

I had never had to ask Eric something like that and I wasn't fond of it in the slightest. The worst part was that Eric knew that I was uncomfortable. He smirked down at me and fiddled with the sleeves of my tank top. I smiled as he brushed the hair back off my shoulder and leaned down to kiss a bruise that was on the top of my chest. I bit my lip to keep quiet and fought to keep my legs from quivering. Somehow I managed to keep still.

His lips came back to my ear and I grinned softly. "I look forward to it," he said softly. "Don't think that you're getting any sleep tonight."

"Don't think that I want to sleep," I shot back.

A low growl erupted in his throat as he tightened his grip on me once more. We smirked at each other before he leaned back up and grabbed my shirt. He fixed the sleeves and I let him layer my hair around my chest and neck, once more hiding the bruises. Once he was satisfied he looked back up at my eyes. He was no longer smirking. He was back to being a strong leader.

"Don't let the sims get to you. They seem real but they aren't. Slow your heart rate down and solve the problem. Four will be watching to make sure it doesn't get out of hand," Eric said.

"Okay," I said, repeating his words like a mantra in my head.

He had told me this before but it helped to hear it again. If he could make it through this so did I. "You'll take turns throughout the day. You'll be training with the Dauntless born at this point and going in reverse order. That means you're going sixth to the last," he explained.

I understood that but it didn't mean that I liked it. That meant that I would have to wait nearly all day for it to finally be my turn. Suddenly another thought struck me. "Do other people see your sim? Besides Four?" I asked.

"No," Eric said.

I let out a breath. At least one thing was going right today. "Alright then. I'll see you after training," I told Eric, trying to sound positive.

It didn't work very well. My voice had a little shake in it. Eric nodded and leaned down to kiss me once more, squeezing my hip painfully. I knew that it was his own little way of telling me that I would be fine. It left a slight throb at his touch. I was still tender from last night. He left and I counted to thirty in my head before walking out and heading to the table my friends were at.

By the time that I made it out in the dining room, Eric was already standing on the perch and talking with Max. It sent a shiver down my spine. Eric was not a good guy. I couldn't forget that. I headed straight for my normal table and took a seat next to Heather as I started to shovel my eggs down. It took me five bites to get them down. I sipped my water slower, not wanting to expel my food.

People were chatting softly around me and I smiled at them, trying not to show them just how afraid I was.

"Initiates!" Four yelled, startling me out of my daze. "Follow me!"

We all did so without argument. Everyone stood from their seats and I noticed the dining room fall silent as we left. They all knew what we were doing and their gazes dropped uncomfortably. Despite the fact that I never turned back, I knew that Eric was watching me the entire way out. We walked through a few halls that I had never been down before until we came up on a room that I was sure that I had never seen before.
The room that Four led us into was large and gray. It was like a galley, kind of like the way that the food line was laid out. There were seats on each side of the room that led to another door at the end with only the tiniest of windows. It looked like the door was made out of steel and extremely strong. It must have been the room that we would be testing in.

As I turned to look at the initiates, I realized just how many of us there were. Twenty-one of us. But it felt like so many more in this tiny room. We were all standing around, waiting on Four's instruction. I noticed Lisa standing near the door and I gave her a weak smile that she returned. Even the Dauntless born girl looked nervous. It made me feel sick. We were all in what I assumed was the waiting room. It felt like we were being led to slaughter.

Four shut the door behind the last of the initiates, walked up to the front of the room, and turned to face us. "Welcome to Phase Two of initiation. Congratulations on making it this far. But it only gets tougher from here. In my opinion this is much harder than physical initiation," Four said.

I noticed that as he talked his eyes flitted over the remaining initiates. And I noticed that his eyes were mostly trained on me. I swallowed a large lump in my throat. I didn't like the way that Four was looking at me. Like he knew my secrets. All of them. Even the Eric secret? I certainly hoped not.

"I'll tell you more as you come into the room. All you need to know right now is don't panic. You'll only make the waiting worse. We go from the bottom of the ranking board up. Colt, you're up first," he said.

Colt nodded, walking through the small crowd. As he walked into the room and the door hissed closed behind him everyone took their seats. Nerves were bundling in my stomach as I watched him through the window for as long as I could. He had bruises all over him. My stomach clench painfully at the look of pure hatred he gave me before sinking back into the room and disappearing from sight. I sighed deeply and dropped into the seat next to Heather.

We quietly talked with Lisa and Aaron for a while, but I had no idea what we were talking about. Finally the door hissed open once more and Colt walked out. He looked as pale as a ghost and had a thin sheen of sweat over his forehead. He looked half dead. It did nothing to calm my nerves. A clock on the side of the wall was marking our times and I looked up at his. Just over twenty-five minutes. Hunter was called in after Colt and I waited curiously. He came out after nineteen minutes. He looked a little rattled but otherwise calm. It disturbed me to no end how someone could always be calm the way that he was.

We sank back into our seats as Jade was called in. In the meantime, Lisa admitted to me that she was petrified of heights. She knew that it would be her first fear. I wondered how she had been able to scale the side of the train tracks when we had first come to Dauntless on Choosing Day. I was sure that it hadn't been easy. Heather admitted to Lisa that her fear was drowning, and it turned out that another Dauntless boy was afraid of the same thing. I admitted that I had no idea what my fear was. Heather and Lisa seemed to think that it would make things easier for me. I wasn't so sure about that.

As we waited, I wondered how Four and Eric had felt when they were doing this for their first time. Were they afraid? I didn't think that they were. Part of me even wondered if Damien, Zeke, or Cameron were afraid. I had a funny feeling that Damien was. Part of me was glad that Eric wasn't here. He would be raking us all over the coals if he could see how cowardly we were all being. And after the strange change in relationship between Eric and me, I wasn't sure how I would take his harsh words.

After what seemed like an eternity, Jade finally came out of the room. It looked like she might keel over and die. I glanced up at her time as she wobbled out of the room. Twenty-nine minutes. That was the slowest time so far. I couldn't help but to wonder what she had seen. As Jade left the room I
noticed that even the Dauntless born now looked nervous. And that did nothing for the knot building in my stomach.

Jason was called in next and I found myself curious to see how a Dauntless born would handle the fear sim. He would be the first one. I turned to chat with Buck for a while, but it was next to useless. Neither one of us were invested enough to make a real attempt at a conversation. After a few minutes we fell silent, and seventeen minutes later I found out that the Dauntless born weren't handling the sims well either. Jason looked green.

Aria was called in once Jason left the room and, despite how tough the raven haired girl looked, I noticed that she was shaking. A few minutes after she had gone into the room Lisa had admitted to me that her mother had jumped off of the Chasm when she was just a young child. They were pretty sure that she had been intoxicated at the time. There was no doubt in my mind that that would be her first fear.

Most of my friends were speaking with each other and the Dauntless born but no one looked completely invested in their conversations. By this point most people were a touch of green. Aria walked out of her sim twenty-three minutes later shaking beyond belief. Four was walking her out. A few of her friends, including Lisa, tried to talk to her but she shook them off. I noticed that no one had spoken since leaving their sim.

Once Four was sure that Aria was alright another Dauntless born named Darren went into the sim. As the door slipped shut I noticed that Heather was shaking slightly. She was next. I held Heather's hand tightly as we waited. For once I wanted the person to take as long as possible. No matter what, I was going to have to wait until after lunch to do my sim. It made me nervous.

My nerves were currently to the point where I was sure that they were going to fry my brain. I didn't want Four to know what I was. I liked him well enough but I wasn't sure that I could trust him. Cole was currently trying to cheer Heather and me up, but it wasn't working. His attempts were frail anyways. I knew that he was just as nervous as us. Darren finally came out of the room and I glanced up. Twenty minutes on the dot. Four called out for Heather and I smiled at her.

"Good luck," I said. Heather smiled but said nothing back.

The door shut behind her and I dropped back into my seat with my knees pulled up to my chest. I was trying desperately to think of what I was afraid of. But nothing came to mind. I honestly had no idea. Not Jeanine. I hated her more than anything and frequently found myself nervous for what was to come, but I was sure that it wasn't fear. Or maybe it was. I was no longer afraid of Eric and I had never been afraid of Four.

Perhaps someone dying in my life? My parents not making it? My sister dying in my mother's womb? Losing my friends? Those were some of the few things that I could think of. And I didn't want to have to face any of them. I just wanted this to be over with. I didn't want to have to face this. But I was Dauntless. I was brave. There was no doubt in my mind that I could do this.

My heart was pumping rapidly until the door opened. My heart nearly slammed to a complete halt. I knew that it skipped a beat. Heather was half-walking and half-limping out of the room. She was breathing heavier than normal and it looked like she might have been crying. I walked up to her with Cole as Four called Serena into the room. Heather had taken just over twenty minutes. Not a bad time compared to everyone else's.

"Heather?" I asked. She kept her gaze averted to the ground. "Heather, are you alright? Hey, honey, look at me."
Heather finally looked up at me as Cole grabbed one of her hands and I grabbed the other. Heather stared like she had never seen us before. "I - I - I think I'm gonna go take a nap before lunch. I - I'll see you guys there," she said weakly.

The rest of our friends joined us a moment later. Everyone looked terrified for her. She looked like she might have passed out if I wasn't holding her as tightly as I was. "You sure?" I asked her.

Heather nodded weakly. "Don't worry. It - It isn't that bad," Heather said weakly. We all knew that she was lying, but I appreciated the attempt anyways. "See you guys soon. Good luck."

Only a few more of us would be going before lunch. Cole gave her a quick kiss on the forehead before releasing her to let her head back to the dorms. We all wanted to say something to ask about what had happened with Heather, but it seemed that no one could find it in themselves to talk about it. Partly out of respect for Heather. We all knew that what she had gone through hadn't been easy. But it was also because people were thinking that if they opened their mouths to speak they might throw up all over the floor. So we all sat in our chairs and tilted our heads back to the ceiling.

My eyes slipped shut and I tried to clear my mind. I was trying to take Four's advice on not panicking. But it was hard after seeing how people were acting as they left. And it was nearly impossible to ignore the tenseness of the air around us. It made it impossible for me to try and take a nap. All I could see was the terror waiting for me on the other side of that door. I wondered how Four felt doing this to us. Probably fine, considering that someone had once done this to him.

Unfortunately it took thirty-one minutes before Serena came out of the room. Despite the fact that we weren't the best of friends, I still felt bad for her. After all, she was trying her hardest and had apologized for the jests at the zip line. Although I was pretty sure that Lisa had talked her into doing it. Serena looked disappointed in herself and like she might burst into tears. The worst of it was that she looked like she might fall onto her face. Her knees were wobbling dangerously below her. I could hear Lisa whispering to her friend before letting her leave, the same way that I had acted with Heather.

Cole was called in afterwards and I grabbed his hand before letting him head into the room. He came out twenty-six minutes later. He was pale and sweating slightly. He did not look good in the slightest. He grabbed my shoulder weakly before walking from the room. Jet was called in next. He looked pale and a little twitchy when he came out of the room eighteen minutes later. He looked the most stable of anyone who had left so far.

It only took Four a moment to pop his head out of the door and call Sara into the room. There were only about half of us left waiting to go now. Twenty-three minutes after she had first been called in I watched as Sara left the room. She took a few steps before leaning over and vomiting all over the ground. Everyone jumped to their feet and rushed over to help her to her feet. Four shook his head and called for someone to clean up the mess as he helped Sara out of the room.

A moment later a Dauntless member came in to clean up the mess and everyone headed back to their seats as Lisa was called in. She came out twenty minutes later looking like she was about to vomit. Luckily she had a stronger stomach than her friend. She walked out on unsteady feet, letting the door shut behind her.

Four popped his head out of the room and I waited for him to call the next person into the room. But he never did. Instead he walked out of the room and closed the door behind him. That meant that it must have been lunch time. I had thought that today would drag by, but instead it felt like the day was flying by. I knew that it was because I was nervous.

"Alright, head to the dining room. Get some food in you. Everyone that hasn't gone, come back here
after lunch and we'll get you set up," Four instructed.

Everyone nodded at him and left the room with weak knees. They were wobbling as I walked in between Buck, Dante, Jax, and Draven. They all looked nervous too, but at least most of them knew what their fears were. The only person that was in the same predicament was Draven. I wondered if he was as nervous as me. It didn't look like it. Maybe it was possible that he had no fears. But I couldn't believe that. Everyone was afraid of something. Even Draven. Eric. Four. They were all afraid of something.

"Hey guys," I tried to chirp sweetly as we sat at the table next to our friends, who all looked sick.

Hunter, Jade, and Colt were sitting together too, on the other end of the dining room. They weren't talking. "Hey," Cole said softly.

"How are you feeling?" I asked Heather.

It took Heather a moment, but she finally let out a little sigh, probably steeling herself to tell us what had happened. "Awful. God that was awful. It was like I was drowning. I mean I really felt it. I felt like I was going to die. Four had me in this sim where I was on a boat in the middle of the ocean. The boat started to sink and I tried to run to get off of it. But I wasn't fast enough. No matter where I ran there was a block. So I got stuck in the bottom chambers. The water started to overflow and I pressed up on the ceiling. I tried to get out but I couldn't. The water went over my nose and it was awful. It felt like my lungs were on fire and my eyes were going to explode," she told us.

My skin began to erupt with goosebumps at her story. I shuddered, trying to push them away. That didn't make me look forward to my upcoming sim. Especially if they were as real as they sounded. Four must have pulled her out. It didn't sound like she had even managed to conquer her fear.

"I just - I don't want to do that again," she said softly.

Cole put an arm around his girlfriend and I watched the two with a small smile. "Mine was bad, too," he said.

"What happened?" I asked curiously.

"The sim that I was in started with me in a coffin. Or I think it was a coffin. I tried to pry open the doors but I couldn't. I was stuck." My mouth nearly dropped open as I grabbed a fry. "And that was when they started crawling in. From underneath the box I think. They were coming in and stinging me. Everywhere. I tried to find a way out of it but I couldn't. There was no way out. They were crawling into my mouth and stinging me in the eyes. Some of them went down my throat to cut off my air. Four stopped the sim because he thought that it was getting too dangerous," he said.

That meant that neither one of them could conquer their fears. I wasn't looking forward to this. "Scorpions?" I asked.

"Yeah," Cole muttered.

"Sounds like we had the same sim," Jet said.

"Are you afraid of scorpions?" Cole asked.

"No. But mine started out the same way. I woke up in this box. It was too small for me to be in. I fought against it and cut myself up. I'm pretty sure that I broke my foot while I was doing it," he said, a little grimace of pain crossing his face. "And then the box started to get smaller. I was sucking in all of the air that I could. But then I remembered what Four was telling us. To slow down your heart
rate. So I did. I stopped panicking and that was when I found it. A lever. It was rusted almost solid
and I tore off a few fingernails but I did it. I got the box opened and that was it. The end of my sim. I
really thought that I wasn't going to make it out."

"You peeled off your own fingernails?" I asked fearfully.

"Yeah." This was getting better and better by the second.

Once Jet had finished with his story we all sighed and dropped into our seats. No one knew what to
say now. No one wanted to say anything more. We didn't even know what we were getting
ourselves into. Not until after we got back from our fear sims in a little while. As we ate I noticed that
no one else was talking at the other tables. I was grateful to see that Dauntless was much more
demure today. They must have all been remembering their first day during these sims.

It wasn't long before we were called back by Four to return to the waiting room. I walked back with
the other initiates that hadn't gone yet and departed from our friends that had already gone. I was.pretty sure that they were all going to either go back to bed or hang out in the Pit. They were lucky.

As we made it back to our seats, I took one close to the door and wished Buck good luck. I leaned
back in the chair and tried to slow my heart rate. I hated to admit it but I was completely terrified.

Much more so than before we started physical training. Buck emerged from the room after twenty-
two minutes. I tried to get him to go back to the dorms and lay down as he staggered out of the
training room, but I wasn't sure that he would.

Greg went in next and came out twenty minutes later, red in the face like he had been yelling. If he
had, I hadn't heard him. As he left, I noticed that he was walking on shaking legs. Finally Dante was
called in and I sucked in a breath. I was next. My heart was pounding out of my chest as he came out
after twenty-one minutes. He looked extremely nervous. He wished me luck and I nodded at him,
feeling like I might pass out.

"Alex," Four said, leaning against the door frame. "Come on."

Four motioned for me to come into the room and I did so. He let the door slip shut behind me and I
took a look around. It was a near carbon copy of the room that I had taken my Aptitude Test in. But
this chair had something more akin to a head restraint near the top. It made my stomach lodge itself in
my throat.

"Alright, go ahead and sit in the chair," Four ordered.

I nodded at him, moving towards the center of the room. I took a seat in the chair and leaned back,
propping my feet up on the footrest. Four was standing off to my side holding a needle with blue
liquid in it. Just like in my Aptitude Test. Four was glaring at me and I gulped deeply. I knew what
was coming.

"This is a serum. It will put you through a fear of yours and your job is to conquer it as quickly and
efficiently as possible. I'll be watching on this screen. Try to relax. I know its nerve-wracking
watching others go," he told me.

Maybe it wasn't coming. "Okay," I said softly.

"Alex, there's something that I need to talk to you about," Four said.

Before I could stop myself, I opened my mouth and spit out the first thing that came to mind. "Are
you going to kick me out of Dauntless?" I asked stupidly. The moment that I said it, I wanted to
smack myself. I was nervous and I knew for a fact that he knew about Eric and me. "I know that you
know. About Eric. So are you going to kick me out? I'll call it off with him. I don't want to be Factionless. After all there's only -"

"Stop talking," Four ordered. I cut myself off. I was glad that he said something. I wasn't quite sure where I was going with that. "I'm not going to kick you out."

I felt a huge breath leave my body. At least something was going right today. "That's nice to hear," I muttered.

"For two very different reasons. Number one, I like you Alex. You're a good person and a good Dauntless. You're better than Max. Eric wants you on the track for leadership. I agree. I think you're suited for it. I hope to see you in one of the top spots so that you can go that route," Four said.

He had no idea that it meant the world to me. Someone that had once asked me if I had been pushed from the net when I had been the first jumper during the beginning of training was now telling me that they wanted to see me at the top of the leader board at the end of training.

"Thank you, Four. What's the other reason?" I asked, remembering that he had said two very different reasons.

Four took a moment before sitting on the chair behind the computer and rolling it in front of me. "Because I think that you're good for Eric," he said.

My jaw dropped. Of all of the reasons that I could think that he wouldn't rat me out, I had never thought that it would be because Four thought that I was good for Eric. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"I've seen Eric with a lot of girls and never once has he cared anything about them. Never. Not until you. He cares about you in his own twisted way." I let out the tiniest of laughs. "Maybe it's because you stood up to him and maybe it's not. But I know that he respects you more than he ever has with another initiate. And I know that you're the only person he's ever let stay the night in his apartment," Four told me.

Color flooded my cheeks as I shifted uncomfortably in the chair. How had he knows that Eric had let me spend the night? And if he knew, did that mean that someone else knew that I had spent the night in Eric's apartment? That would be terrible. I'd thought that we were doing so well hiding us.

"How did you know that Eric let me spend the night?" I asked softly.

As far as I knew, this door was soundproof, but just in case I wanted to be quiet. A sharp glare fell over Four's features and I knew that he was angry at me for being so careless. "You are aware that there are cameras all over Dauntless?" Four asked.

"Of course," I said.

The only places that there weren't cameras were the apartments. Eric had told me that much. And then I remembered something. Besides training the initiates whenever the season came around, Four also worked in the Control Room. Of course he saw the security footage from that night.

"I saw you leaving Damien Roberts's apartment the other night, battered and bruised. You went straight to Eric's apartment. And you didn't leave until the morning. Not hard to figure what happened," Four told me.

A blush rose to my face and I nodded. "Oh," I muttered dumbly.

I wasn't sure why, but talking about Eric and me with Four made me feel like I was talking about it
with my father. Maybe it was because Four seemed almost like my protective older brother. Definitely not something that I needed. I shifted awkwardly before looking back up at Four with suspicious eyes.

"Wait a second. Eric told me that there was no solid evidence that anything happened to me. But there is. The cameras wouldn't have picked up what was going on inside of the room but what happened in the hallways would be enough to condemn them," I said. I could get Colt kicked out of Dauntless.

Instead of looking impressed at my knowledge, Four merely shrugged at me. "Maybe. But it would condemn you and Eric, too," he told me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The standard procedure for an attack like that is to bring the initiate back to the infirmary to spend the night while the issues are sorted out. You went and stayed the night in a leader's apartment," he said.

Now it made sense. There was evidence for my case but it would also get me into trouble. "Right," I muttered.

"And that would also beg the question, what were you doing to go into Damien's apartment?" Four continued.

My eyes dropped to the ground and I sighed. He was right. There was too much in that video that would get me in trouble, too. And right now I was trying to fly under the radar. I had already had too much attention put on me in the past few months. I didn't need any more.

"I didn't think about that," I told Four softly.

Four snorted and I couldn't help but to feel a little embarrassed. I liked Four but he made me feel very stupid. "Of course you didn't. I wiped the footage from that night but I need you to be careful, Alex. I'm the only one that sees those cameras but others can too. And they might not be as forgiving as me," he said.

"Thank you," I said softly.

Four was a good man and a good friend. "Just... Do me a favor?"

"Anything."

"Be careful around Eric. I don't think that he's all bad, but he's dangerous. I hope that you never have to see it," he said.

"I know. I'll watch out," I said softly.

Unfortunately I'd already seen his dangerous side. And I was sure that I would see it again. But that wasn't something that I needed to tell him. Four had helped me more than I deserved. And he was right. I had to be careful around Eric. I wished that things were different, and maybe they would be one day. But today was not that day.

"Thank you, Four," I said. He nodded at me. "For everything."

Four had done more for me than he could ever imagine. He shrugged me off and I smiled at him. He wasn't the type to get super emotional but he was certainly more open than Eric. Although it was
hard to get less emotional than Eric. He was like a damn spoon when it came to emotions.

"Not a problem. Don't you dare get caught," Four said as he stood.

I laughed loudly and shook my head at him, settling back into the chair. "I don't intend to," I said.

"Lean back in the chair. I'm going to inject you with the serum. Don't panic. It will be just like the Aptitude Test. Like I said. Get out quickly and efficiently. Don't panic. Slow your heart rate down. That's the easiest way to get out. Good luck," he said.

"Thanks."

He walked up to my side and brushed my hair back off of my shoulder. He stiffened for a moment and scowled when he saw the bruises. I merely smiled bashfully back at him. He shook his head at me before pushing the needle into my skin, making me cringe from the feeling. I sighed and let my eyes slip closed. It only took a moment before the world got heavy.

It felt like only a minute or so had passed since I was sitting in the chair with Four at my side. I was now laying in a room that didn't look the slightest bit familiar to me. My heart began to beat faster as I glanced around the room. What was I afraid of? The question kept repeating in my head as I looked around.

The walls were painted a light blue and I sucked in a breath. I was in Erudite. I had to be. I knew the color of these walls well enough. There was nothing in the room other than a few monitors. The walls were bland and there was no furniture other than the consoles that the monitors sat on. I walked over to them to see what was on them but the monitors were blurred so that I couldn't see them. I don't understand. What am I afraid of?

My time was going to be pathetic. I couldn't even begin to figure out how to conquer this fear. Suddenly there was a clacking noise on the floor behind me and I turned back to see Jeanine Matthews standing in front of me, my parents at her side. My stomach clenched as I stared at them. It was starting to make more sense. My mother's stomach was distended with my sister and I felt bile rose in my throat. What was going to happen to them? My father wore a look of pure fear while Jeanine smiled down at me.

"Hello, Amarantha. I believe no introductions are needed here?" Jeanine asked.

My jaw clenched as a few guards filed in from a door I hadn't seen before. I stared at them in fear, wondering what the hell was happening. Two went to stand at my parent's sides and the other two stood behind me. One stood at my right pressed a gun to my temple. My heart began to pound erratically.

"What do you want?" I asked stupidly.

I could hear that my voice was wavering as I tried to steady myself. This was my fear. My parents dying at Jeanine's hands. I didn't like that. The two men standing near my parents raised their guns up to my parent's heads and I panicked. They couldn't kill my parents. Not because of something that I did. I couldn't live with myself if something happened to them because of me.

Before Jeanine could say anything else my mother cut in. "Amarantha. What's going on? What is this?" Mom asked.

My eyes watered as I looked at her. "Everything's going to be alright," I told her weakly, my voice cracking.
But I wasn't sure if anything was going to be alright. I didn't know what was going to happen. "What have you done?" she pleaded with me as tears began to run down her face.

My eyes began to water to the point that I almost couldn't see my mother. I let out a soft sob. I couldn't do this. I knew what was happening. My parents were going to be killed because of what I was. My secret was going to kill my family. Jeanine took a step forward and I wanted nothing more than to wrestle the gun from the man behind me and shoot her. But I wouldn't be able to move fast enough. The men would kill my family before I could get the chance to take out Jeanine.

"Tell your family, Amarantha. Tell them before they die. Before I kill you," she said. I could die, I just wanted them to live. "Tell them why I've brought you here. Tell them what it is that makes you so dangerous. The reason that they're here in the first place. The reason that they're going to die."

My secret was too dangerous. I couldn't tell her. "Kill me. Not them," I said.

"I intend to. Once they're dead. Shoot him," Jeanine ordered.

My screams filled the room as my father dropped to the ground, dead. A bullet hole was clean through his eyes. I tried to drop to the ground and run to him, but the guards were holding me in place. A few tears were running down my face as I stared back up at Jeanine. This was insane. My entire body was shaking desperately and I wanted nothing more than to comfort my crying mother. I wanted my father to be alive. But nothing like that was going to happen.

"What do you want from me?" I screamed at her, the tears falling onto the floor. "I don't know what you want. I don't know what you want. Please. Let her go. She's pregnant. You wouldn't kill an unborn child. Would you?"

She didn't bother answering me. She didn't need to. I knew that the cruel smile that twisted on her face was a yes. And I wanted nothing more than to wipe it the hell off of her face. She was a monster. This might have been a sim, but I knew that she would do this if she ever got the chance. If I ever gave her the chance.

"Amarantha? This is you? You did this?" Mom asked.

I shook my head at her. This wasn't me. Not really. She had killed my father, not me. "I didn't -"

"You killed your father!" she screamed at me.

"Please, listen, I didn't do this -"

"Because of what you are! Look at you. Trying so hard to fit in and you can't. All you bring is death. All you spread are lies! Jeanine might be the one to pull the trigger, but you're the monster," Mom continued to sneer.

No. I wasn't the monster. Jeanine was. I couldn't let Mom die hating me. "I believe you know what I want, Amarantha. Just admit it. Admit to me what you are and I might let your mother live," Jeanine said with a cruel grin on her face.

She knew that I was going to bend as I gave a dry heave. My father was dead because of me. My mother hated me. But then it dawned on me. None of this was real. My parents weren't in Erudite. They were in Amity. In their home. Jeanine was currently on a trip to Abnegation. The Faction that she was planning to attack. None of this was actually happening. And I knew a surefire way to get out of this. Die.

My mother was sobbing on the floor and Jeanine's smile hadn't faded once from her face. They
looked like the real thing, but they weren't. I just had to remind myself of that. If I could calm down and end the sim, I would manage to defeat it. If only I'd thought of that before watching my father die.

"No. This isn't real," I told myself. Suddenly the world went on mute. I couldn't hear anything. Jeanine and my mother had stopped moving. "You aren't real. They aren't."

Glancing down at the ground, I looked for my way out of the sim. There had to be a way. Clearly just calming myself down wasn't enough. I had to actually find a way to get out of here. As I searched the floor I noticed that the man that was holding the gun to my temple had his foot directly behind mine. I knew how to end this.

Raising my foot I stomped down on his foot. He yelled and as a jerk reaction he pulled the trigger. At the exact same time one of Jeanine's men shot my mother. A bleeding mass was on my mother's stomach as she fell to the ground, dead. Both my mother and my sister, gone because of me. My entire family was gone and it was all my fault. I opened my mouth to scream but it never came out. There was a blinding pain for a moment, and then nothing.

My eyes shot open to see that Four was leaning down in front of me. I jumped out of the chair as Four grabbed my arm. He managed to keep me down in the chair. My breathing was coming out in short pants and sweat was pouring down my face. Four was holding me down in the chair.

"Calm down. Calm down. You're alright. I promise it was just a sim. Your family is safe. You're alive. It's alright," he said.

I nodded weakly. He let my arm go and I got up so that I could pace the room for a moment. They were right. That was awful. My breathing was still heavy and my heart was pounding as I leaned up against the door. Four was watching me but I looked away from him. I didn't want to see him right now. It took me a moment before I finally calmed down enough to sit at the edge of the chair again. My body was shaking as I tried to shove the images of my dead parents from my mind.

"Are you okay?" Four asked.

No. But that wasn't what I was going to tell him. I was Dauntless. I could have gone through something much worse. "Y - Y - Yeah. Yeah, I'm good. I'm alright," I tried to convince both Four and myself. "How long did I take?"

My voice was very soft. I was confident that I had taken close to a half an hour. My head hung in disappointment. My time had probably been the longest of anyone. I should have known earlier that it wasn't real. I should have known that it was just a trick that the sim was playing on my mind.

Four merely stared at me for a moment before shaking his head at me. "Three minutes, twenty one seconds," he said darkly.

My jaw dropped open so hard that I thought for a moment I might have completely unhinged it. That was the fastest time by far. No one had even come close to doing that. "Are you serious?" I asked.

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Four ignored my question. "Tell me something, Alex. What did you score on your Aptitude Test?"

Four repeated.

Alright, don't panic. Don't panic. Maybe he was just asking me for conversation. "What did you score on your Aptitude Test?" Four repeated.
It wasn't just for conversation. He must have known about Divergent's. Did he know what I was? Was he going to sell me out? "Amity," I finally answered, trying to keep my voice from wavering. I just had to stick to my story.

Four clearly didn't buy it. "Try again," he snarled.

He knew. He knew that I was lying. Did he know that I was Divergent? "Amity," I repeated.

"Don't lie to me this time," Four warned.

Once more I tried to stick with my story. "Amity," I repeated.

He merely stared at me with the same scowl that he had given me the first and second time that I answered him. Maybe I could confuse him if I went with the story that Tori had told me to give my parents. But Four was a little bit smarter and a little more perceptive than my parents were.

I decided to give it a try. "I didn't actually take the Aptitude Test so my administrator just plugged Amity into the computer. She said that most people go to their home Factions. I couldn't take the test because the serum -" I rambled until Four cut me off.

"Made you sick," Four finished for me softly. My face drained of all color as I stared at Four, who was staring back at me. How did he know that? Was it possible that he was Divergent? Or maybe he had met someone else that was Divergent once? "It made you sick, right?"

"Yes," I said, not trusting myself to say anything more.

He was silent for a moment before turning back to me. "You're one of them. Aren't you?" he asked.

He couldn't have known about this. This couldn't have been happening. This was the one thing that I wanted. To protect my secret from Four. And now here I was, basically screaming to him that I was Divergent. He was staring at me like he was waiting for me to admit that he was right. But I couldn't. Not to him. He held my life in his hands. He could kill me. I had to lie to him.

"Four, I don't know what you're talking about," I told him.

My voice was wavering slightly and I wanted to punch myself. I was practically telling him that I was one. "Yes you do," he snarled.

The breath left my lungs. He knew. And no matter what I told him, he wasn't going to believe me. "No I don't," I said.

He knew the truth that I had been fighting so hard to protect for the past few months. "Tell me the truth. You're one of them. A Divergent," he said.

It was like when he said the word it finally drove the point home. It felt like a stake had gone through my heart. He knew. He knew exactly what I was. So it was time to stop fighting it and turn to just begging. If he knew there was no point in lying. Maybe he would have a heart for my struggle.

"Please, Four. Don't tell anyone. Please, don't. I beg you," I told him desperately. He was staring at me with a face that was nearly impossible to read. Tears were filling my eyes as I begged with him. "Jeanine Matthews, she's looking for them. She's going to kill me or test me or something like that. I know that she is and I know that she knows what I am. Just please, don't tell anyone."

My head went down to the floor as I fought to keep the tears at bay. "Hey, look at me," Four said. I looked up slowly. "I'm not going to tell anyone. I'm not."
He wasn't telling anyone. For now I was safe. "Thank you," I whispered.

"But we need to do something about this. You're going to get caught if you keep going like this," he said, making me tense.

He suddenly seemed panicked, something that Four never seemed. He clearly didn't like what I had just admitted to him. "I can't get caught," I said desperately.

"I know. Come back here, at midnight. It's too dangerous to keep talking about this right now. You understand me? Back here at midnight. Don't be late," he warned.

I nodded at him dumbly. "I won't," I said.

"Good. Get out of here. Mention this to no one. Don't let anyone see you leave tonight. And most importantly. Do not let Eric know about this," Four warned.

I nodded once more at him before standing. "I won't. I'll be back at midnight," I said.

Four nodded at me as I walked out of the room. All eyes were locked on me curiously. I knew why. I was fourteen minutes faster than the next best person. They all looked like they wanted to ask me how I had done it, but I was grateful that none of them had. They simply let me walk past them and out through the halls. I passed through them at a sort of autopilot and nearly froze when I walked past Eric and Max with a few others that I didn't know.

They all nodded at me and I weakly nodded back. Eric looked like he wanted to say something to me but instead he merely stared at me as I passed. I headed straight into the dorms where a few of my friends were currently sleeping. I debated on saying something to Heather, but thought against it as I dropped into bed and fell immediately asleep.

My dreams were horrible. Some of them consisted of my parents dying in front of me once again. Others were of Four betraying me. Selling out my secret. In some I was being executed. In others, the worst ones, Eric was either killing me or watching as Jeanine pulled the trigger. I knew that my sleep was fitful and, when a hand laid itself on my shoulder startling me from my latest dream, I shot upright. Heather was standing above me; her eyes had dark circles underneath them.

"Hey, come on. It's time for dinner," she told me.

"Okay," I said, standing up from the bed.

"You alright?" she asked.

"Fine."

Sensing that I wasn't quite up to speaking yet, Heather grabbed my arm and walked us into the dining room. I glanced around once we walked in and noticed that it was quieter than normal. But it was louder than it had been that morning. It seemed that everyone was trying to cheer up the initiates. The kids were the only ones that didn't seem to be acting any differently. Heather and I grabbed ourselves dinner before taking a seat at the table together.

Buck was smiling at me and I smiled back. As we dove into our meals I risked a quick glance up to see that Four was standing with Zeke. He gave me a barely perceptible nod and I looked away, not wanting to give anything up. Eric was also staring at me, but still managing to speak to Max normally. I knew that he wanted to say something to me.

"So I guess I'll go first and say what it was that I had to deal with," Buck said.
Everyone nodded with small smiles. No one wanted to be the first person to have to talk about their fear. "Thanks for starting," I teased.

We exchanged scattered laughs. "They put me in this desert. The sun was beating down on me and my skin was boiling. Like it was actually bubbling. It started to peel off and soon I burst into flames. I could feel it. And every little bit of skin that fell off was agonizing," Buck explained, making me cringe. At least there hadn't been much physical pain in mine. "There was a spring not far from me. I wasn't fast enough though. I couldn't make it. Four pulled me out but told me that now that I knew what was coming I could do better the next time I see that fear."

"At least you know what to do next time," Jax said.

"That's true. Kind of like with mine. I just have to remember the way out," Heather added. She looked better than she had this morning.

At least he knew that he could do better next time. I grabbed his hand under the table and he grinned at me. "You'll get it tomorrow," I said hopefully.

"Thanks, Alex," Buck said.

"That's awful, man. Sorry you had to go through that. It makes what I went through seem completely normal," Dante said.

"So what was yours?" Jet asked curiously.

"I woke up and I was in this small, dark closet. Couldn't get out. I was panicking when I heard voices around me but the place was so small that I couldn't take more than a step. I felt like I was in there for an hour, trying to kick and knock the doors down. Finally I calmed down enough to realize that I couldn't get into a room without a way out. So I calmed down and moved my foot around. There was a door on the floor. I opened it and I fell through." Dante sounded like he had been the calmest out of any of us. "Woke up a second later to Four telling me that I'd done good," he explained.

"Doesn't sound like you did half-bad," I put in.

Dante shook his head. "No. It could have been much worse. I'm expecting it to get worse," Dante confided.

"Well if I were afraid of enclosed spaces I'm sure that it would have been awful," Jax said. "I was on the train in mine. Couldn't realize for the life of me what was happening. And then we went over the bridge. It collapsed and the train fell under all of the debris. It was crushing me from all angles. I was pretty sure that both my ankle and wrist were broken. Probably my leg and arm too. But I had to get out of there. So I rushed through the back of the train and fell out the back end. It hurt like hell and I thought that I wouldn't survive." I could imagine the feeling of all of my bones breaking. "It's the worst part. Not realizing that it isn't real until you come out of it."

I couldn't help but to look away. None of them were the same as me. They didn't go into the sims and realize that the scenes in there weren't real. It was what made us different. That was the one good thing about being Divergent. I knew the difference between reality and my imagination.

"Yeah, it is pretty awful. I finally found out what I was afraid of," Draven said. He hadn't known what he was afraid of. "My family, dead. When I woke up it was lunchtime back home and I was sitting at the table. Then it happened. It was my sister first. She came tumbling down the stairs, the back half of her brain blown out." I knew how it felt to see my family dead. "My parents followed.
The whole time it was these faceless people, laughing. I was petrified but I knew that my brother was still alive. So I had to save him. I attacked them and killed them both. It felt like I was really killing them. I can't imagine what it will be like if I ever have to actually kill someone."

It reminded me of the trip to Amity. When I had seen Eric kill James without a second thought. Four, Cameron, Zeke, and Eric. They hadn't seemed the slightest bit bothered by the sight of the dead man. I had been the only one to jump. Maybe, in time, seeing someone die in front of me wouldn't bother me either.

"It won't be easy. Killing a person takes a lot out of someone. But that's the whole point of this place. It sets us up so that if we do ever have to take a life, we'll be prepared for it," Heather said.

I wondered if Four or Eric had ever been that concerned about killing someone. They were born brave. Even if they weren't Dauntless born. "We're Dauntless now. We'll have to kill someone eventually," I pointed out.

We all lapsed into silence for a few minutes until Heather spoke up once more. "Alex, what happened in your sim? We're here for you," she said softly.

I took in a deep breath. I had to tell them. They had all told me. "My parents," I said softly, noticing that Draven's eyes dropped. He knew how it felt. "I woke up and I was in a room that I didn't recognize. My mom was in front of me down on her knees. My dad too. Her stomach was distended. With my sister. A faceless person came out and threatened to kill them if I didn't admit something. I'm not sure what. My parents were screaming that they hated me. That they were there and it was my fault. I didn't believe her. They shot my dad first. Killed him. I tried to wrestle the gun away from one of the guards. The second that I got it the figure shot my mom through the stomach. Killed them both. I raised the gun and shot the figure at the same time they shot me. I guess I made it first. Woke up right after."

I was a little nervous that Heather, an ex-Candor, might see through my lie, but she never did. Instead she grabbed my hand and held it tightly. "Alex, that's awful," Cole said.

"Yeah. But it's like we said. It's not real. They're alive and well in Amity," I pointed out.

"Doesn't make it easier," Heather said.

"No. But I'll have to live through it time and time again until I can perfect it," I reasoned. "

Hey, your parents would never hate you. And that isn't ever going to happen. Your Mom and Dad and sister will be fine," Cole said reassuringly.

I smiled, not bothering to tell him that he was wrong. "I know," I muttered.

"Personally I think that it was well worth it. Your time was awesome!" Cole yelled, everyone joining in on his cheering.

Despite the happy air of the table, I couldn't help but to blanch. He didn't help but to blanch. He didn't realize why my time had been so short. And he wasn't Divergent. I knew that now. He would be reacting to my time differently. And he wouldn't have taken so long. Everyone was congratulating me on my quick time before a sharp sneer came from the other end of the table.

"So how do you do it, Softie?" Colt sneered at me.

It was the first time that he had spoken to me since I had been in Damien's room. That had been the last time that I had ever expected to hear him speak to me. I turned to him with a mix of surprise and
fury in my eyes. He had no right to talk to me. Not after everything that had happened.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"Everyone else's time was way behind yours. You were in and out of there in like five minutes. Not even. Even Max looked impressed when he saw your time," he told me and I gulped. Max had seen my time?

If he was looking for me to back down, he wasn't going to get it. I had been pushed around by him for long enough. "I would have thought that you learned your lesson from that guy who jumped you to talk out of term," I snapped at him.

He paled but continued to glare at me. My voice was so loud that the dining room had quieted to listen to me. "Alex -" Heather warned, but I spoke over her.

"Maybe he's listening right now. Just waiting to strike again," I snarled.

Fear flitted in his eyes for a moment and I smirked. Nothing made me happier than to see him afraid of me. Well, Eric. I dropped back into my seat and turned back to the rest of the dining room see that most people were snickering at Colt. Eric was up on the perch, watching me with an amused grin.

"And I don't do anything different. I just work fast," I mumbled softly, just loud enough for my friends to hear.

The rest of dinner thankfully went without another word of the sims or how fast I had gotten out of mine. I was incredibly grateful as the air turned to something more celebratory. We had all made it through our first sims. It was the perfect time for us to get together and have some fun after a stressful day. We had hung around the dining room for a few hours, none of us feeling up to the party atmosphere of the Pit, and the boys had gone to get us drinks.

For hours we hung around, Heather and me making sure that we kept up with the boys with our drinks. My head was beginning to feel a little fuzzy and I slowed down slightly. Only because I would need to be sober when I went back to see Four tonight. He would kill me if I came to him drunk. As Heather, Dante, and me taught Draven to do a handstand, I found myself yawning. I glanced up at the clock and saw that it was already ten. The boys were starting to settle down as well, and I saw that Heather was finding herself some comfort in Cole.

That figured. Not that I could blame them. I was about to do the same thing. I managed to pry Heather off of her boyfriend long enough to tell her that I was heading out and that I wasn't sure whether or not I would be back that night. She happily waved me off as I headed down the corridor to Eric's apartment. I knew that he was there. I had seen him leave about fifteen minutes prior. I had nodded to him as he left, silently telling him that I would be there soon.

Walking through the halls, I stopped for a brief chat with Zeke, who had heard about my time. He congratulated me before letting me go on my way. I was glad that he hadn't questioned me as to why I was in the hallway that led to the member apartments. I got to Eric's apartment quickly and gave a soft knock at the door. I didn't bother to wait, pushing the door open and heading into his apartment. He was perched on the couch, drink in hand. He was lounging in gray sweat pants and a deep gray tank top.

"What was your first fear?" he asked, not even looking up from his tablet.

Rolling my eyes at him, I kicked his feet off of the couch before planting myself a few inches from him. I probably deserved it when he kicked me in the butt before I could take a seat. I laughed as he
stretched back out, placing his legs over mine. He dropped the tablet and wrapped a hand around my thigh.

"Can't even say hello?" I asked him with a little smile.

He smirked at me and I rolled my eyes. Grabbing a spare glass left on the table that I assumed was left out for me, I took some of Eric's drink and poured it into my glass before taking a small sip. It burned, but it was good. Eric was watching me with a small smirk. It made something stir in my stomach.

His hands crawled up my legs, wrapping around my hips, yanking me into him. He planted a rough kiss against my lips. "Hello," he mumbled against my mouth. I laughed as he pulled away. "Tell me about your sim."

"I don't want to talk about it," I said softly.

Eric dropped the tablet onto the table. I knew that he was thinking that I was a coward. "It helps to talk about it. Trust me," he said.

"Did you talk about it?" I asked.

He nodded. "I told Cameron," he admitted.

I raised my eyebrow at him. I was a little surprised that he had actually told someone about it. Even if that someone was his best friend. Maybe he knew just how bad these fear sims were. Maybe, for once, he wasn't going to be an ass. But I stayed silent. I really didn't want to repeat my fear and I didn't want to hear what he had to say about my fear.

"You think that I'll laugh at you?" Eric asked.

That was close to what I was thinking. "Kind of," I admitted.

Plus I had a paranoid fear that Eric would know I was Divergent just by telling him my fear. "I won't. Cameron is afraid of birds. Can't be worse than his. When we were initiates he came out pale and sweaty because they'd flown around him and chased him through Chicago," Eric told me.

That time I couldn't help it. I threw back my head and laughed loudly. For whatever reason I could completely imagine Cameron doing something like that. And maybe the next time that I saw him I would be sure to bring it up. For all of the times that he had teased me. Eric was laughing, too. The smile suited took a moment but I finally sobered and turned to face Eric.

I was watching him with a small smile. "What?" Eric asked.

"Your smile. It's nice. You should use it more," I said.

"Come around more," Eric growled.


"Tell me about your sim," Eric said.

"It was my parents. I woke up in this room. I'm pretty sure that it was somewhere in Erudite. This person with a blurred face came forward and told me that my parents were going to die. They had no reason. Just because. I thought that it was a joke. That they wouldn't really do it. But they did. They killed my dad first. Shot him. Right through the eye. I tried to get to my mother but she started
screaming at me. Telling me that it was my fault that he was dead. That she was going to die. She
told me that she hated me. I watched as the person raised the gun and shot my mother through the
stomach. Killed both her and my unborn sister. The guard that was standing behind me was holding
a gun. I grabbed it from him and turned to shoot the figure. We fired right after each other. But mine
hit first. Woke up the second that the bullet hit them," I said, keeping in the alterations I had told my
friends.

He nodded and moved so that his legs were no longer on top of my own. He grabbed the tank top
and pulled it over his shoulders, tossing it to the ground. I watched him unabashedly and smiled at
him. He had a killer body. And a killer attitude to go along with it. I rolled my eyes at myself. Shut
up, Alex. He grinned over at me, knowing that I liked looking at him.

"You aren't the first person to be afraid of getting their family killed. It's alright. Lots of people
have," he said.

"I figured that," I muttered.

"I hear your time was pretty impressive. Just over three minutes. That's the fastest of any initiate.
Faster than most people that ever do it," he said, making me blanch.

He didn't know. He didn't look even slightly suspicious. He actually looked proud of me. It made my
heart soar. I was happier than he would ever know. "Yeah. Four told me that," I said and he nodded,
taking another drink with me. "I thought that I was in there for at least twenty minutes. I thought that
it was closer to thirty actually."

Eric nodded at me as he drained the rest of the drink and I raised my eyebrow. I didn't think that I
was a weak drinker or anything like that, but I was shocked the way that he could drain the entire
glass. I was sure that I would have accidentally spit it out if I had done something like that.

"They feel longer than they actually are," Eric said and I nodded.

Heather had mentioned to me during the night that she felt like she had been in the ship for nearly an
hour. "Maybe it'll pass in a few tries," I muttered.

"It always feels that way. I'm impressed, Amity," Eric teased.

"For what?" I asked.

"I would have thought that you'd be afraid of killing your flowers or something," Eric said, and once
more I laughed.

Seeing Eric, surprisingly, had made me feel better. His teasing was good to hear sometimes. Leaning
over him, I grabbed the bottle and poured myself another glass. Eric was watching me with a smirk
as I fell back to his side and leaned into him slightly, taking a few sips of my drink. He was watching
me with dark eyes.

"And what about you? Books burning or something?" I asked him with a little teasing lilt to my
voice.

Eric laughed and I found myself smiling. He had a nice laugh. I wished that he would do it more. His
laugh was something that I rarely heard. Normally he would scoff or something of the likes. The
laugh was something different. But I seriously was curious about his fears. What could a man like
Eric possibly be afraid of?

"What were your fears?" I asked.
He looked up at me with a raised brow. He wasn't going to tell me, but a girl could dream. "I'll tell you when you tell me the whole truth about your sim," he said.

I froze in my spot and nearly dropped the glass in my hands. How did he know that I was leaving out little parts of my sim? "What?" I asked dumbly.

"Everyone lies about certain things in their sims," he told me like it was the simplest thing on the planet.

I nodded and took another long drink before settling back into the couch. We sat together in silence as I kicked my shoes to the floor and curled my legs up underneath myself. The silence was relatively peaceful and I enjoyed it, leaning back and closing my eyes. I opened them after a few minutes and glanced over. Eric was staring down at me and I smiled softly at him.

"Come here," he growled.

Part of me wanted to snap at him and tell him to come get me, but after the day that I'd had, I no longer cared. I just wanted some form of comfort. So I moved into Eric's lap, letting one leg fall over each side of his thighs. I was about to position myself over his lap, but he grabbed my thigh and yanked me over him. I was thrown over his lap and laughed softly. I got no chance to do anything more. He kissed me roughly and I tasted the alcohol on his breath. It was mixed with the scent of wood in his hair and I smiled. Damn, he smelled good.

His hands ran up my spine and I grinned into the kiss. One of Eric's hands was underneath my leg and it ran upwards, grabbing my ass and yanking us together, to the point that I thought that I would dissolve into him. Eric tugged at my bottom lip roughly, making me moan into his mouth. His hands wound their way across the back of my neck to wind into my hair. He grabbed the roots and tugged gently, making me sigh into his mouth. I wished that this moment could last forever.

It was moments like this that I never wanted to end. It made up for everything that was happening to me. I grabbed him by the string on his sweatpants and pulled myself as close to him as I could possibly get. His hands went onto my waist and gripped me so tightly that I could feel the bruises forming. Even in the cold air of his bedroom, I was burning against Eric's bare chest.

A soft moan slipped from my mouth as his hands snuck under my knees and worked their way up to squeeze both my thighs and my ass. I laughed softly and let my nails trail down his chest, to where his pants hit his waist. He groaned at my touch and his entire body tensed. I smirked at the feel of his muscles contracting. He was so easy. Despite the fact that he didn't think that he was, he really was easy to turn on.

His hands jumped up to my hips and I laughed once more as he easily lifted me off of him, letting my legs wrap around his waist. He dropped me over the bed and I fell, bouncing a few times. He walked away from me for a moment, grabbing a drink and placing it on the bedside table before dropping over me once more. He laid himself on top of me, ensuring that he wasn't going to crush me. Our bodies melded together as we kissed all over each other, my nails raked over his body, and his hands left bruises with his force, and our clothes were displaced.

He had no idea just how good it felt when his hands traveled to the hem of my shirt and ripped it slightly as he pulled it off of me. His hands were rough against my skin as he ripped it away from me, tossing it from us. I gasped as his hands went from my waist down to my thighs and he pulled them apart, jamming himself in between my legs. He let out a small grunt, grabbing me around the waist somewhat painfully and yanked me upwards. I growled slightly, heart beating rapidly, as I moved back and ground my hips to rub against his.
It was easy to feel him growing harder, straining against his pants, and I smirked, loving that I was the person that could do that to him. Our torsos were pressed together as I leaned forward and gave a gentle nip at the skin between his shoulder and neck. He let out a deep growl at the sudden feeling. His hips jerked upwards into mine and I gasped. It surprised me when his mouth came down to mine, pulling me into a bruising kiss. His tongue immediately jumped into my mouth.

A soft moan escaped my mouth as he grabbed the bra and snapped it off of me, throwing it far across the room. It surprised me slightly when he broke the kiss to bite roughly at my shoulder. I gasped softly as he came back up to my mouth, his tongue swirling in my mouth, battling my own for dominance. It was rather easy to see that he was beating me in our quest for control of the other. I was sure that he always wanted to be the one in charge.

My head fell back in pleasure when his hand went down to my breast, his thumb rolling over my nipple. He grabbed my hair and yanked my head back to his own roughly. A little hint of pain shot through me, and I was ashamed to admit that I liked the pain. It was a kink that I'd recently realized that I had, much with Eric's help. I let out a sharp cry into his mouth as he started up the kiss again, his finger pinching at my nipple.

Eric's mouth curled up in a smile, knowing that he had gotten exactly the reaction that he was looking for, as he looped his tongue around mine. I laughed softly and groaned when he ground his hips into mine. I was panting as he rolled my nipple in between his finger and pinched it tightly. He yanked me up towards him once more, our bare chests pushed together. He forced me to lean back slightly, exposing my entire chest to him. Despite wanting to be in charge, I also wanted him to get on with it. I needed my release, and wanted to give him his.

Every once in a while he would squeeze my other breast roughly. Occasionally his hand would drop down to the spot in between my legs and squeeze. I really wanted him to take off my pants, but I knew that he wouldn't do it until I was good and ready. My breath left my body as he moved his mouth from mine to my breast. His mouth dropped over my nipple and I groaned, throwing back my head, moaning loud enough for most of the floor to hear.

My hands went up to his hair and I pulled back at his roots. He hissed in pain and tightened his teeth around my nipple. A sharp tingle went through my stomach, making me roll my hips against his. Eric groaned, the humming spreading through my entire body. God, I just wanted him inside of me. But he knew that, and he wouldn't.

"Eric. Stop teasing," I begged softly, rolling my hips up to meet his once more.

He simply ignored me as he grabbed me around the waist and raised me off of him. I laughed softly as he tightened his grip and lifted me off of him. He rolled the two of us before shoving me down onto the bed, and pushing my hips down into his bed. His hand was on the bottom of my stomach, keeping me from moving.

His fingers grabbed at the waistband of my pants and he easily began to yank at them. I laughed softly as he popped the button and ripped them off. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had ripped them. Not that I cared. He could do whatever he wanted as long as he slept with me. At the force of the tug, my underwear went with them. They went somewhere over the edge of the bed, gone from sight. I groaned as he slid my legs apart, settling himself between them.

He gave me no warning before plunging a finger inside of me, curling it as far as he could. I yelled out as he bit down on my nipple and his other hand wound into my hair, pulling it back. My breath was coming in soft pants at the feeling of him moving back and forth. My hands went to clawing at
his sheets as I tried to gain more friction on his finger.

But Eric knew what I wanted and he wasn't about to give it to me. "Beg for it," Eric growled.

My head fell backwards onto the sheet and I groaned once more. The last thing that I wanted to do was give him the pleasure of hearing me beg, but I wasn't sure that I was going to last much longer with his teasing. I knew what he wanted. He wanted to know that he had control over me. And he did. As much as I hated to admit it, he did. In the bedroom, at least.

He added a second and third finger in and I groaned as he stretched out my walls. But it was nothing compared to him. His mouth finally released my breast to travel down my body. His tongue slipped out of my mouth so that he could drag it down my body. He trailed it in between the crease of where I wanted him most, and my thigh and I shivered at the feeling. He was teasing me far more than I could take.

He kissed at the crease before moving over and coming down to my clit. He grabbed it in his mouth and began to suck, his tongue swirling around it. My body gave a sudden jerk at the feeling, and I cried out, grabbing for his pants. The one thing that I wanted was for him to be in me. His teeth ran over my clit in a gentle bite and I gasped softly, his name slipping from my mouth. He let me graze hims bulge softly, but he jolted as I gripped him tightly. He grabbed my hand and he pried it away from himself, shoving it underneath my back.

His tongue swirled around my clit as he sucked at it and pumped his fingers in and out of me. "Eric, Eric please. Harder. God, yes," I moaned, arching my back as far as I possibly could.

He continued to ground my body back into the bed. The bundle in my core was tightening more and more with each passing second. My body was beginning to convulse as the bundle threatened to release. But I couldn't believe that he would actually let me hit my release. He always wanted me to be in him when I did. But this time he didn't. He merely continued, whispering things that would have made even the roughest Dauntless blush into my ear, briefly leaving my center.

That was all that it took. My walls closed around his finger and he dropped next to me, kissing me roughly, letting my screams fill his mouth. I tasted myself on him but I didn't care. The only thing that I cared about was what he was doing to me right now. My body was tingling as I let out a few spasms. He used his spare hand to pinch at my clit and I cried out once more as his tongue wrapped around my own. His spare hand dropped to the band of his pants. Thank god. I needed this. But I needed him more.

My body fell limply onto the bed, my breathing shallow and rapid, as he retracted his fingers and peeled his pants off, his member springing free. It was far larger than anyone else that I had been with, and I was grateful for it. It was the reason that I loved sex with him as much as I did. I wanted to tell him to give me a minute, but my breath was still coming in short pants. No real words were coming out, and they wouldn't for a while.

"Don't you dare think that I'm done with you yet," Eric growled.

I tried to respond to him, but it only came out as a little moan. Eric pulled me up and I suddenly regained the urge to fight him. All of the tiredness that I'd felt before was gone. Now I wanted to see what I could do to him. So I shoved his chest roughly and watched as he fell back onto the bed. He looked like he was about to reach up and kill me, but before he could stand upright on the bed, I jumped on top of his waist and lowered myself onto him, not giving him a chance to do anything about it.

His eyes rolled back into his head at the sudden movement. I groaned as he stretched me out,
throwing my head back towards the ceiling, as I slid down his entire length. My legs were still shaking from my previous orgasm as I continued to move downwards until he was buried completely inside of me. Eric's head had fallen back on the mattress and his eyes had gone nearly black as I leaned forward, chests pressed together, raking my nails through his hair.

"Keep going," he groaned.

Nodding, I raised myself up to slam back down onto him. It obviously left him very surprised that I had done something like that. It was usually him that made the sudden movements. He let out a string of curses, his eyes rolling back once more, as I repeated the motion, feeling the nerves bundling inside my lower half. His hips began to lift up to meet my thrusts roughly and I found myself nearly being bucked off of him. So I leaned backwards and placed one hand on the mattress. The two of us were moving quickly, meeting each other's thrusts, both of us grunting and panting as we slammed together.

Finally I knew that he couldn't take it anymore. He sat upright and grabbed my hips, rocking us backwards so that we went sprawling back onto the bed and completely off, landing in a tangled mess on the floor. I would have laughed if he hadn't almost immediately continued. He hadn't pulled out of me, despite our awkward fall, and I didn't care in the slightest. He straightened me out, as we had landed in a heap, and threw my legs back over his shoulders, spreading them as far as they could go.

His thumb went straight to my clit and I screamed softly as he wrapped his spare hand around my thigh and began to rock into me harder than I thought was possible. He was rocking me so hard that I thought that he was going to completely shove me away from him. He pounded into me, holding my thighs apart so that I couldn't close them as my release came closer. He knew that was what I would do when I was getting close.

He was getting close too as he leaned down and swallowed my mouth with his own. His hips were smashing into my own and I moaned his name into his mouth, begging for him to go faster and harder. He complied with my request, moving frantically. All sorts of noises were escaping my mouth as his fingers twisted at my nipples and our tongues battled for dominance. He won the fight as my walls began to tighten around him and I moaned his name loudly. He was still shoving himself into me as my vision became spotty and my second orgasm hit at full force.

I could tell that he was restraining himself. He was the type of guy that would always make sure that I found my release first. He cared more about my own pleasure than he did his own. My name slipped from his lips a few times as his body started to convulse. My grunts came softer as he pushed my legs to the side of my head, hitting a spot deeper inside of me than before. He found his release moments later as he let himself go inside of me, making me sigh deeply. He rode out his last few thrusts as I leaned my head up to meet his in another soft kiss.

My breath was coming in weak pants as he picked me up from the floor. I wrapped my legs around him, neither one of us breaking apart from the kiss. He dropped us into his bed and we rolled over for a second with him still inside of me. I sat on top of his waist, my torso pressed against his for a moment before finally breaking the kiss. He sat up and I went with him, pressing another kiss against his mouth. His hands went up into my hair, tightening his grip on me. We were both panting as I raised up off of him and dropped into the bed beside him. He fell back next to me a moment later.

I thought about leaving the room but he made it obvious that I wasn't leaving tonight. He grabbed me and pulled me under the blanket as he kissed me once more. I sighed into his mouth as he pushed my very tangled hair from my face. His kiss became a little more heated as I pushed him away from me. There was something that I still needed to do, despite being desperate for round two. I was impressed
with Eric's recovery time.

Eric grunted as rolled his eyes at me and turned away. I nudged him with my foot against his bare ass but he merely kicked me, much harder than I would have liked. I groaned at the pain and heard him snort against the pillows. That was just the way that we were. And I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way. I liked being rough with him. I debated on hitting him for the kick, but decided to let it go as I rolled onto my other side. It was a few minutes later when he turned to face me and placed a kiss in the crook of my neck, the few little hairs he had on his chin rubbing against the sensitive skin, sending a shiver down my spine.

"Your loss, Amity," Eric purred as his fingers swiped the lips in between my thighs. He had known that it would get to me. I bit my lip to keep from making a noise as he laughed and threw his arm over me, deliberately continuing to swipe his thumb over my nipples from time to time. Damn you, Four. Of course Eric would choose tonight to want a round two. This was the one night that I couldn't do it.

Later that night I laid in bed, wide awake, as Eric slept soundly next to me. His soft breathing was filling the otherwise silent room. It was getting close to midnight and I had had to pretend to be asleep before Eric had finally allowed himself to fall asleep. The corny part of me hoped that it was because he wanted to make sure that I was going to spend the night. But the rational part of me knew that it was because he was suspicious of why I was still awake.

It was now ten minutes before midnight and I stood from the bed. The last thing that I wanted was to be late for my meeting with Four. Before I could get out of bed, Eric rolled over. He was half leaning on me and I laughed as a muscle-corded arm laid itself over me. He protested for a moment as I tried to wrestle myself out of his grip. He didn't want to let go of me but, after a brief struggle with him, he finally let me go. I stood and pulled on my clothes before dashing out the door silently and heading to the sim room.

Thankfully most people seemed to be asleep as I managed to avoid anyone on my way to the sim room. Once I made my way into the sim room, I pressed open the door to the waiting room and saw that no one was there. I walked in and pushed open the door to the actual sim room. It was only a minute before midnight. Four should have been here. But he wasn't. No one was.

I raised my eyebrow and glanced around the room as the door fell shut. A hand grabbed mine and I gasped, throwing my fist out blindly at the figure. They caught my hand and I went to raise my leg into a kick that should have been aimed for their chest. Just before I could, I saw that it was Four. He dropped my hand and I pressed it to my chest, where my heart was currently racing.

"Damn it, Four. You scared the hell out of me," I snarled at him.

He merely smirked as I rubbed my fist. Four had a crushing grip. I would hate to be the person on the other end of his punches. Although I was sure that Eric probably hit harder. "Good reflexes," Four teased.

I rolled my eyes, walking forward a little more into the room. "Thanks, asshole," I snapped.

A spare chair was set out and I knew that it was for him. I hoped we wouldn't be here too late. I was exhausted from the day. And I really wanted to go back to bed. Four was watching me closely and I couldn't help the blush that rose to my face. He wasn't stupid. He knew what I had just been doing.

"You're a big girl. I get it," he told me with a shrug, making me smile at him.
"Thanks," I muttered.

At least he wasn't going to call me out on it. He led me over to the chair that I was sitting in earlier and I took a seat, my legs starting to shake a little bit. This time I was still nervous, but I didn't feel like I was about to die. Maybe it was because the secret was already out.

"Alright, we're going to go into one of my fears. I'm going to teach you how to get out of your fears like a Dauntless would. Not like you can. They'll kill you if they see the way that you get out," he said.

"Okay."

I knew what he meant about my way of getting out of the sim being different from the way that everyone else would get out of the sim. They had to fight their way out of the sim. I could realize that it was fake and stun myself from the sim. As long as he would show me what I needed to do, I wouldn't complain.

"It gives away that I can see past the serum, right?" I asked.

Four was filling up two of the vials with the serum. "Yes," he said.

I leaned forward in the chair. "Four, I have to ask. Why are you helping me?" I asked softly.

Even though I knew that no one was anywhere near this section of the Faction, I felt like I still had to be quiet. If Four and I got caught here, I knew that it would be both of our heads on the chopping block. And I was sure that Eric would be the one to play executioner.

"You aren't the only one with something to hide," he said.

"What do you mean?" I asked, raising my brow.

"Divergent's. They're more common than you think. And they aren't as dangerous as Jeanine Matthews seems to think," Four said.

Once more I found myself nodding. Now it all made sense. How Four had known that I had been sick by the serum. How he had known exactly what I was. Why he was helping me. I wasn't the only one with something to hide. He'd been hiding the same secret that I had. And he was good at it. I would have never suspected him.

"You're one, too. Divergent," I said softly.

"That's right," Four said.

I let out a long breath. He had no idea how good it felt to not be alone. It made sense that he was Divergent. He was Dauntless to the core, but I saw other things in him too. He was intelligent, he was kind, he was selfless, and he was truthful. It made perfect sense now that I actually thought about it.

"So we're going into your fear?" I asked Four.

"We are."

"You know, I think I'm good. I'm pretty sure that I don't want to know what you're afraid of," I told him, half-joking and half-serious.

He merely shoved me back into the seat as I stood. I stumbled slightly as I fell into the chair. "Don't
be such a baby," Four snapped.

I scoffed. "I'm not a baby," I snapped back.

I just didn't want to know what type of thing a tough guy like Eric was afraid of. "If you're brave enough to sleep with Eric I'm pretty sure you're brave enough to see one of my fears," he pointed out.

I laughed loudly. "Wasn't expecting you to be that blunt," I said.

I shoved Four, not that it made any difference, and he grinned at me as he led me over to the chair. He brought the needle up to my neck and I took in a breath. At least this time it wasn't my fear. But there was a chance that his fear might be even worse than mine.

"Wait for me in there. I'll be right behind you," he told me. I nodded as the pinch of the needle hit my neck and I fell.

Time slowed as I woke to find myself in a building that looked to be in the center of Chicago. But it wasn't. There was no Fence and all of the buildings around me were dilapidated. At least some buildings in Chicago still looked new. There was another building about a hundred feet from me and a narrow, metal beam that connected my building to the other one. I had to be at least eighty stories up from the ground.

If this were real, a fall from here would kill me. So would the fire. The building that I was standing on was producing an insane heat wave. I turned back in shock to see that it was on fire. It wouldn't be long before the fire reached the beam, making it impossible to walk on. There was a time limit. I only had so much time to make my way to the other building. Was Four afraid of fire, like Buck? Or maybe it was something deeper, like a fear of the unknown. Four appeared next to me after a moment, looking a little sick.

He moved to the edge of the building, near where I was standing, but I noticed that he kept a little bit of distance. This was so strange. I would think that a guy like Four would be afraid of being Factionless or something like that. Not of burning to death. If that was even what this fear meant.

"I don't get it. What are you afraid of? Fire? Burning to death?" I asked him stupidly.

Four walked a little closer to the edge of the building and I almost wanted to take his hand. He looked like he would rather die than be here. I would have to make sure to thank him for this later. He probably hadn't been in one of these fear sims in four years, since he had been an initiate himself.

"I take it that Erudite was not one of the Factions that you were suited for," Four said.

Asshole. I was suited for all of them but Candor. "Actually it was. Candor was the only one that I didn't seem to have an aptitude for," I snapped at Four.

Four looked a little surprised, but his lips turned up in a smile. So did mine. "I see why you weren't Candor," Four said.

Most of the time it wasn't by choice. I had to lie. It was the only way that I could live. "Seriously. What are you afraid of?" I asked.

It was driving me nuts that he knew what I was afraid of, and I didn't know what he was afraid of. Hell, I was in his stupid fear sim and I couldn't figure out what he was afraid of. "Come on," Four said, pulling me to the edge of the building. "We have to cross the beam."
"I figured," I muttered.

But the one thing that he didn't understand was that the beam was going to collapse under us. I wasn't even sure that it could take both of our weight. I wasn't even sure that it could take mine. We might have more luck trying to fight through the fire. Or we could jump. The hit at the end would be sure to wake us up. And we would have a good time. Four had left the clock running.

"Four, that thing's going to collapse under us. We could just jump off of the edge of the building. It's only a sim. The second we hit the ground we wake up back in the room," I suggested.

He looked over at me with an exasperated face. The moment that I said it was the moment that I realized my mistake. That was something that someone who was Divergent would do. That wasn't something that a Dauntless would do. They would cross the beam and not think about it.

"And that's exactly what's going to get you killed. That's what a Divergent would do. That's not what a Dauntless would do. A Dauntless would cross that beam without thinking that it might collapse. Remember this for the final test. They're going to be watching you. Don't recognize that it's not real. Solve the problems that are set in front of you as a Dauntless would do and make it fast. Don't kill yourself to get out of it. They'll know if you do that," he instructed.

Nodding at him, I propped my foot up against the edge of the beam and tested my weight on it. It let out a soft groan and I cringed. At least if it collapsed, I wouldn't die. It seemed steady, but I wasn't sure how steady it would be once I got to the middle of the beam, the weakest point.

"Alright. Then let's go," I said softly. The fire was getting close now. "Come on."

I stepped onto the beam and sucked in a breath. It wobbled slightly. My foot could barely fit on the narrow beam. I risked a glance down and noticed just how high up we were. It was a damn long drop. Maybe Four was afraid of falling. My next footstep was slightly off center and I screamed as my foot went toppling off of the beam. I slipped and hit my chest against the beam as I caught myself and forced my arms to pull my weight back up onto the beam.

"Alex!" Four yelled as I rooted myself back against the beam.

"I'm good," I called back to him.

My legs were now shaking desperately. I was taking large steps - wanting nothing more than to get to the other building - as I walked and I knew that I needed to slow down. I was being careless. That was why I had fallen in the first place. I turned back briefly to see that Four was moving slowly.

"Four, come on! You're taking forever."

He had to be at least thirty feet behind me. I was getting close to the end of the beam. I would be off in a few more steps. "Slow down, damn it. You fall and this thing is over," he told me.

He was right. If I fell and died, even on accident, they would take off points for being careless. And I was not getting kicked out of Dauntless now. "Okay," I said, my breath hitching in my throat as I nearly fell once more.

"You got lucky last time. We have to move slow to make sure that neither one of us falls. And stop looking down," he snapped.

Finally I understood. I got what Four was afraid of. "You're afraid of heights," I called back, smiling at him.
I took tiny steps towards the edge of the beam, my legs still shaking. I turned back long enough to see Four barely nodding at me and I nearly laughed. That was a rather mundane fear for someone as tough and mysterious as Four. He didn't say anything back to me, but I noticed a nasty glare settle on his features.

"For someone that always seems so strong and stoic a fear of heights seems almost silly," I told him with a little laugh.

"Keep going, damn it," Four growled.

I made it to the end of the beam and took a slow step off, making sure that I wouldn't shake it. I turned back to see that Four was about fifteen feet from the end. The flames were already on the end of the beam. "Four, the flames are melting the end of the beam. Hurry up," I said, motioning for him to walk faster.

He didn't look up but I knew that the scowl on his face was for me. "Very helpful, Alex," Four groaned.

I ignored his quip and motioned for him to move faster. The beam was melting and I nearly screamed when it gave way. Four was only feet away. It fell and I screamed as Four fell with the beam. I jumped to the edge and grabbed Four's hand. My arm popped and my back groaned in protest but I managed to hang on to him. After struggling for a few minutes over how heavy Four was I finally managed to pull him over the side of the building.

He rolled off of the edge of the building and collapsed next to me, leaning on me slightly. "Good reflexes," he repeated what he had told me before.

I was still laughing softly when I opened my mouth, only to find myself in the sim room, sitting in the chair. We had taken eight minutes and nineteen seconds. Longer than I had before, but it was still a good time. Four was pacing the room and I smiled when I saw that his forehead was veiled in a thin sheet of sweat. He clearly really hated heights. Not that I blamed him. They weren't the most pleasant thing in the world.

But I certainly wasn't afraid of them. I couldn't help but to wonder what else he was afraid of, if he was even afraid of anything else, or if it was something as mundane as being afraid of heights. Maybe they got darker. Like mine. Maybe it was both. But I couldn't imagine that Four was afraid of many things.

"It couldn't have been something normal like climbing the Ferris wheel out by the docks?" I asked Four, who laughed softly.

He walked over to me and handed me his bottle of water. I was panting slightly as I grabbed the bottle and drained it. "You did well," Four said.

"Thanks."

"Do it like that on the last day and they'll never notice a thing is off about you. We'll do this every other day to make sure that you know how to conquer each one of your new fears without making it too obvious what you are," he said.

"Okay."

At least I didn't have to do this every night. But still, every other night was a lot. "Go to bed. Tomorrow won't be any easier," Four said.
"Thanks, Four. For everything," I told him.

"Of course," he said, giving me a small smile.

Four might not be what Eric was to me, but he certainly meant a lot to me. Especially with all that he was doing for me. I moved in to give him a hug, wrapping my arms around his torso. He was shaking slightly and I smiled. He must have really hated heights. His arms wrapped loosely around my shoulders before he let go.

"I'll see you tomorrow," I told him.

He nodded at me as I let go and backed away from him. I turned to the door before I was called back by Four. "Alex?"

"Yeah?" I asked.

"Your sim today. Something is going on between you and Jeanine Matthews. What is it? What do you know about her?" he asked.

My jaw snapped shut as I debated whether or not I should tell him. I knew that eventually I would have to talk to him about Jeanine's plans; they would come out one way or another, but I wasn't sure that now was the right time to tell him. He had enough on his plate with trying to keep me safe.

"You can tell me. If something is happening, you can't fight it on your own. I can help," he said.

I didn't have a doubt in my mind about that. Smiling at him, I gave him a little nod. "I know you can," I told him honestly.

One day I knew that I would need Four's help. But that day hadn't come yet. Four had helped me enough just in the last eight hours. He deserved a little bit of time to himself to deal with these new revelations. He deserved a normal night. As normal as it could get anyways.

"I'll tell you soon. I promise. Just not tonight. You've done more than enough for me today. Let me do something for you and not tell you this. When the time comes I'll tell you," I told him.

A small smile actually graced Four's face and I realized that he looked much better when he was smiling. Just like Eric did. Despite the fact that they didn't like each other, they were more like each other than they thought. Maybe there was a chance that they could be friends one day. I would like that.

"I'll hold you to that," Four told me and I smiled at him. Once more I turned to leave. I grabbed the door and held it open as I went to walk out. "Alex?"

I turned back and leaned against the door. "Yeah?" I asked.

"Make sure that you don't tell anyone about this. Especially Eric," he said.

"I know," I muttered, feeling a little pang going through my chest.

He was right. Eric was not someone that I could trust. "He might be a good guy right now, but he's in it with Jeanine. And I'm not so sure that he'd stop. Even if your life was in danger," Four continued.

Weakly, I nodded at him. He was wrong. I hoped. I walked out of the room and let the door slip shut behind me. Silently I moved back through the hallway and headed back to Eric's room. I probably
should have gone straight to the dorms but, after tonight, I wanted to know that Eric was still at my side. For now, at least.

I pushed the door open to Eric's room and saw that the lights were still off. That meant that he hadn't realized that I was gone. After all, I had only been gone for about half an hour. Eric's soft snores filled the room and I walked back towards the bed, stripping off my clothes once more, trying to fling them back towards where they had been. I gently settled back into the bed and let my head rest against the pillow as Eric shifted towards me in his sleep.

"Did you go somewhere?" he asked, his voice riddled with sleep.

I jumped, thinking that he was asleep. I forced my heart to stop beating so fast and fought to make a yawn to come out of my mouth. Thankfully it worked. "Just the bathroom," I said sleepily.

I hoped that he couldn't tell that I was lying. Judging by his husky grunt, I knew that he hadn't. He said nothing but grabbed me tightly, smashing me against his chest. I was a little surprised that he was being this affectionate with me, but I wasn't going to say anything. I liked it. I settled into his chest and planted a small kiss against his chest as our bodies melded together. One of my hands rested against his chest as his head fell against the top of my skull. This was perfect. I just wished that we could stay like this forever.

Eric shifted towards me. "Do I remember you saying that you didn't want to sleep tonight?" he asked.


"Good."

Nothing made me happier than the way that he'd said it. I knew that he wanted round two all night, and I was thrilled that he was finally coming to collect. Eric grabbed me around the waist and yanked me towards him. I laughed as he rolled the two of us onto his side of the bed. He pulled me up on top of him before grabbing my hips and lifting me upwards. I laughed as he sat up on his knees, my legs on each side of him, as he slammed my back into the headboard. I gasped softly as he shoved into me, far rougher than I was expecting. But it felt amazing as I raked my nails down his back.

My grip was so hard that I might have drawn a little bit of blood. Eric merely hissed and pulled me into a searing kiss, grunting each time that he shoved into me, very nearly breaking the headboard. It turned out that I wasn't just in for a round two that night. In fact, I managed to lose count. The only thing that I knew was that the sun was already rising when we finally managed to really go to sleep.
Chapter Seventeen

As much as I hated it, I knew that it was time to wake up. I hadn't gotten much sleep last night but that didn't matter. The day must go on. So I yawned deeply and opened my eyes. If nothing else I at least slept much better in Eric's bed than I did my own. It was ten times more comfortable.

It had been a week since my first fear sim and this was the second night this week that I had spent with him. He seemed to be slowly opening up to me staying more often, but I wasn't going to push my luck. I still spent most of my nights in the dorms and made sure to spend most of my free time with my friends. But they weren't stupid. They had realized that I had someone to spend the night with. Thankfully, except for a few passing comments and jeers, they hadn't said much about it. But I was sure that it would change if I ever got the chance to admit to them that it was Eric.

Sitting up in his bed, I grabbed my book off of the side table and flipped it open once more. I was nearly done with it. Eric, on the other hand, was flipping through a manual across from me and grumbling about how whatever he was doing was supposed to be Max's job. The manual was long and wordy. I smiled at him and turned back to my book. I was reading his copy of Frankenstein.

Despite many attempts, I had never been able to sneak it from the Amity library. But I was glad that I could read it now. I was currently reading the part near the end of the book where Dr. Frankenstein was on the ship and telling his Monster that his dying wish to take his creation to the grave with him. I knitted my eyebrows and scowled at the page. Why spend so much time creating something that you could love, only to destroy it?

Sprawling myself across the bed, I read the last few pages of the book. As my eyes scanned over the pages, Eric's shirt rolled up on my thighs. The corner of my lips quirked upwards when I saw Eric's eyes briefly stray from the manual to trail over my legs. Lately I'd been coming to Eric's apartment at night and we would roll around in bed together for a bit. Or the kitchen. Or bathroom. Or living room. We weren't picky.

Regardless, we would end up in bed together and I would read until I was either too exhausted to continue or it was time for my lessons with Four. Which I had told Eric was my self-set curfew. Midnight. He had laughed but shockingly hadn't fought me on it. I actually found myself enjoying my time with Four. It was funny to get to know him as a friend rather than a trainer. We had quickly become something close to good friends but we made sure to never let anyone see it. After all, even friendships with trainers and leaders were frowned upon. It could still show favoritism.

Often times I thought about what I had learned from Four over the past week of training with Four. Well, what I had learned about him as a person. Unfortunately, it wasn't much. He was tight-lipped when it came to his own life. I still didn't know his real name, which I knew wasn't Four, anything about his family, or which Faction he had originally come from.

The only things that he'd admitted to me were that he was a transfer and an only child. I knew that he was a transfer. Although I was a little surprised to hear that he was an only child. Just like I had been for seventeen years. I would always feel like one. Even though I was going to have a sister, I would only see her one day a year. My birthday, along with Four's, had gone and passed without notice. We were both grateful. It turned out that neither one of us enjoyed making a spectacle of our birthdays. I had turned seventeen only a few weeks after coming to Dauntless and Four had turned twenty-one just a few weeks ago.

Despite the good times that I'd had with Four over the past week, I hated having to think about my fear sim. Over the past week I had been experiencing the same fear over and over. More than once I
had asked Four if it were possible to have only one fear. He had told me that it was possible but unheard of. That at least gave me confirmation that Four and Eric both had more than one fear. I still didn't know any of Eric's, and only one of Four's.

Four just assumed that my fear was repeating itself until I perfected it. He also thought that I was close to figuring out the fear sim that I had grown so accustomed to seeing. I felt more than a little uncomfortable that I had grown so used to seeing my parents slaughtered before my eyes. This new fear might prove a good change.

Four had been extremely helpful with teaching me to master the sim. Most of the past week had been dedicated to teaching me how to properly deal with getting out of a fear sim - meaning Four's heights fear. But we had gone into my fear sim at night one time and Four had taught me how to conquer it the proper way. I now rushed through the sim as fast as I could.

Four had taught me to run and duck behind the counters the moment that I popped into the sim. I would then wait for Jeanine to come into the room. Once she had, I would attack the guard that was the closest to me and grab the gun, using his body as a shield, before shooting Jeanine in the forehead. The sim would then end, since my parents were out of harm's way. Four had told me that Jeanine would be there to watch the fear landscape and suggested that if she brought her death up to me, to ignore her.

Finally turning the last page of Frankenstein, I dropped the book onto the bedside table and sat upright. I glanced over at Eric and smiled when I saw that he was still emerged in his tablet, grumbling profanities to himself. At least I knew that he did work on occasion. He never seemed to be working whenever I was watching.

I stood from the bed, knowing that despite the fact that Eric hadn't looked up from the tablet he was still watching me. I grabbed my clothes and headed into the back of his apartment, closing myself in the bathroom. I peeled Eric's shirt off and turned on the water. I shook my hair out and stepped under the hot stream, sighing as it hit me. Eric's shower was the only time that I could get warm water in Dauntless since being with Damien. I leaned my forehead against the cool glass wall of the shower and let the hot water pour over me.

My mind was racing with thoughts of the day to come. I wanted to know if I was finally going to see a different fear today. Judging by the pit that was forming in my stomach, I had a funny feeling that it was going to be different. Some of my friends had moved on to new fears. Heather and Buck had both gotten past their first fears. Heather's new fear was spiders and Buck's was heights. I had laughed when he had told me that one.

Draven and Dante had both told us that their fears were changing every day. They had both said that they saw their first fears a few times since our first practice session. Jax had just said yesterday that his first fear had finally changed. Jet and Cole were usually pretty quiet about their fear sims since they had told us what their first ones were. I knew that most people had trouble dealing with their sims and avoided talking about them if they could.

The rankings had changed slightly in the past week and for the most part, it was for the better. Aaron still sat at the number one spot, much to his pleasure. But pretty soon he would be bumped into the second spot, where I was currently resting, much to Eric and Four's pleasure. But Four had warned me to be careful about my timing. He wanted me to take my time. He was nervous that Max would get suspicious. But I wanted that first place spot, and I knew that I was getting close to it.

Draven, Jackson, Dante, Michael, Greg, Buck, and Lisa followed in the top ten spots. Heather had moved up to the eleventh spot. One more spot and she would be safe from possible Fence duty. Cole was right behind his girlfriend and I was hoping that he could push his way up too. Jet, Darren, Sara,
and Serena followed him. Jade, unfortunately, had moved up to the seventeenth spot. Jason and Aria followed her. Hunter and Colt were still in the bottom two rankings, right below the red line. I knew that the both deserved to be higher, but I was sure that Eric and Four were working to keep them below the red line.

I couldn't help but to let my mind wander and think about what my fear might be today. If I was right it was going to be changing. Like the first time that I had seen one of my fears, I wasn't sure what it would be. I had a feeling that, at some point, my friends would probably be involved. They were the people that I would die to keep safe. Part of me was wondering if I would see Four in my fear sim at some point. I had become close to him over the last few days but I wasn't sure if we were really that close.

I was sure that at some point Eric was going to pop up in one of my sims. But I wasn't sure how. I just knew that I didn't want to have to face him. I didn't want to know just how afraid of Eric I really was. I just wanted to be ignorant to him. I was inclined to think that Jeanine was going to continue appearing in my fears, considering she held so much over my head.

The door to the bathroom opened and I looked away from the wall. Eric was walking into the bathroom and I blushed deeply. He was standing at the sink without a scrap of clothing on himself. It never failed to surprise me just how bold Eric was. He never bothered to wear any clothes when it was just the two of us. He brushed some loose hairs out of his eyes as he turned away from the mirror and walked back to the shower stall.

I was watching him out of the corner of my eyes as he opened the door to the shower and walked in. I backed out of the water so that he could get underneath it. He shut the glass door behind him and his eyes shot straight to me, darkening almost immediately. He walked under the stream of water and his dark eyes suddenly went wide.

"Damn it, Amity. I don't think you have the shower hot enough," he groaned with a little scowl.

Smiling softly, I couldn't help but to laugh. As he turned his back to me I watched him with my brow raised. His back was slightly red and I couldn't help but to laugh. Eric wasn't the first person to ever complain to me how hot I liked the water. Florian had once used my shower and complained about how hot I had left the water. Iris had used my shower plenty of times and had never once complained about how hot it was. Maybe it was a girl thing.

"Don't be such a bitch," I shot back.

The moment that the words left my lips, I knew that saying it was a bad idea. He probably knew that it was just me teasing him but his head still snapped back to me. No matter what, he didn't like to be insulted. He moved out from under the water, which had turned his pale body slightly red, and grabbed me by the arm. My heart jumped into my throat as Eric shoved me roughly back into the shower wall.

"What the fuck did you say?" he snarled.

I shivered as the cold from the shower wall seeped into my back. But his body was warm against mine. "Nothing," I muttered.

"Come on, Amity. Don't get shy now," he purred, leaning into my torso.

Despite the fact that Eric liked to look tough, I knew the difference between when he was genuinely angry with me and when he was teasing me. I smirked as he watched me closely. If Eric didn't want me to be shy with him, than I would certainly oblige. I moved towards him and, without giving him
warning, I launched myself into his arms. Thankfully he had fast reflexes as he caught me underneath the thighs and I wrapped my legs around him, taking some of my weight off of his arms.

He groaned as I crashed my mouth into his. He walked us back across the shower stall and I grinned as he stopped us underneath the shower head. The water poured over us as our mouths moved together. The slickness of the water against our bodies made us practically slide against each other. His hands dug into the skin of my lower thighs and my fingers worked through his hair. He lifted me a little higher on his body and I smirked as I felt him pressing into my thigh.

His hands were tight around my thighs as he threw me up against the other glass wall. I groaned as Eric moved his mouth over my own. His tongue was rough on the skin of my neck as he moved down and I let out a moan that was amplified against the glass walls. One of his hands dropped lower on my body and I sighed against his neck, kissing softly behind his ear.

The day would probably hold awful surprises and scares that would normally paralyze me, but I had right now, with Eric. It was the moments like this that I never wanted to forget. Eric's hand went to the water nozzle and I laughed and he jammed it off. He walked us out of the bathroom and into his bedroom, without ever moving his mouth away from mine. I felt his feet slip a few times from the water but he didn't care as he unwrapped my legs from around his torso and threw me down onto the bed.

We were both lying on the bed a little while later, panting heavily and staring up at the ceiling. Underneath us, the sheets were completely soaked. The sheets would definitely need to be washed from the water and other stains. Of course, whenever Eric and I were together he normally had to wash the sheets not long after. I smiled as Eric got off of the bed, his chest rising and falling rapidly, as he stretched out.

His eyes raked over my body and I blushed softly. He grabbed the sheets off of the bed and bundled them together. He swiped them out from under me before I got a chance to say anything and I went sprawling to the ground painfully. I looked up to glare at Eric, who was currently wearing a bemused smirk.

"You're such an ass," I mumbled.

"Come here," Eric said.

He reached down to me and grabbed me underneath the crook of my back. I laughed as he reached down to me and lifted me off of the ground, holding me in his arms. I laughed loudly as he literally tossed me into the air and onto the bed. I bounced for a moment as I turned to look at Eric. He grabbed the sheets in his arms and walked out of the room. He was only gone for a moment and when he came back the sheets were gone.

"Get to training, initiate," Eric snarled.

"I have time," I shot back.

He looked at me and pulled at my ankles, tugging me towards him. I shrieked softly. "Good. We have time," Eric said, leaning down to kiss me.

Giggling softly, I pushed him away from me. "I think not. Not after you threw me on the floor," I said.

"Fucking prude," Eric snarled.

"Need I remind you of what we were doing just a minute ago?"
"So let's do it again," Eric growled against my throat.

As much as I would have loved it, there were only a few minutes until I actually did have to leave. "Tonight," I said, regretting it almost the minute that I had.

Eric grabbed my hips, squeezing them painfully. "Your loss," he said, walking away.

I rolled my eyes and stood up, searching for my clothes. My pants and underwear were in the bathroom but I had no idea where my shirt was. I rushed around his apartment, searching every crack and crevice for the stupid thing. Where the hell did we throw it? Where did Eric throw it? This always happened. He would throw my clothes everywhere and it would take me an hour to find them in the morning.

"Here. Take this one," Eric called.

He threw me a tank top that he had clearly shrunk in the wash straight into my face. It hit me directly in the eyes and I growled as I threw it over my head. It was definitely too large but it fit well enough to go to training. I grabbed my pants and pulled them on my body before turning back to Eric, who was watching me with dark eyes.

"You're such a joy to be around. Thank you, anyways," I told him softly.

"You're welcome," he said.

Eric snorted at me as I slipped on my boots over my long, ribbed pants. They weren't the best looking pants but they were efficient to work in. As I fluffed my hair around my head, I watched Eric pull himself together. He wasn't in training clothes right now so he must have been going to a meeting. I was pretty sure that he had mentioned he had to meet with the representative of Candor. I grabbed Frankenstein off of the bedside table and pushed it back into place in the shelf, looking over the other ones. I wanted to read another one. My fingers traced the spines as I searched for a new book.

Eric's footsteps fell behind me but I didn't bother to turn back. "Here. Read this one," he said.

He reached around my body, his torso pressed against my back, and pulled out a leather-bound book. I grabbed it from him, my hands softly passing over his. I turned it over and read the title. The Picture of Dorian Grey. I couldn't help but to smile. I had snuck it once from the Amity library when I was little. I remembered reading it but for the life of me I couldn't remember the details. Only the main story. I couldn't help but to be impressed that he had picked a book that I had once enjoyed.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"You're welcome," Eric said, pressing an almost loving kiss against my hair.

A small smile fell over my face. The once fearsome leader now made those stupid butterflies swarm in my stomach. "I read this once when I was little. I don't really remember it anymore. I guess that's a good reason to read it," I said.

He nodded at me as I slipped by him and dropped the book on the bedside table. I glanced up at the clock that he had hanging in his kitchen and sighed. Good thing that we had woken up early that morning. My friends would already be down at breakfast and that meant that I needed to be there too. It was time to leave. I grabbed the hair tie off of my wrist and tied my hair up into a messy bun. I wasn't sure if Eric would mind me using his brush or not. I wasn't even sure where it was.

"Alright, I'm leaving. I'll see you later," I called to Eric.
Before I could make it more than a few steps, Eric grabbed me and pulled me back. His body pressed mine into the counter and I looked up at him, stumbling over myself slightly. His eyes weren't shining so I knew that he was being serious. Although I couldn't have possibly done anything to make him angry.

"Has your fear sim changed yet?" he asked.

I was a little surprised that he was asking me. "Not yet," I said.

"Have you conquered it?"

"I think I managed to conquer it yesterday," I admitted.

"Then it will probably change today. Be ready. The new ones might be different but they won't get any worse," he said. I nodded once more. He was right. It wouldn't be any different than the first time. "Just remember, get out fast."

"I will," I said.

The air had suddenly become a little bit thicker with anticipation of what was going to happen. My heart rate was starting to pick up slightly as I thought about what my next fear could entail. It had to be a new one today. I was sure about that. So were Eric and Four. But I didn't want to face it.

"Wow, would you look at that?" I teased, trying to lighten the mood. Eric raised his eyebrows at me. "Big, tough guy like you cares about a little Amity transfer like me."

My leg came out slightly as I pressed myself against him. He scoffed and shoved me back into the counter, probably a little rougher than necessary. My back hit the edge of the counter and I suppressed a sharp intake of breath. Sometimes Eric forget his own strength compared to me.

"I don't think so, initiate. I don't care about you," he said. Despite the fact that his voice held a slightly teasing tone, I couldn't help the little hint of hurt that seeped into me. "I just don't want the girl that sleeps in my bed to be some weakling that cowers in the back of her own mind."

Had he really just said that? I rolled my eyes as his glinted. I knew that he was mostly joking around with me, but some part of me knew that his words were true. And that was what hurt the most. That something as simple as words from Eric could hurt. Sighing deeply, I tried to push any hint of hurt from my voice.

"Good pep talk," I said blankly.

Eric smirked at me and I let a small smile rise to my face. Eric was a good guy, underneath that tough demeanor. I found myself repeating that mantra to myself at least twice a day. The longer that I thought about it, the more that I realized that Eric really was a dangerous guy, the worse that I felt about what was going to happen.

"Enjoy those meetings today," I quipped, trying to push any thoughts of what was to come from my mind.

Eric scowled at me and I smiled. Last night he'd told me that he was spending most of the day in meetings with the representative of Candor. He grumbled at me as he backed off from me slightly. I smiled and stood on my tip-toes to kiss him briefly before sinking back onto the heels of my feet. He tripped me as I walked to the door. I grabbed one of his shoes off of the floor, turning back and chucking it at him. He ducked out of the way at the last minute and the shoe hit a glass vase, shattering it.
"Dick," I growled. Eric laughed as I stormed out the door. At least he wasn't angry for the vase.

As much as I really did like Eric, he drove me nuts. Without waiting to see if Eric would say anything else, I dropped out of the room and let the door fall shut behind me. I turned and headed straight back to the dorms. On my way, a few Dauntless members said hello to me and I chirped back hello's to them. I had noticed in the past few days, since I had come up to the number two spot in rankings, more people had been saying hello to me and being friendly. I assumed that it was also because I was the only Amity transfer that was set for a spot in Dauntless. A good one, too.

It was something out of a fantasy story. Four had told me the other day that the last Amity transfer to Dauntless had been kicked out after Phase Two. It had made me a tad bit queasy to know that someone else just like me had been so close. But they had just missed it. They might not have done it, but I would. I was going to be the first Amity in Dauntless.

As I walked through the halls I chirped a quick hello to Tori, who seemed to be walking to the tattoo parlor with a man that I had never seen before. I also said hello to Cameron, who seemed to be in the middle of a business meeting with the representative of Candor. Both men had smiled and waved at me. The Candor man seemed nice enough. Although I was sure that Eric would find some reason not to like him.

"Alex!" a deep voice called out.

For a moment, I thought that it might have been Four, but the voice was too happy. The only time that I'd seen or heard Four happy was when we were alone in the training room, when no one else could hear us. I turned back to see that it was Zeke, with another boy that I had never seen before. He looked a little bit like Zeke.

"Hi, Zeke," I chirped happily.

"Hey. I wanted you to meet my brother. This is Uriah," Zeke introduced.

Smiling at him, I waved to Uriah. I moved in to give Zeke a quick hug. His arms were tight around my torso and I had to suppress a cough. He was stronger than he let on. As he let go of me, I turned to look at Uriah. He was the spitting image of his older brother. He was a little bit younger and a few inches shorter. Uriah was two years younger than me, but he looked older. I sure as hell didn't look seventeen. At least, not right now. Uriah's eyes held the same sparkle that Zeke's did and I smiled.

"Nice to meet you, Uriah," I greeted him.

I moved to shake his hand and he grabbed it tightly. He had the same strong grip that his brother did.

"You, too, Alex," he said.

He even sounded like Zeke. "You two look just alike," I said, laughing softly.

Uriah was looking me up and down, but not in the creepy way. In a way that told me that he was scrutinizing me. "That's what our parents used to say," Zeke told me.

"So this is the Amity transfer I've heard all about?" Uriah asked.

Normally the wording would have made me angry but Uriah's smile and genuine surprise calmed my temper slightly. "That would be me," I said softly.

He looked impressed. "Damn, you don't look Amity anymore," he said.

"That was kind of the point," I joked.
"I heard that they let you ride the zip line after Capture the Flag. They must really like you," Zeke said.

Once more I laughed. It seemed like the Dauntless born liked me well enough. At least I knew that Aaron, Jackson, and Lisa did. Greg and Serena seemed to be alright with me as well. Zeke looked thrown by the information that I had ridden the zip line. Of course he did. He hadn't known. He wasn't there that night.

"They let you ride the zip line?" he asked.

"They did."

"Shit, they never let transfers ride the zip line. It's typically only for Dauntless born. But you are the one that helped beat Eric's team," he said.

Capture the Flag had been so much fun. Probably the most fun that I'd had in Dauntless. Plus I'd gotten to shoot both Colt and Eric. "Yeah, I did. Trust me it was so worth it to shoot Eric," I told them honestly.

As much as I did like Eric, I had genuinely enjoyed getting to shoot him with the dart. Zeke and Uriah were laughing loudly and I smiled. They were friends of Four. Which pretty much meant that they were not friends of Eric. "You did it for all of us," Zeke teased.

"Anyways, it was good to see you again Zeke, and nice to meet you Uriah." I said to both boys, who nodded back at me. "But I gotta get going. I wanted to get changed before training."

Zeke raised an eyebrow before nodding. "Oh yeah you're in mental training right now, aren't you?" he asked.

The smile slipped off of my face. "Yeah. Started last week," I said.

"Four mentioned that you were all going through that right now. He said that you were the best out of the initiates too."

At least Four had faith in me. But I knew that my ranking had only jumped like that because of my Divergence. "That's nice to hear," I said softly.

"Give it another week and you'll be in the number one spot," Zeke said.

The smile came back to my face. "That's the plan," I said happily.

"Good for you! Don't let the sims get to you, alright?"

He had been through this before. He knew where I was coming from. "I'm trying not to. But it's hard. I'm sure that you know that," I told them.

Zeke nodded as Uriah's head dropped to the ground. He would be going through this soon enough. "I know. But it's over before you know it," Zeke said.

"Alright, I gotta run guys. Good to see you!" I yelled back.

Zeke and Uriah both called out goodbyes as I took to a mad dash through the hallways. My little stunt with Eric in the shower this morning had cost me time. As I burst through the dorm doors I was surprised to see that Dante was still in the room. He was in the middle of getting changed and I smiled at him. It didn't bother me, or him. We had all seen more of each other than we cared to.
"Morning, Dante," I called to my friend.

As he buttoned the pants on his jeans he looked over at me with a smile. "Good morning, Alex. Have a fun night?" he asked.

"Sure did," I muttered.

A smirk was on his face as he looked at the oversized tank top and I blushed. I shoved him off to the side and changed the ribbed pants into a pair of dark grey jeans, choosing to leave on Eric's shirt. It might be too big but it was extremely comfortable. Dante was leaning in the corner, waiting for me.

"Hurry up, I want breakfast," he whined to me.

I laughed as I pulled on my boots before walking over to him, shoving his shoulder roughly. "Calm down, we're going," I said.

He laughed and slung an arm over my shoulder as we headed out of the dorms. We walked in tandem, heading towards the dining room. I sunk into Dante's side as we walked. I loved Dauntless, but it was always either boiling hot or freezing cold. At least in the common areas and the dorms. We passed through the Chasm where the railing from my fall had finally been fixed. I liked to think of it as a positive omen. That the phase of violence towards each other in my relationship with Eric was over.

We walked into the dining room where Eric, Cameron, Four, Zeke, Max, the rest of the leaders, a few other members, and the representative of Candor were all standing together. They were in the perch, just above where my friends and I sat. I knew that if we were loud enough they would be able to hear our conversation. Hopefully they were all engrossed in their own conversations. But, of course, Eric wasn't. He looked bored as the others around him spoke. I couldn't help but to giggle. It was easy to see that he was bored. I took my seat between Heather and Buck, saying a quick hello, and waited for the berating to begin.

Eric's P.O.V.

Eric was currently standing with the vast majority of the other important members of Dauntless and the representative of Candor, Jack Kang. He seemed nice enough to Eric, who had met Jack a time or two before, but he much preferred being in Dauntless. Although Eric figured that, if he were to have to pick another Faction, Candor probably wouldn't be too bad. Definitely not Erudite. Eric would take dealing with Jack over Jeanine any day. He hated Jeanine more than anything. But he had to work with her. It secured his spot in Dauntless.

They were all standing around and talking about some kind of serum, but Eric wasn't paying complete attention. This wasn't his deal. But he still had to be here for it. Besides, if he missed anything important he could just make Four explain it to him. He was currently more enamored with his Amity's conversation with her friends.

They were all currently teasing her over her clothing. Eric was shocked to see that she was still wearing his shirt. Although it did send a spark of pride through him. It was about as close to being public as they could possibly be. For a few more months, at least. And he wanted everyone to know that she was his.

"Cute shirt, Alex," Cole teased softly. "But it looks a little big for you."

Eric was standing to face her table. She was clearly trying desperately not to look his way and Eric smirked. He knew that she was mortified. It was clear that by now her friends had all figured out that
she was seeing someone. Considering she had spent a few nights away from the dorms recently. Of course, only one other person at that table knew the truth.

"I like bigger clothes," she hissed.

"That explains why your pants are skin-tight?" Dante shot back.

She blushed again. "Shut up, you two," she snapped.

Her friend Heather was looking down at her plate with a little grin on her face. His Amity's head dropped towards the table as Heather leaned up and began to play with the sleeves of the shirt. She was picking at the loose threads and Eric smirked as it dipped lower on his Amity's chest. She smacked Heather's hand away from the shirt and yanked it up her chest.

"Can we talk about something other than my wardrobe?" she asked softly.

Instead of letting the subject go, like Eric was sure that she wanted them too, Draven spoke up. "Sure! How about where did you go last night?" he asked, leaning into her.

She said nothing as she shoveled a few bites of bagel into her mouth to keep from having to speak. Eric smirked and turned back for a moment to nod his approval. It probably would have been a better idea to pay attention to what they were talking about, but he couldn't bring himself to care. Eric hated the sims and he hated the serums. Whatever they wanted to do was fine by him.

"I was with a friend," she mumbled.

Something in Eric bristled at the thought of being called only a friend. "Come on, Alex. We'd let you know if we were seeing some Dauntless girls," Draven argued.

"No you wouldn't!" she snapped.

He had a feeling that they would. He knew how men worked. "We would too!" Draven shot back.

"Actually you're right. You'd be those morons to go and parade her around Dauntless and get yourselves kicked out. I'm smarter than you guys," she bragged haughtily.

He had no doubt that she was smarter than them, but he prided himself in being smarter than her. Or smarter than she gave him credit for. There was no way that they would resist telling people that they were with some Dauntless girl. Eric knew the way that men thought. They liked to show off their prizes. He smirked down at the table when he realized that Heather was the only one not jeering at her. She was stupid enough to tell her.

They were silent for a moment. "Alright fine," Buck stated. Eric's brow rose. He couldn't believe that they were going to actually let it go. "If you won't tell us who it is then we'll guess."

Eric couldn't help the little snort that escaped his mouth. Four turned to look at him and Eric steadied his face with a scowl. "That ought to be good," she said.

As far as he knew, her friends didn't know that many Dauntless members. He had a feeling that she knew the most. She knew Cameron and Zeke. That was already two more than the rest of them knew. It would be a quick game on their part. Although it could be funny to see who they thought that she would be brave enough to try and get with. And it would be good to listen to something else other than Max's droning on about serum laws. Eric found himself wanting to thank Jack for insisting that the meeting be in the Pit rather than an office. Eric would have had to pay attention there.
The laughter exploded at her table and Eric smirked. They would never guess. They all knew that Eric hated the initiates. And as far as they were concerned, that included her. They would probably just end up pointing to random members until it was time for them to go to training.

"I'm gonna go first!" Jax barked over the chattering of the table. Eric leaned over the railing slightly so that he could hear them better. Of course he had to look at Jack and the others to make them think that he was paying attention. "How about the off chance that it might be Four?"

Eric's vision went red at the thought of Four touching his Amity. She was his. No one else, especially not Four, was going to lay a hand on her. He noticed Cameron laughing next to him and Eric knew that he was listening in on the conversation too. Eric wanted nothing more than to take his drink and smash it on her friend's heads.

He was glad to hear her make a loud sound of protest. "Absolutely not," she said quickly.

"Yeah, I didn't think so," Jax said.

They were all laughing at her as her face went red. It took a minute or two but their laughter finally died down. "Come on, Jax, don't be stupid. Alex isn't tough enough for him," Jet said loudly.

For a moment Eric thought he saw Four's lips twitch and Eric growled. She leaned over without hesitation and punched her friend roughly in the shoulder. He groaned loudly and Eric nearly laughed at the crunch that sounded. She was tougher than they thought that she was. She'd even come close to being in charge with him a few times. But it didn't work. Eric didn't let any woman lead.

"Asshole," she growled.

"Alright, what about that guy?" Jet asked. Eric watched out of the corner of his eye as they pointed up to Cameron.

Eric scowled darkly. "Nope," she said.

"Or him?"

This time he was pointing towards Zeke. "Not him either," she said.

Eric didn't mind Zeke but he certainly didn't like that he was friends with Four. "How about Max?" Jet asked.

She stuttered loudly before shouting, "No, you idiot!"

Eric was somewhere in between rolling his eyes and laughing. Max was at least twenty years older than her. "Come on you guys suck at this," Dante called out.

Eric rolled his eyes with a little sigh. It wasn't like he could do any better. They were just pointing to random Dauntless members. He noticed Dante's eyes scanning the room and Eric's ears perked up slightly. He had always seemed like the smartest of the transfers.

"How about going out on a limb? Eric, perhaps," he said softly.

But not soft enough. Eric still heard him. His eyes shot open and he forced the straight look to remain on his face. He had to pretend that he hadn't just heard that. Although he was watching her out of the corner of his eyes. She spit out the water that she was drinking and it shot across the table, splattering a few of her friends. Eric snorted as her friends jumped back and laughed at the dumbfounded look
on her face as she tried to compose herself.

They all thought that it was a funny joke that she hadn't been expecting, but he knew the truth. As did Heather, Tori, and Cameron. Heather was currently staring at Alex, clearly trying to fight to laugh a very obviously fake laugh. They both were as she tried to get herself together again.

"What? No!" she snapped. Eric noticed that her voice was the tiniest bit higher than it normally was and her face was bright red. "I might not be Erudite but I'm not a damn idiot. Eric's an ass and he'd probably kill me if we were ever in a room alone together."

Eric scowled as he heard the conversations below him. Her friends were all laughing and siding with her that she deserved someone better than him. He was shaking with anger, wanting nothing more than to pull out his gun and shoot them all. He was damn well good enough for her. No one would ever make her feel the way that he did. He saw it in her eyes. She might not have ever said it but he knew. She cared deeply for him. In some way cared for her too.

Cameron was standing at Eric's side, laughing as Eric steamed. "Cameron. Eric," Max called. Both men looked up. Cameron sobered immediately but Eric didn't bother to wipe the crass look off of his face. "Do you gentlemen need a moment to compose yourselves before we continue with the meeting?"

All eyes were on them but Eric couldn't have cared less. He was still fuming over the soft conversation that was ringing in his ears. "No," Eric answered through gritted teeth.

"No," Cameron agreed.

He wanted to punch a hole through their heads. The second that Max let them out of this damned meeting Eric was going to head straight to the training room. Perhaps he'd imagine her friend's faces on the punching bags. Cameron shook his head at Max, the small smile still settled on his features.

"Good," Max stated.

All attention turned back to Max and Eric looked away from her and her friends. She had given him one desperate look but Eric had ignored it. He knew that she couldn't say anything in his favor. But that didn't change the fact that he was furious. For whatever reason, being called not good enough for her genuinely bothered him.

"And have we come to a conclusion on the distribution and uses of the compliance serum?" Max asked.

"Yes," Cameron and Eric said together.

Four was the only person that hesitated. "Yes," he finally said.

Eric wasn't really sure what he had just agreed to, but he figured that if everyone else was agreeing it couldn't have been that bad. As long as Jeanine wasn't here Eric knew that the serum would be put to good use. Even though he worked with Jeanine, he trusted Jack much more. The man had never given anyone a reason not to trust him.

"Then you're all dismissed," Max stated, effectively ending the conversation.

It didn't take long for everyone to head off to perform their duties. The majority of the Dauntless members stormed off towards their jobs but Eric noticed that Four took to the staircase. He knew that Four was going to get the initiates for their fear sim. Before walking off, Eric noticed his Amity swatting her friends away. They all still seemed to be teasing her over her shirt. Probably seeing if it
would be large enough to fit Eric. Not after he'd accidentally shrunk it. Cameron walked up besides Eric, who was still scowling.

"Heard your girl back there saying that she'd never be with you?" Cameron asked as they headed back to Eric's apartment.

"Yes," Eric said through gritted teeth.

"Don't worry about it man. If she's as good as you say she is, it's them that couldn't handle her," Cameron said.

Eric didn't bother saying anything back, but he did nod. He appreciated that Cameron was trying to make him feel a little better about things. He knew that she would be too tough for any of her friends to handle. Or Four. And there was the most important thing. She was his.

Alex's P.O.V.

The berating still hadn't stopped. My friends had been on my case for at least ten minutes and now the topic had changed to Eric and me. It drove me nuts and made me want to bury my head in the sand. Not because what they were saying was embarrassing. But because what they were saying was right.

"Could you imagine Alex with Eric?" Cole asked, making me blush deeply. They probably didn't want to know what went down when Eric and I were alone together. "I don't know which one of them would live longer in the relationship.

Everyone else, with the exception of Heather, laughed. My friends were having a blast talking about the relationship that they could imagine me having with Eric. I was having a hard time not telling them that he was the man that I had spent last night with. And taken a shower with this morning. They were driving me nuts but I knew that it was all in good fun. Plus I would be doing the same thing to them if the shoe was on the other foot.

"Honestly I don't think that either one of them would survive the night," Dante said.

I couldn't help but to laugh slightly. We weren't that bad. And we had our own ways to make up. "Guys, stop," I pleaded.

They ignored me. "You remember how much you guys used to fight. I mean, you threw a knife at him!" Dante yelled.

I couldn't help it. That time I flinched. To this day I still couldn't believe that I had done that. And it nearly killed me to think that Eric had almost killed me for it, even if it had been an accident. It was far behind us. The boys fell silent for a moment and when Buck opened his mouth to make another comment, Heather was quick to cut him off.

"Alright, knock it off!" she shouted.

The boys silenced themselves and stared at Heather like she had lost her mind. She was normally one of the people that got in on the jokes. "What's your problem?" Cole asked.

"At least Alex is getting laid. By Eric or not, who cares?" she asked. I smiled at her. She actually had told them the right man, they just didn't know it. "As far as I've seen, she's the only one around here who's gotten any."

I smiled at her and grabbed her in a tight hug. "Thanks," I whispered in her ear.
Heather and Cole were technically getting some too, but I knew that they weren't ready to admit it yet. I wasn't so shy about it. Heather was fantastic, she was the always the first person to jump to my defense. The boys went silent and started to mumble among themselves. I knew that they all felt stupid and I smiled at them as I wrapped myself in Eric's shirt. We all sat together as the boys went to talking about the sims.

"Initiates!" Four yelled, startling me slightly. "Get to the sim room."

Another five minutes, of my friends not teasing me about the shirt, would have been wonderful. I stood with everyone else and headed into the deep hallways. Yesterday I had been down at the fourth spot and today I was in second. Eric told me that during lunch yesterday he had sat down with Four and taken a deep look at the rankings. Apparently Four and Eric had both said that my ranking deserved to be raised. But today that meant that everyone, other than Aaron, would go before me. We walked into the room and I took a seat in between Heather and Dante.

"Colt, come on in," Four said.

Colt walked towards Four without argument and I leaned back in my chair. I hated having to be here for the entire time, but the rules stood. I still had to be at training at eight. Being late would only get me thrown out of Dauntless. And I couldn't do that. Not when I was so close.

Initiate after initiate walked through the doors and I wondered what everyone was going through. I especially wondered what Hunter and Colt saw. I couldn't help but to wonder if I ever popped up in their fears. I doubted it, but I was sure that Eric popped up in Hunter's fears. The more that I thought about it, the more that I was sure that he was in them. Probably in other's too.

And that made me think that one day Eric was going to appear in my fear sim. I just hoped that today was not that day. I wasn't even sure what I would see if Eric was in my fear sim. There was a chance that it could be physical. Him beating me to death or something like that. It could be something like him taunting me and making me out to be the foolish little Amity like he had originally thought that I was. Maybe he still thought that I was.

There was also the chance that it could be something darker. Perhaps it would be him discovering my Divergence. Or Jeanine ordering him to do something to me. I wasn't sure. If he did appear in my fear sim, I knew that it wouldn't be anything that I wanted to see. Even less than seeing my parents die in front of me.

My eyes popped open in time to see Aria walk into the room. Four looked a little concerned as he watched her walk in with a strong face. I noticed her lip quiver out of the corner of my eye and I sighed. She always looked afraid when she came out of the room. I wondered if she was still seeing her mother jumping off of the Chasm, even after a week. At least I didn't have to see something that had really happened to me in my fears.

Jason went in once she came out. He came out a while later and I watched as he went and sat with Serena instead of leaving. He looked comfortable next to her and I smiled. I assumed that something was going on in between them. They made a cute couple. Jade went next and took twenty minutes. It was one of the longer times. She looked sick and I grinned. The sadistic part of me enjoyed watching her having a hard time.

Once more I leaned back in my chair and blew some loose strands of hair out of my face. Draven was sitting next to me and I leaned on him. He didn't seem to mind as he already looked half asleep. Most of us that had a while to go were taking naps. I couldn't help but to let my mind wander to what Four would be having me do tonight during our meeting.
I didn't have to go yesterday as it was my day off and that made me happy as a clam. Instead I'd spent my night romping around with Eric. It was good, considering we didn't get much time together anymore. I just hoped that tonight we wouldn't be going into Four's fear of heights again. I would rather go into my fear. I couldn't help but to wonder if Four only had one fear. It didn't seem like it.

Serena was the next person to go into the sim room. My eyes slipped shut as the door close behind her. I was startled out of my little nap when the door swung open, slamming against the back wall. I shot up, colliding heads with Draven, both of us mumbling apologies. Everyone was watching Serena closely. She was swaying slightly as Jason caught her, walking her out without another word. Even though I wasn't Serena's number one fan I was glad to see that she had Jason. And we had been getting along better over the past few weeks.

Sara went into the room next. As I watched her time tick by I thought about how the times had dropped recently. The average time it took someone to get out of the sim now was about twelve to fifteen minutes. It took me about five minutes on average. Darren went after Sara and he looked disappointed and green when he came out later. I assumed that he had seen a new fear today.

The good thing was that times were going down for everyone, including my friends. They were averaging about fourteen minutes. That was fast enough. Draven was the fastest of the transfers, taking on average ten minutes. He was usually in time with Aaron. I knew that the only reason that I hadn't passed Aaron yet was because he had been undefeated in Stage One and would still be able to beat me in a fight.

Although Eric had said that he thought in another week or two he thought that I would take the number one spot. And Heather was evidently getting close to the number ten spot. That was what I wanted so she could be cleared of Fence duty. She just needed to keep conquering her drowning fear. Apparently she was only doing it about half of the time.

It wasn't long before Cole came rushing out of the sim room. I wanted to ask him what was wrong but I never got the chance. Cole went darting off before I got the chance. With a bright red face too. As Four came back out I saw that he looked a bit thrown. I assumed that whatever Cole was afraid of must have been rather embarrassing. Part of me couldn't help but to wonder if it had been something to do with Heather.

That made me wonder the kind of things that Four had seen in the fear sims. I couldn't imagine what the worst thing was that he had seen. I knew that one time someone had been afraid of going to training naked. Four had told me that he could barely watch their fear sim. He said that it had felt too private.

Laughing off the image of Four's cheeks burning over some poor naked kid, I thought to something a little more solemn. Something that occupied my thoughts frequently. Whatever was going to happen between Jeanine Matthews and me. For some reason Jeanine had been laying low lately and I almost thought that maybe she had forgotten about me. But I knew that she hadn't. She was just waiting for me.

It was like what was on the file back in Erudite. She was going to wait until the end of Phase Three, which was still a few months away. It was killing me, not knowing what she wanted. Did she want to kill me or did she want to use me? And if she wanted to use me, what did she want to use me for? If she was going to kill me, was she going to make Eric do it? Would he?

The door to the sim room opened again, interrupting my train of thoughts. I was still leaned up against Draven and I sat up when I saw Greg walk out of the room. His eyes were rimmed in red and his head was angled to the ground. I looked away quickly. It was obvious that he had been crying. Looking at him seemed like an invasion of privacy. Whatever he saw in his fear sim was nothing
good, and I forced myself not to ask.

Four was leaning over him and I watched out of the corner of my eyes as he whispered to him. They stood together for a moment before Four ushered him out of the room, turning to the seven of us that remained. There were only five more before me. It must have been time for lunch.

"Head to lunch," Four said, confirming my thoughts. "I'll call you all back when it's time to keep going."

It didn’t take more than those words for everyone to get get up and leave. I stood and walked out of the room with Jax, Dante, and Draven at my sides. Jax and Dante had their arms slung over my shoulders and I smiled at the two boys. They really were my best friends here in Dauntless. I don't know what I would have done without them. Heather too. Especially Heather.

We walked into the dining room and I noticed that Draven was lagging behind us, reading through some pamphlet. I wasn't quite sure what it was. Something explaining a new serum that was being produced by Candor. That was the meeting that Eric had been in earlier. We all got into line and I picked up a piece of fish with some potatoes. Eric was standing on the other side of the line and my blood boiled when I saw that Sarah was talking to him.

She was standing with barely an inch separating them. Eric wasn't looking at her, but I still wanted to snap at him to step back. I noticed that he was watching me out of the corner of his eyes. "Just... Let me know if the other girl doesn't work out. Alright?" she asked Eric softly, her eyelashes fluttering. I snarled under my breath as Eric looked up at her with an even face. In the back of his eyes I saw a little glint of amusement and I knew that he was finding my reaction funny. My fists were balled around my plate as I bit my tongue. I couldn't say anything. Not right now. Eric was my leader. And, as far as Sarah was concerned, I only said the occasional hello to him in passing now that we were out of physical training.

"Oh, Alex," Sarah said, finally noticing me.

"Hey, Sarah."

"How have you been? I haven't seen you in a while," she said.

My stomach lurched slightly at the look I was getting from Sarah. She had a sad smile that was marring her pretty features. She had no idea that only an hour ago I had been with her ex. She had no idea that even when the two of them had been together Eric and I had still been interested in each other. She had no idea that her relationship with Eric had always been a sham.

"Oh, I've been good. I'm number two in rankings so things can't get much better. Still fighting for that number one spot though," I said, trying to get the topic to anything but Eric.

Sarah gave me an impressed smile and I smiled back at her. She really wasn't that bad now that she wasn't with Eric anymore. Eric snorted at Sarah's side and I rolled my eyes at him. My friends looked like they wanted to say something but one sharp glare from Eric made them turn and head to the table.

"Yeah I've heard that your times in the sim are quite something," Sarah said.

"They're okay," I muttered.

"You've been averaging five minutes or something like that. I heard Zeke talking about it," Sarah continued and I nodded.
Eric seemed bored but I knew that while Sarah was talking to me, he wasn't going to leave. "Yeah. I guess I get through them pretty fast," I said awkwardly.

Sarah's eyes dipped to my shirt briefly and I wanted to run away. If anyone was going to recognize it, it was Sarah. "Funny," she muttered.

"What's funny?" I asked.

Please don't recognize it. "Eric has a shirt just like that," she said, looking over the shirt closely.

Her words made Eric's head snap over to us and I blushed. I should have changed the shirt. "That is funny," I told her with a pathetic laugh. My voice was higher than it normally was. "I just like clothes that are bigger on me. They're more comfortable."

Sarah didn't look at all convinced. "Is that so?" she asked.

"Yeah. Alright, well, Sarah it was good to see you again," I said to the girl, who gave me a quick goodbye. "Have a nice day, Eric."

It felt so strange having to speak to him like that, but I knew that in a few more months I would be able to speak to Eric like a normal human being. Although I wasn't sure what would happen if we ever went public with our relationship. It might end up making things even stranger. I headed over to the table with my food and took a seat next to Heather. My friends were all chatting about their fear sims and I tuned them out.

It wasn't that I didn't care about their fears, but listening to them set me on edge. I was more concerned with what my next fear was going to be. And how close Sarah had come to discovering that I was the girl that Eric had left her for. It was getting dangerous. It felt like every day someone was getting closer to discovering the truth. I let out a little breath and leaned against the table. I was speaking with Jet about different fighting techniques, appreciating the change of topic. We could only talk about sims for so long. We chatted for a while and laughed loudly as we waited for Four to call us back in for training.

And just as that thought went through my mind, Four walked up to us. "Initiates!" Four yelled, startling both Hunter and Colt. I laughed loudly. Neither one of them had seemed in their right minds since mental training had started. "Those of you who haven't done your fear sims yet, head back to the waiting room."

We all nodded and said goodbye to my friends that had already gone as I walked back to the sim room. Taking the seat back near the door to the sim room, I propped up my legs against Aaron's as we waited. We both still had a while to go before we were going to get to go through our sims. That was the one annoying thing about being on the top of the leader board. If you were near the top it, it meant that you had to wait all day to get to go. It was a long wait.

I shut my eyes for a while and listened to the closing and opening of the door, along with Four's voice calling the next people in. Jax, Michael, Dante, and Jackson had already gone and left. Each one seemed to be going rather fast. I knew that right now they were all trying to beat my times. Draven was currently in the room and I yawned, glancing at the clock. It was already nearly six. My friends would already be down at the dining room waiting for me.

A moment later I heard the click come from the door and Draven walked out. I opened my eyes and stood as Four let Draven out. "Alex, I'm ready for you. Come on back," Four said.

I nodded and stood from my chair. "Okay. See you at dinner," I told Draven.
"Good luck," he said, walking past me, heading to get his own food.

Hearing the door to the main room close behind me I went to the medical chair in the center of the room and took a seat. I hated this thing. It was so uncomfortable. And it made me nervous just sitting in it. Four was filling up a vial of the serum and I leaned down to retie the laces on my boots.

"Have a shopping trip recently?" Four asked.

I tightened my laces before looking up to see Four scowling at my shirt. Without saying anything to him, I merely smiled. It was easy to see that my relationship with Eric made Four uneasy. I knew that he didn't care for Eric, in the same way that Eric didn't care for Four, but at least Four was supportive. He frequently offered insight to me about why he thought that Eric was the way that he was. It was always good to hear the opinions from a third party.

"I did," I teased Four. He was a hard ass that insisted that I wasn't funny, but I knew that he thought that I was hysterical. "Don't worry, I can take you shopping if you'd like."

"No," Four growled.

"We really have to do something about those ugly pants you always insist on wearing," I said.

His eyes shot down to his pants as he picked at the baggy material. Most of my words had been a joke, but I did mean what I said. His pants were horrible. He wore the same type of pants all the time and they were the ugliest things that I had ever seen. But Four still insisted on wearing them. They were popular here in Dauntless. At least for work. I'd noticed that many people wore them. Including Eric. At least his fit. Four's were dragging limply on his legs.

Once I could go out in public with them, the first thing that I was doing was take them shopping. "What's wrong with my pants?" Four asked.

I rolled my eyes. His pants were terrible. The shops in Dauntless had some of the best clothes that I had ever seen. "This is why you're single, Four," I teased.

He glared and shoved me roughly down into the chair as he passed to go back to the computer. "Watch what you say to the person who's helping you," he snapped.

"Just kidding. You're a good guy and you'll find yourself a good girl," I said.

The corners of his lips twitched and I smiled. "Thanks," he muttered.

"Just make sure that she buys you new pants," I mumbled.

Glancing back over my shoulder, I saw the corner of his eyes twitch like he was fighting back a smile. As much as I knew that he didn't want to admit it, Four found me funny. We were like the brother and sister pair that never stopped picking on each other. In some ways the relationship that I had with Four was the same one that I had with Eric. He hated admitting that I was funny too.

"Alright. I think you might be seeing a new fear today. You've pretty much conquered the old one. Just remember, solve it like a Dauntless would," he said.

"Okay."

He held the needle over my neck and I took a deep breath. Might as well get this over with. "You ready?" he asked.
"Let's get it over with," I said.

"Good luck in there," Four said. He pushed the needle into my neck and I cringed. A moment later the world went black.

The room faded quickly into view. The moment that I was in it, I knew that it wasn't the same fear that I had been dealing with for the past week. The room wasn't blue and that meant that I was no longer in Erudite. Instead the room was gray. Was there a chance that I could be in Abnegation? But what in Abnegation could I be afraid of? I didn't know anyone in Abnegation. There wouldn't have been any reason for me to be afraid of anything here.

Glancing down at myself, I realized that I was in full Dauntless getup. My black pants had cargo pockets on them and my black tank top was covered with a thick black leather jacket. A gun was hanging at my hip and I grabbed it, making sure that the safety was off. Nothing was in the room but I found myself nervous. What was going on? No one had come into the room yet.

The only thing that was actually in the room, besides me, was a gray door. I thought about walking over to it but I never got the chance. The door swung open and my grip on the gun tightened. A figure walked into the room and I watched closely. It was Eric. My heart launched itself into my throat and I swallowed a lump. Was there any chance that Eric was my next fear?

"Eric? What's going on?" I asked, feeling foolish.

He came to stand in front of me, his eyes meeting mine. They didn't have his normal teasing grin in them. They were blank and glossy. I watched him carefully as Jeanine Matthews walked into the room, standing directly behind Eric. Even though I had only seen her for a moment, and I could no longer see her, I knew that she was gloating.

"Eric? Is everything alright?" I tried once more.

Just like this afternoon when I had spoken to Sarah, I noticed that my voice was higher than it normally was. I waited for Eric to say something but he never did. His eyes just remained locked on me, not giving anything away. At least he wasn't attacking me. But his glare said that that could change at any moment. He looked as angry with me as he had the first time that I had insulted him and his family.

"Hello, Alex. It's a pleasure to see you again," Jeanine said from behind Eric.

A growl sounded low in my throat as I fought to see her. But I could barely see Jeanine around Eric's hulking figure. I pulled back the slide of the gun to check how many bullets I had. My heart sank at the sight. One. I only had one. And Jeanine clearly knew that I was running over what the one bullet meant.

"One bullet. One bullet to take care of one problem," she practically sang.

She knew that the one thing that I wanted was to kill her. And this was her way of rubbing it in my face. Eric wasn't going to move and it meant that, if I wanted to kill her, I would have to kill Eric. A bullet through his forehead would hit her. My voice was weak and shaky when I spoke up.

"Eric, move. I don't want to have to do this," I practically begged.

It was easy to see what my fear was now. I was afraid of losing Eric. Either physically killing him or metaphorically losing him. They were both here. I had lost him to Jeanine. And I knew that the only way that I was going to kill Jeanine and end the sim was if I shot her. Through Eric. This was my fear. And all because of the Divergence.
"Eric, please move. Please," I begged him softly.

Eric probably would have either laughed or slapped me if he saw me right now. Here I was, gun in hand, unable to do anything about it. My hands were shaking and tears were slowly rising to the corners of my eyes. I couldn't kill Eric. I wouldn't. He hadn't done anything to me. He didn't deserve it. There had to be some way out of the fear. Four had said defeat it. But there was nothing in the room that I could use to beat it.

"Can you do it, little Amity?" Eric asked, his voice colder than normal.

My entire body shuddered slightly as I remembered that it was one of the last things that Damien had ever said to me. And that was why it was in my fear. That was why he was saying it. Because they knew that it would hurt me. It was one of the few things that Eric could have said to truly hurt me.

"Please move," I whispered.

"I don't think that you can," Eric told me with a nasty grin.

His hand had dropped down to his gun and my heart rate sped up. If I didn't kill him, he was going to kill me. There was no way that I was going to kill him. We were supposed to conquer our fears but there had to be another way to go about it. I didn't have to kill him. I kept the gun tight in my hands as I dashed off to the side, not giving Eric a moment to react. As much as I wanted to fire the shot, I couldn't make a blind one. If I missed I would have wasted the only bullet that I had.

Eric was quicker than I thought that he would be as he grabbed my arm and rammed his body into mine. It sent me flying across the room and I hit the ground, tucking into a little roll. I sprawled out on the ground and coughed a few times. It only took Eric a second to pull out his gun and fire it into my hip. The pain was horrible. The scream that escaped my lips was a sound that I hadn't thought was possible for me to make. I knew what my friends meant now. Physical pain felt real in these sims. But nothing was worse than the mental pain.

Even though I had seen it coming, I couldn't believe that Eric had really shot me. My hip was bleeding and the blood was slick over my hands. It felt like my entire hip had been broken. "Eric," I moaned.

"I knew that you couldn't do it," Eric snarled. Tears rose in my eyes as I fought to stand. The pain was unbearable. Standing was nearly impossible. "See, you don't understand the good that we're doing. People like you, you're the dangerous ones. All I'm doing is helping Jeanine create a better world. Any world without you is better."

"You don't mean that," I whispered.

A sharp pang of hurt shot through my chest, worse than the one in my hip. This wasn't Eric. He doesn't mean it. I just had to keep telling myself that. But he did mean it. He would if this were real. My eyes were still watering as I looked up to where Eric was standing, still shielding Jeanine. There was no way that I could shoot her without hurting him. I tried to fight the pain of the bullet wound but it was blinding. The bullet was grating against the bone in my hip.

The way to solve this as a Divergent was easy. Take the gun and shoot myself in the head. Kill myself. But I had to solve this like a Dauntless. And that meant that I had to live. I had to kill Eric. It was the only way that this would work. But I couldn't. No matter what, I couldn't bring myself to move and shoot Eric.

"He's finally understood what this process is about. Eliminating Divergent's is crucial. They pose a
threat to this delicate system," Jeanine said from behind Eric. "Eric, take care of her."

The order was clear. This time she meant it. This time it was more than just Eric shooting me for show. She wanted him to kill me. Time was running out for me but I couldn't just let it end like this. Eric was a good man. There was good in him. I would always believe that.

"Eric, don't. Don't do this. This isn't you. I trust you," I said so softly I wasn't even sure that he could hear me. "You wouldn't hurt me. Not really."

I was more begging him than I was actually talking to him. "I would," he said.

He laughed and raised his gun to my forehead. I cringed as I stood up weakly, barely managing to stay up. "Eric, please don't make me do this. I'm begging you," I whispered. He said nothing back. He was merely smiling at me, his gun still trained between my eyes. "Eric, move. Please move."

I didn't want to do this. He didn't move, instead he just cocked the gun. "Not today, little Amity," he said.

Now I was desperate. It didn't have to end like this. "Eric, move!" I yelled.

He stayed standing where he was. His finger took up the slack in the trigger and I knew that my time was out. I had done everything possible and he wouldn't move. There was only one choice. Eric wouldn't move and I had no idea what else I could have done. So I raised the gun faster than he could and fired. The round shot directly through his forehead and he fell to the ground. A fraction of a second later Jeanine followed.

The bullet went clean through both of them. They were both lying on the ground with blood pooling around their heads. The back of Eric's skull was blown off, chunks of bone scattered on the ground, and his eyes were blank. My knees gave out underneath me and I collapsed, letting out a deafening scream.

My eyes shot open and I found myself laying in the chair back in the sim room. My breath caught in my throat and I gasped loudly. I jumped from the chair and paced the room. Making a few trips back and forth, I grabbed my hair out of the bun and ran my fingers through it. My breath was coming in short gasps and my eyes were still watering. I couldn't believe that I had done it. I had really killed Eric. My knees were shaking under my weight and I fell against the wall, nearly dropping down completely.

"Hey, calm down. You did well," Four said softly. He came in front of me and leaned down to my height, as I was kneeling against the wall. I shook my head pathetically at him. "Are you alright?"

I shook my head at him and let out a few more breaths. My breathing was going slowly back to normal but I was still shaking. "No, Four. No, I'm not alright," I said softly and somewhat irritably.

My knees collapsed under me and I sank to the ground. Four was still kneeling in front of me. "You're alright," Four said, placing a hand on my knee.

"I can't believe that I really did it," I said. I wasn't really sure whether I was talking to myself or Four. "Why couldn't he have moved? And he fucking shot me."

Shaking slightly, I leaned down and reached for my hip. The skin was unbroken and in contact. Four saw what I was doing and he reached over to grab my hand. I could see that in his eyes he felt terrible for me. My breathing was still ragged as I drove my free palm into my eyes.

"That's the point of these fear sims," Four said, his voice quieter than I had ever heard. "They give
you the absolute worst case scenario and see if you could actually do it."

I shook my head at him and squeezed his hand. "Apparently I can," I whispered.

This was worse than my first fear. My first fear could be real but I knew that there was very little chance of it actually happening. This was different. There was a damn good chance that this would happen. I had a feeling that it would happen at any moment now. There was definitely a chance that it could.

"He wouldn't shoot you," Four said.

I snorted and shook my head. I knew that if push comes to shove Eric would kill me. If it meant that his place in Dauntless was secure, he would. "Yes, he would," I said.

"No he wouldn't."

There was nothing that he could say that would change my mind. "Yes, he would," I said softly, knowing that it was the truth.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"If it was to protect Dauntless and his position here... he would shoot me. I don't doubt that," I said.

Four sighed and shook his head. He leaned over me and grabbed a cup of water, handing it back to me to drink. I took it from him and swallowed a little bit, nearly spilling it all over myself. My hands were shaking too badly for me to actually hold something. I set the cup of water down, shivering when my hands brushed the spot where Eric had shot me.

"How long was I in there for?" I asked Four.

I had to think about something else. "Six minutes, eight seconds," Four said. It had felt like I was in there for hours, locked in a silent battle with Eric. It was a little longer than my average time. "Not too bad for someone that got out the Dauntless way. You need to learn to do it faster."

I knew that it wasn't because my time was poor. My time was outstanding. The problem was that Jeanine had directly said something about the Divergent problem. I needed to kill her before she could say anything. People would be there watching me, including Jeanine, and they couldn't hear her say that.

"Okay," I muttered.

"The second that you see them come out there together, shoot them. Don't give them a moment to talk," he said.

"Okay."

"Alex, this isn't going to happen in real life," Four said softly.

He had no idea what was going to happen. Eric was working with Jeanine. I was in danger being with Eric. But I couldn't stop. "How do you know that?" I asked Four pathetically.

My voice was so soft that it didn't even sound like my voice. I had never felt this weak before. That was what Eric did to me. Four looked like he was in between crying for me and giving me a hug. Maybe even slapping me. I would probably deserve it. I needed to snap out of it. But I wasn't sure how.
"Because I might not like Eric but I do know him. I've known him for a long time," Four said. Four years was certainly long enough to get to know someone well. I had only known Heather for a few months and I felt like I had known her for all of her life. "He's never once cared about any of the people here in Dauntless. Maybe Cameron. That's it. He's cared about himself and his position. That's no way for anyone to live. But then he found you."


"It is. You are someone that, despite his best efforts, he genuinely cares about. Eric might have a hard time accepting it if the truth about you ever comes out but he will. I know that he will. He would never kill you. No matter what Jeanine says," Four argued.

It didn't matter what he said about Eric and me. He might care about me. There was a chance that he could leave me be and help protect me. But that was something that I thought about in my dreams. There was no way that Eric would ever give himself up to save me. That wasn't the type of man that he was.

"But you aren't saying that because you genuinely believe it," I told Four softly.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You're saying it because you know that it's what I want to hear."

Four shook his head and I almost thought that he would slap me. This whiny and desperate version of me wasn't me. "You're wrong," Four snapped.

"I'm not."

"You are. You aren't as smart as you like to think. If I really thought that Eric would kill you, I would tell you. I don't. Honestly I don't know what he would do if he found out. But every fiber of my being tells me that he wouldn't kill you," he told me and I sighed. He would. "Me? Now that's another story."

Despite everything, I couldn't help but to crack a small smile. That one I couldn't argue with Four. It was no secret that Eric hated Four. I wiped a few tears out of my eyes and sighed deeply. This was when it came in handy to have Four as a friend, rather than a trainer. He was a good friend.

"No. He wouldn't kill you. You might be an ass, Four, but some part of me likes you," I said.

Four gave me a small smile and I smiled back at him. I wished that he would smile more often. It looked good on him. "Some part of me likes you too," he said.

"I wouldn't let him kill you."

And I meant it. I really would defend Four if I needed to. He was the one that was risking everything to keep me and my secret safe. Four gave me a quick hug and I smiled into his shoulder. He was a good person to have around. My friends were wrong about Four being always stoic and never happy. He was a great man and a great friend.

"Alright, I'll hold you to that," Four said. I smiled once more. We might have started on rocky terms, but we were friends now. With a secret that held us together like glue. "Get out of here. You're taking too long. Go get dinner and see Eric tonight."

"I'll try," I said. I wasn't sure that I could go and see him. I had no idea what I would be able to say to him.
"Come back here at midnight and we'll work on that fear. We need you conquering it as fast as possible," he said.

"Okay."

He gave me a hand and I stood, heading out the door. I chirped back a quick thanks to Four and wished Aaron good luck before heading out of the fear sim room as the door closed behind Aaron. As quickly as possible I headed back to the dining room. The only thing that I wanted was to be back with my friends and forget about this stupid fear. As I passed through the Chasm I glanced to the water and looked at my reflection. A grimace was quick to splay across my face. My eyes were a little red from crying.

It was obvious that I'd had a bad time. I hated looking so weak. It was obvious that what I had seen in my fear sim had gotten to me. I knew that by the time I forced myself to Eric's apartment, I was going to have to buck up. He wouldn't let me live it down for looking weak. I walked into the dining room and grabbed dinner before heading to the table.

Heather scooted over so that I had room in between her and Buck. Dante let his leg fall from the table so that I could sit down. Heather's eyebrow raised so that she was looking at me, but one shake of the head told her that I would explain it to her later. She nodded and looked back at her food.

"Hey, Alex, training go alright?" Dante asked, clearly trying to break the tense air.

Smiling at him as best as I could, I nodded slowly. "About as good as can be expected. I don't really want to talk about it," I said softly.

My friends all nodded, knowing that it was tough. They all knew that if I was having a hard time with it, my fear must have been bad. Most days we only went briefly over what had happened during our fear sims. It seemed that today my words had ended the conversation.

"So what have you guys been up to?" I asked, not wanting to have to suffer the silence between my friends.

Everyone went to chatting about their days and I smiled as we all joked and laughed together. Food was being thrown back and forth and I laughed. My friends were the best to have around on a bad day. A few Dauntless born were sitting with us and I smiled. I liked the Dauntless born and I was glad that we were all interacting more now. Although I still found it funny that my friends didn't know about the zip line.

"Alex?" Heather called, breaking my concentration.

I had been nibbling on the leftovers of Buck's cake. "What's up?" I asked.

She was wearing a smile but there was a hint of worry in the back of her eyes. Probably because I'd been so quiet today and because of the obvious way that I had been on the verge of tears earlier. "Can I see you for a second?" she asked.

"Sure," I said, getting to my feet.

We walked over to the side of the Pit, where it was quieter and no one could hear us talking. "What's going on? What did you see in your fear sim today?" Heather asked. I knew that we would eventually have this conversation. "You're never this quiet and you've never just backed down from a talk about the fear sims."

I sighed and took a seat at one of the tables that was lining the edge of the Pit. Heather took a seat
across from me and we both leaned into each other, keeping our voices low. I should have known that Heather would know that my change of demeanor was from something serious.

"My fear sim changed for the first time," I told her.

"What was it?"

"I was in this room, alone. Eric walked in. He was defending this woman that was telling him to kill me. He was listening to her. I had to kill her. But he was standing right in front of her. He wouldn't move. I begged him to but he wouldn't. I tried to get around him to shoot her but he was faster. He shot me. Right in the hip. He was going to shoot me in the head if I didn't get there first. So I did it. I can't believe that I actually did it. I shot him. The bullet went through him and hit her. But I still did it. I killed him," I said, my voice cracking near the end.

Heather's hand shot up to her mouth. I knew that she wasn't expecting that one. "Oh, Alex. I'm so sorry. That's awful. I can't believe that you actually had to do that. I couldn't imagine what would happen if I'd had to kill Cole. I would have never made it. But honey, he wouldn't ever hurt you," she said.

She grabbed my hand, holding it tightly, just the way that Four had done earlier. "Yes, he would," I muttered.

"No, he wouldn't. He wouldn't kill you either. He cares about you. Trust me, Eric is a hard-ass but he would never hurt you," she said.

Shaking my head at her, I dropped against the seat. No one understood that if push came to shove and Eric found out who I really was, he would kill me. "That's just it, Heather. He would. He would kill me. If he really needed to," I said.

She shook her head. "He wouldn't," she said determinedly.

"That was the whole point of the fear. Not necessarily having to kill him but being afraid that he would kill me if need be," I said.

She shook her head and I scoffed loudly. I knew that she wouldn't believe me. "What reason would he have to kill you?" Heather asked.

"It doesn't matter," I said.

I couldn't risk having her know the truth. It wouldn't be safe for her to know what I was. "Alex, he is not going to kill you. Or hurt you," she said.

But she didn't know what he was capable of. "He will," I muttered.

"Eric might be an ass and he's hurt you a few times before. But he's changed. It's like you tell me about the times that the two of you are together. He's warming up to you. He might not be in love but he does care about you. He's the type of guy that would sacrifice himself for someone that he genuinely cares about. And that person is you," she said.

The thought of him saving me at his own personal risk warmed my heart but it quickly cooled down. As much as I wanted Eric to be that guy, I knew that he never would. He was not my knight in shining armor. I'd known that for a long time, despite the fact that he had saved me a few times. I didn't even want him to be that kind of guy. I just wanted to know that he would stand by me. But he wouldn't. Not once he knew what I was.
"No it isn't, Heather. It isn't," I insisted when she looked like she might interrupt me. "It's not that I don't think that he cares about me but I think that if he really needs to take care of a problem, he will. Even if that problem is me."

We sat in silence for a moment and I waited for Heather to say something. For the moment I was out of words. I had nothing left to say to her. There was nothing left for me to say. As much as I wanted to think that Eric was a good man, he wasn't. I had no argument that he was. She knew where I stood on the Eric issue.

"Get up," Heather snapped.

My eyes widened as I stared at her. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"You heard me, get up. Come on," she snarled again.

I stood slowly and watched as Heather jumped from her spot. "Where are we going?" I asked.

"Come on," she said, otherwise ignoring me.

She made a move to leave, but the moment that she saw that I was rooted in my spot, she came back and dragged me away. Heather grabbed onto my arm and started to drag me down the hallway to the Dauntless member apartments. I stumbled over my feet slightly as we walked, tripping a little bit. Heather was ahead of me, muttering to herself irritably.

"Which apartment is Eric's?" she asked.

"That one," I said.

I knew that Eric would be in there. He had told me earlier today that he would be back in his apartment right after dinner. I figured that he had work to do. Heather stopped in front of the door and my breath caught in my throat. I should have told her the wrong one. She held my arm tightly in her own and I knew that there was no way that I could get away from her.

She turned back to me with her hands on her hips. "Okay, you're going to go in there and enjoy a night with your boyfriend," Heather said.

My eyebrows raised and I let out a little laugh though. Eric was not my boyfriend. I had a feeling that he would never be my boyfriend. He wasn't that kind of guy. In fact, I wasn't sure what he was. But he certainly wasn't my boyfriend. At least, he'd never made any mention of it.

"He's not my boyfriend," I said.

"Whatever he is!" she shouted, making me jump slightly. "I don't care. Just get in there and don't you dare come back for at least another hour."

"Heather .."

I made another move to argue with her, but I was too late. Before I could stop her, Heather knocked on the door loudly enough for Eric to hear. My heart dropped and I jumped to run off before Eric could open the door. Unfortunately I didn't get the chance. The door swung open and Heather shoved me into Eric.

"Goodnight!" she yelled, dashing off.

Part of me wanted to run back and slap Heather, but the other part of me wanted to thank her. Either
way, it was too late to do anything. She was long gone and not coming back. In the meantime, I was standing pressed up against Eric. The same Eric who I had killed earlier. The same Eric who had shot me.

"Evening," he purred.

"Hey," I muttered.

He was looking down at me, and I was sure that I looked extremely frazzled. I felt extremely frazzled. He didn't seem to mind what I looked like as he smirked down at me. I stepped past him and walked into his apartment, keeping my gaze down at the ground. I couldn't look at him without seeing his body in front of me. I really didn't want to remember the look on his face as he shot me. He had looked almost happy to do it.

"Did your friend have to drag you here?" Eric asked as we walked back into the apartment.

"No," I snapped, knowing that I had spoken too fast. "No, I was just going to go and take a shower before coming here. She just thought that I should come straight here."

Unfortunately I wasn't the best liar in the world. For now, I was just hoping that Eric would buy into my lie. He stared at me for a moment but finally nodded. I was sure that he didn't really believe me. Not that I blamed him. It wasn't believable. He was wearing a black vest over a black shirt and a pair of dark gray pants. He looked like he had just come from a meeting. He had told me earlier that he would be in meetings all day.

"How was your day?" I asked, trying to stop the barrage of images of his dead body that my brain kept playing.

His face fell and I knew immediately that I shouldn't have said what I had. Eric and I never asked each other how our days were. There was no need to ask how our days were. We always had things to say to each other. The conversation was forced. We always fell into an easy conversation. He knew that there was something wrong with me. He wasn't stupid.

"Did you just ask me how my day was?" he asked.

I nodded weakly, hoping that he would let it go. "Well, yeah," I muttered.

It felt so strange to be here after just hours ago I had been forced to have to kill Eric, who had been more than happy to shoot me. Even worse, it had been after he had threatened to kill me. All I wanted right now was to leave. I could come back once I'd gotten over my fear. Right now, this was too much for me to handle.

"What's your problem?" Eric asked sharply.

I was still standing over near his kitchen counter as Eric set down the drink in his hand and made his way over to me. My hands started to shake with nerves. I tried to force a normal look onto my face and smile at Eric, but it was hard. Especially now that the gears were turning in his head.

"What do you mean?" I asked, trying to play stupid.

It was a game that I was pretty good at after years or playing it with my parents and the rest of Amity. But Eric was smarter than I liked to give him credit for. Not that I was surprised at how quickly he'd figured it out. He used to be an Erudite. He could easily outsmart a foolish little ex-Amity.
"You didn't want to come here," Eric said.

It wasn't a question. I shook my head at him. "Of course I did," I said quickly.

Even though he was completely right I didn't want him to know that. "No, you didn't. I can see it. You don't want to be here," he said.

"I want to be here," I mumbled.

Eric was advancing on me as I backed up as far as I could into the counter. I was trembling slightly as he walked up to stand in front of me, fighting to ensure that he couldn't tell. He really was a good guy. He was a nice guy when it was just the two of us, but he would never be the right guy.

"What's wrong, Amity?" Eric asked, a teasing glint in his eyes.

My entire body gave a little shudder. As much as I liked having him near me, I wanted nothing more than to shove Eric away. All his words did were remind me of what he had told me in my fear sim. Eric took another step closer and I had to suppress the urge to tell him to back away from me.

"Nothing, Eric. Look I just want to sit down or something," I practically begged with him. "Do you have a drink?"

It might have been nice to have some courage for the conversation that I knew was coming soon. Eric merely stared at me for a moment before pressing himself into me. Any chance that I'd had of escaping before had gone flying out the window. He had me trapped in my place.

"You must have seen something real strange in that fear sim today," he purred.

His eyes were twinkling with mirth and I froze, standing completely still. "I did," I muttered.

The last thing that I wanted tonight was for him to find out what was in my fear sim. "What was it?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Not your parents dying again," he stated.

"No."

"Maybe it was all of your little friends," he teased.

"Not that either."

His eyes narrowed as he stared at me. "Come on Amity, give me something," he said.

His large hands touched the tops of my thighs before running their way up and coming to a rest on my waist. I tried to shrink away from his touch, but his grip was like steel. And with every little movement that I made his grip only got tighter. I forced my breathing to slow down as I looked Eric in the eyes. He looked like he was waiting for an explanation from me.

"Eric, please. Let me go," I said softly to him. "Move. Please."

All it did was remind me of what he'd said to me in my fear sim. He didn't bother to move from me. He was staring down intently at me and my face flushed of all color. I just wanted to be able to leave but I knew that Eric was going to keep me here, against him, until I admitted to him what I had seen. He was close to figuring it out. I assumed that I wasn't going to need to tell him. His face fell after a moment and I trembled underneath his touch. He knew.
"Me. I was in your fear sim," he said softly.

Even though he was right, I didn't want to have to tell him. "No. You weren't," I muttered.

"What happened?" he snarled.

Every part of me knew that I would eventually tell Eric anyways, as I would have wanted to know if it were me in his fear sim, but I just couldn't. He didn't need to know that I had been forced to kill him. He didn't need to know that he had shot me. Mostly I didn't want him to know what I thought he was capable of.

"Eric -," I half begged, but he cut me off once more.

"What happened?" he repeated, letting me know that there was no way that I was getting out of this conversation.

His voice was deepening and becoming dangerous. Shaking my head at him, I grabbed his arm to try and push him away from me. He wasn't taking it. His grip on me only got tighter. His hands were digging into my skin painfully. I wanted to shove him away from me, but I knew that he was stronger. He wasn't moving from me until he got what he wanted.

"Come on, it doesn't matter. Let it go. Let's just enjoy the night," I said desperately, hoping he would let it go.

But it was Eric. And he didn't let anything go. Not when he wanted to know the answer. I wouldn't have let the topic go either if it was me that we were talking about. His hands were still tight on my waist. With every minute that passed, they were tightening even more. I knew that he could feel me trembling beneath his hands.

"What did I do to you?" he asked. I stayed silent, not wanting to admit to him the truth. He didn't need to know.

"Nothing," I whispered.

"Tell me the truth," he growled.

My head was facing the ground and I could feel him staring a hole into the top of my head. "It doesn't matter," I said.

"Tell me!" he shouted.

We had been standing in silence for a little while. My entire body was shaking as I thought about what he wanted. Should I just get it over with and tell him? I didn't want to. But I should. I jumped at the sudden raise of volume in his voice and stared up at Eric. His hands were so tight on my hips that they hurt.

"Let go of me," I said, softer than I thought was possible.

His eyes were radiating fury as he slowly released his grip on me. But his hands still didn't drop off of me. They were stroking my bare skin. "Tell me," he said, quieter than before.

"I woke up in this room. No one was in there. You came in. I was asking you what was going on but you didn't say anything to me. A woman came in behind you. She stayed hidden by you. She told you to kill me. I had a gun. So did you. But I only had one bullet. I just knew that she had to die. But you wouldn't move. You just stayed in front of her. I begged you to move but you wouldn't. She told
you that I was dangerous. That I wasn't right. She ordered you to kill me. I tried to run around you and shoot her but you got to me first. You shot me. In the hip. I stood and you raised your gun to my head. I tried so hard to get you to move but you wouldn't. You were going to kill me. So I did it, I shot you and shot her through you," I explained, not using Jeanine's name.

My head had stayed towards the ground for my entire explanation but I finally looked up at him. He was quieter than I had ever heard him. His eyes were almost black and I knew that this time it was with anger. Any trace of laughter in his eyes had faded during my recount. He looked angry. Extremely angry. His eyes held a little hint of sadness and I felt a sharp pain go through my chest. He actually looked hurt. I couldn't believe that I had actually told him what had happened to me.

"You really think that I would kill you?" he asked.

"No," I mumbled unconvincingly.

"Alex," Eric called softly. It was only the third time that he had ever said my real name. "Look at me. Do you think that I would kill you?"

His eyes were hard. I knew that he wasn't sure of himself. This was not the type of person that he was. Vulnerability was not his strong suit. "Would you?" I asked. I wasn't sure why I had said it. But I wanted to know. "If it meant keeping your position here in Dauntless. If someone was telling you to kill me. f it was you or me. Would you really not kill me?"

"Excuse me?" Eric asked.

"Tell me the truth," I said softly.

It was the worst look that I had ever seen on Eric's face. He looked somewhere in between hurt and angry. And I knew that it was everything that I had just said. I shouldn't have said it. But I had. And Eric was good at masking emotions. The hurt fled from his eyes as fast as it had come.

"You don't know me as well as you think that you do if you think that I would ever lay a hand on you. Shoot you or kill you, you're dead wrong," Eric snarled. Was it the truth? Would he really put me before himself? He seemed sure of it. But he still didn't know the truth. "You honestly think that I would kill you?"

Tears built in my eyes as I looked away from Eric. I wanted to tell him what I was, but I knew that I couldn't. It wasn't safe to tell him and he wasn't safe either. Not right now. I needed to leave. We could talk about everything later, but not now. Shaking my head at him, I tried to push myself as far back into the counter as I could.

"I don't know, Eric. I really don't," I told him honestly. "I hope that you wouldn't. But come on, Eric. You've told me more than anyone else. You don't care about me. Not really."

Honestly, I wasn't sure why I was saying the things that I was. All I was doing was hurting him. He genuinely thought that he had nothing to worry about with me. But he was wrong. He had everything to worry about with me. I was putting both of us in danger by being here. I tried to shut myself up but I wasn't able to. I just kept running my mouth.

"You were the one who insisted that I was nothing more than a warm body," I whispered.

The vein in his arm twitched slightly. I wished that I could take it back. I wished that my fear was something else. "You think that that's all you are to me?" Eric asked.

I glanced up at him and saw that his jaw was clenched tightly. "I don't know," I whispered.
"You think that I'd let you stay in my bed, tell you stories about myself, not mind that you know about my childhood, if I thought of you as nothing more than a warm body?" he asked.

I shook my head, even though I knew that he was right. I knew that I meant something to him. The question was how much I meant to Eric. There was a chance that I meant enough, but I wasn't sure that I did. I just wasn't sure if I meant enough. Eric's hands dropped from my waist and I found myself missing his touch.

"You're wrong, Amity."

We were both silent as I tried to wrack my brain for something to say. But nothing came to mind. I had already done the damage and I had no idea how to reverse it. We couldn't travel back in time for me to take back what I had said. I just wished that I could go back and act like normal when I walked into the apartment.

"I'm sorry, Eric. But you don't tell me anything. Tell me what I mean to you. Tell me that I'm something more than a warm body. Tell me that I could trust you to put me before yourself," I said. As I had expected, he said nothing. "Because I don't know."

I gave him a minute to say something, but he never did. Eric stayed silent, his eyes never straying from my own. I could see the reflection of my own eyes in his. They were red and tears were glistening in them. He looked completely emotionless and I knew that he was done talking to me. I grabbed Eric and wrapped my arms around him, even though I knew that he didn't want me to. His body language was tense as I buried my face into his chest and I backed away.

He was dangerous right now. For a moment I thought that he might hit me. His arms had stayed down at his sides the entire time and I knew that my words had had a profound effect on him. I couldn't help but to wonder if I was the first person to hurt him. I leaned up to try and kiss him, but he was too tall. There was no way that he was going to budge and lean down to me. So I stood on my tiptoes and kissed the side of his jaw. I felt him twitch under my lips.

As I went back down onto the balls of my feet, I saw his tense stance. I was sure that nothing like this had ever happened to him before. "I'm so sorry, Eric. I really am. I care about you. Probably more than you know," I said. It was easy to see his jaw twitch. "Maybe one day you'll tell me how you feel too. I'm sorry about tonight. I'm going to leave. I'll, uh - see you around. Goodnight, Eric."

Part of me hoped that he would say something to call me back, but I knew that he wouldn't. He was just as upset as I was. Maybe even more so. My eyes were watering as I stepped around him and headed over towards the door. Eric stayed where he had been standing the entire time as I walked to his door and headed out into the hallway. Tears that had been building the entire time were about to fall as I walked down the hall.

I made it about five or six steps outside of his apartment when I heard a glass shatter from inside. My body started shaking with silent sobs. I wanted nothing more than to go back to him. Not tonight though. I couldn't. So instead I let the first tear fall as I headed to the sim room. I was hours early but I wanted to be alone.

My feet carried me blindly to the sim room as tears flowed down against my face. I managed to not let anyone see me cry by taking the back hallways. The moment that I walked into the sim room I dropped against the wall. Tears were steadily running down my face as I drew my knees up to my chest and tucked my head in my knees.

Every part of me wanted to be angry with someone. Four, Eric, or Heather. But right now I couldn't bring myself to be angry with anyone but me. There was no reason for me to have gone to Eric
tonight. I should have gotten Heather to understand that I needed a while before being confronted by him. But it wasn't really Heather's fault. She didn't realize that it had affected me so much because there was a chance that my fear could be entirely possible. For hours I leaned against the wall and cried, not even realizing that Four was on his way here.

At half an hour until midnight, nearly four hours since I'd come into the room, Four walked in. Tears were still occasionally falling from my eyes, but I was nowhere near as hysterical as I had been earlier. I had never thought that Eric would be able to have such a profound effect on me.

"Alex? You're early," Four said. I didn't bother to look up at him. "You ready to start or -" Four cut himself off when he realized that I had been crying. And for quite some time too. "Alex. What's wrong?"

Four walked over to my side and dropped down so that he could lean in front of me. I raised my head to look into his eyes and felt completely mortified. He was my leader, here to risk his life for me. And here I was, crying over some boy. I didn't want to admit what had happened with him but the words wouldn't stop flowing. Just like with Eric.

"I - I told Heather about my fear with Eric and she thought that I needed to go talk to him. It wasn't her fault. She was just trying to help. I - I went to Eric's and I tried to pretend that things were normal but I couldn't. All I saw was him shooting me. Threatening to kill me. He figured it out. He got me to tell him what I saw. He was horrified that I could have thought that he would do something like that to him," I said softly, wiping dried tears from my eyes.

He nodded sadly at me as I curled my legs even tighter in on myself. "I see... Alex... Eric, he cares for you," Four said.

I shook my head at him. "I know," I said.

He cared about me, but he cared about his spot in Dauntless more. He wouldn't turn on Jeanine Matthews for me. "I'm sorry for ever making you think that he would kill you. Even if Jeanine ordered it, I don't think that he would. Not if he reacted the way that you say he did," Four said.

Most of me believed that Four was telling me the truth. There was definitely a chance that Eric would give up everything for me, but he had said so many times that I didn't mean anything to him. I wasn't sure what to think. A tiny part of me still thought that he was lying to me to protect me. And that was the part that I listened to.

"Don't lie to me, Four. I know that you still believe that he'll kill me if Jeanine orders him to. I do too," I said softly. "I just - I never meant to get this attached to him. I don't know if I even am that attached to him. I just know that I feel awful for what I saw in my fear sim. For believing that it could happen."

Four wiped away some dried tears from my cheek, and I swatted at him. I wasn't completely hopeless. "We can't help who we find ourselves drawn to. Sometimes it's a good thing and other times if becomes difficult," Four said.

I nearly laughed. "Nothing has ever been as difficult as my relationship with Eric is," I said.

Even Four smiled. "I believe that somewhere in his heart, Eric has some good in him. I believe that you're the person that can bring that good out. I believe that you're the person that has brought that good out. Believe it or not I think Eric has been nicer this year than past years. If you can imagine that," Four added.
I couldn't help it. I laughed softly and shook my head. I could imagine Eric being worse in past years. It seemed like I was the only initiate this year that Eric had actually caused bodily harm to in our initiation class. Other than the initiates that had to spar against him. But he hadn't thrown them across the room.

"Well maybe to the rest of them. Not to me," I said, making Four sigh. "Do you remember the broken railing over the Chasm?"

Four had tried to stop Eric from dragging me out of the training room but he had been too late. Plus I'd earned my punishment. I'd thrown a knife at him. Looking back at it now, despite not wanting to admit it, I knew that it was right for Eric to have nearly killed me. I had come very close to killing him.

"You don't have to. I know," he said.

My eyebrows raised as I wiped another tear from my eyes. Four moved to sit at my side, the two of us sitting against each other. I had never realized that Four had known what had happened at the Chasm. I thought that it had stayed between Eric and me. That was the way that I'd wanted it to be.

"What?" I asked dumbly.

"When the railing was broken, and no one knew what had happened, Max asked me to check it out. Look at the tapes. I saw it happen. And I saw how scared you both were," Four said.

I nodded at him. I was sure that I had never been more afraid than Eric. Shaking my head at Four, I sighed and leaned back against the wall. "So then you should know. Four, Eric would kill me. He already has nearly killed me. Quite a few times too. That was just one of the times," I said.

And it was the entire truth. The first time that Eric and I had ever been alone together he had nearly choked me to death. Not that I hadn't deserved it. Each time that we'd fought, I'd realized too late that I had deserved it. Eric was a dangerous man and I was the idiot who had fallen into his trap.

"Yes, it was an accident. But you didn't hear him, you didn't see him. Not really. He wanted to kill me. I know that he did," I said.

Every part of me knew that during the Chasm incident Eric had really wanted to kill me. I could see it in his eyes. "But he didn't," Four said.

"He would have. If it weren't against the rules to kill initiates," I said.

"Doubtful. A lot of times we find ourselves furious, more so than we thought was possible. Eric might have thought that he wanted to kill you, but I saw the fear in his eyes when you actually fell. When he could barely hang onto you. He really thought that you were going to die. And I don't think that he could have lived with himself if you'd actually died," Four said.

Was that really the truth? I didn't think that it was. Eric would have gotten over my death. It would be easy enough. He might feel a little bit guilty about it, but he wouldn't have been torn up over it. He would still get over my death if he was forced to kill me. Maybe he felt something for me, but his job here was more important to him.

"He would have. I know that he would have. Maybe he would have been angry with himself, a little upset. But he wouldn't have been devastated. Not even now. His position here in Dauntless is important to him. More important than me. More important than anything," I told Four.

Everyone knew that Eric was very proud of his leadership status. Four shook his head at me and I
looked over to him. "I wouldn't be so sure about that. It isn't that Eric is incapable of feeling anything. I know that he isn't," Four told me.

I knew that Eric was incapable of emotions. "I know. It was just the way that he was raised," I said. And that was a hard thing to break, the way that someone was raised.

Four looked a little surprised for a moment. "Cameron? He cares about him," Four said. But Cameron was his best friend. "There are other friends that Eric has here that he at least somewhat cares about. My story with Eric is different."

"What happened between you two?" I asked.

"It's a story for another night," he said. I always had been curious why Eric hated Four so much. "But you? He cares more about you than anyone else I've ever seen. His position here in Dauntless? It means a lot to him. But something else might mean more."

It was easy to see that Four meant me. But I wasn't so sure that he was right about that. In fact, I was almost positive that leadership meant more to him than I did. Leadership was one of the most important things to Eric. He liked having the authority. He was good with his position of authority.

"But how do you know?" I asked softly.

We were silent for a moment and I waited for Four to say something. I leaned into his shoulder. For a moment I thought that he might shove me away from him, but Four let me lay there. I appreciated that. It really was nice to have him here as a friend tonight, the one night that I wanted a friend.

"You know that I'm not from Dauntless," Four said.

It was pretty common knowledge that Four had been a transfer. "I know," I said.

The only thing was that no one knew where he was from. Four never talked about his childhood with me. "I'm from Abnegation originally," Four admitted.

I coughed a few times and had to suppress a laugh. Did Four really just say that he was from Abnegation? He had really been a Stiff? I remembered the day when I had first come to Dauntless and he had asked me if I was pushed just because I was from Amity. I always thought that it was shocking because Amity and Abnegation never did well in Dauntless. But clearly Four had if he was here and training the initiates. But I had always thought that Four was from Candor or Erudite.

"You were a Stiff?" I asked stupidly.

Well that was much ruder than I had meant for it to sound. Honestly I hadn't meant to say anything like that. It was a little on the rude side. Actually, it was extremely rude of me to say that. But he had caught me off guard. Four narrowed his eyes at me as I lifted my head from his shoulder.

"Seriously, Softie?" Four asked.

I blushed and gave him a tiny smile. "Sorry," I said guilty.

He was right. I had no room to be judging anyone. "Anyways, in Abnegation open love wasn't really something that was ever taught. We were taught to conceal what we love. But my family, they went above and beyond that," he said.

My eyes narrowed at him. "What do you mean?" I asked.
I wasn't sure what he was getting at. "Again, a story for another time. But just know, Alex. The way that Eric looks at you... It's the way that I wish my father had looked at my mother," Four said.

My heart dropped into my stomach as I clamped my jaws shut. I had no idea what to say to that. Part of me wanted to thank him, but I wasn't sure that it was quite appropriate for the moment. Did he mean that his father didn't love his mother? Or was there something deeper there? It was clear that Four would tell me one day about his family, but today was not that day. Tonight we had both found ourselves in a state of mind that we didn't like to think about.

Tonight we could enjoy each other's company without having to say anything. There was nothing more that we could say. His words had done more for me than he could ever imagine. He thought that Eric looked at me the same way a man would look at the woman they cared about more than anything. Maybe that was true. Maybe it wasn't. One day I might see what Four was talking about. Once more I rested my head on Four's shoulders and sighed as his arm went around mine. For tonight, Four was not my trainer and he was not my ally. For tonight, he was my friend.
Chapter Eighteen

Eric's P.O.V.

It was late in the morning when Eric finally woke up. He knew that Max was frustrated that Eric had been sleeping in lately, but Eric couldn't have cared less. He was normally awake by six or so, a lasting trait from growing up in Erudite, but lately he'd been sleeping in until well past ten. Far later than most of the rest of the Faction. It was later than all of the Factions woke up. But he didn't care. He woke up like he had most mornings for the past week or so. Angry and hating himself. Or wanting to drive someone's head through the wall. Probably a combination of all three. Particularly hers.

Even though nothing that had happened was really her fault, he was furious with her. He shouldn't have pushed her. He really didn't want to know that she was afraid of him hurting her. All of this was because she had given him the answer that he had never wanted to hear. The answer that had fucked up everything that he had been working so hard to accomplish with her.

He knew that she thought he was dangerous. He was dangerous. She had already known that the moment that she started seeing him. Before that even. But he couldn't believe that she really was afraid that he was going to kill her. Why would she even think something like that? He was positive that she had no reason to think that. He hated thinking about it. He hated that she thought that he could kill her.

Eric was no stranger to having to take someone's life - having had to take out enemies before - but he could never take hers. He never would. Whether she knew it or not, and whether he would admit or not, he would never have the heart to kill her. He couldn't even understand why she would think that he would kill her. He had never thought that he was that bad.

There was only one reason that Eric could think of that would justify her fear of him killing her. The only reason that would justify her fear of him. If she was one of the people that Jeanine was tracking down. The Divergent's. It would have made sense if there was a chance that she was one of them. But she wasn't. There was no way that she was. He would have been able to tell. Four would have been able to tell. Max would have been able to tell.

It wasn't that hard to tell who was a Divergent and who wasn't. He was inclined to think that it would have been obvious if she was one of them. There was no way that she was one of them. Her times in the sim were good, better than most, but they weren't so good that she was finishing in under three minutes. That would have been a major hint.

Eric stood up from his bed and groaned softly. His head was pounding and his throat was dry. He fucking hated hangovers. It was rare that he actually got them, but they had become an almost welcome friend over the past few days. He glanced around his apartment and scowled. Most of the small living area had been destroyed. He had gone through a bit of a fit when she had left last week and hadn't bothered to clean up. He had drank far too much and ended up tearing most of his possessions to shreds. Not that most of it mattered to him.

The sheets on his bed were thrown in a pile on the ground. The dishes were all stacked up in the sink with bits of food dried onto them. Drink glasses were everywhere in sight and empty bottles littered the room. A handle in the bathroom was broken from when Eric had come home drunk last night, at the insistence of Cameron. It wasn't the first time that he had broken something while drunk. He had wanted to go find her, but Cameron had insisted he go to bed. In retrospect, he was probably right.
The one thing that he hated more than the knowledge that she thought that he could kill her was the knowledge that she had such a profound effect on him. More than anyone else had. No one had ever made Eric care so much about them as she had. With the exception of maybe Cameron. But they had grown up together. Eric had known him for his entire life. Cameron would never be afraid of Eric. Not the way that she was.

He hated the thought that she was afraid of him. He wanted to say something to her but he wasn't sure what he possibly could say. He didn't want to apologize to her. He had never learned how to apologize. He felt weak when he did it. He just wanted them to go back to normal.

In the past week since Eric had learned that one of her fears was him killing her, he had only spoken to his Amity once more. He had seen her a few times in passing in the Dauntless halls. He had spoken to her two days ago. She had come to try and move past their discussion a few nights prior, but the conversation had been forced. It was obvious that neither one had known what to say to the other. He hadn't kissed her. He hadn't even touched her. She had made sure to keep her distance. It had been like she was trying not to set him off. And that was the worst part. When it was just them, she had never seemed nervous.

The one thing that Eric wanted more than anything else was for their relationship to go back to normal. He wanted to be able to tease her again. It was one of his favorite pastimes. He wanted to laugh at how easily embarrassed she was. It was extremely easy to embarrass her. All he had to do was say something about her body. It was the easiest way to get her to turn bright red.

He wanted to call her Amity again, knowing that it was one of the many things that riled her up. He just wanted to see her again. He wanted her to be able to look his way without looking away from him a second later. He wanted to be able to pin her up against the wall, counter, or bed again. But he had no idea how to go about it.

Standing from the bed, Eric tried to shake her out of his thoughts. There was still work to be done and Eric was not the type of man to find himself hung up over some girl. Not even his Amity. He awkwardly fumbled over to the dresser but stopped halfway there. His clothes were no longer folded and put away neatly like they normally were. They were scattered throughout the room. He scowled at the clothes strewn across his furniture. His apartment was a mess and it was all because of her.

He grabbed a black shirt and a pair of black pants, stepping into them before grabbing his boots and slipping them on. His clothes were wrinkled to hell but Eric ignored it. His head was spinning too fast to really concentrate on wearing proper clothes. He had drank far too much last night. He had seen her down in the Pit, laughing with her friends. He hated thinking that she might have been happier - better off - without him.

A knock sounded at Eric's door and he muttered under his breath. It was probably Max snapping at Eric for being late again. He'd been late every day over the past five days. But Eric had never been one for punctuality. Eric hated having to talk to someone today but he knew that his job was more important than his simmering over her.

He had just been hoping to only deal with himself today. The last thing that he wanted was to talk to Max. He wasn't the worst person in the world, but he definitely ground on Eric's nerves after a few hours. He was past sick of having to be civil with these people. Eric decidedly ignored the door, but after a minute, it opened anyways. It meant that it wasn't Max. Unsurprisingly it was Cameron. He was probably here to check on Eric.

"Quite the mess you have going here," Cameron stated as he glanced around the room.

"I guess."
Eric said nothing else. "Eric, what's going on, man?" Cameron asked.

Cameron's voice was quieter than it normally was. Eric had noticed lately that his friend had joked a little less and had looked more concerned for him. It was easy to see that Eric had been more irritable over the past few days. But the way that Cameron was treating Eric like a broken doll was going to make him lose his mind.

"Get out of here," Eric growled under his breath.

He didn't want to listen to Cameron's berating. "No," Cameron hissed.

"If Max wants me tell him I'll be there in a few minutes."

The room was silent as Cameron flipped the light switch on. Eric hissed and made his way into the kitchen. "Enough of this shit," Cameron snapped.

Eric turned to look over at him. For once, any teasing glint was impossible to trace in his friend's eyes. He was pissed. "What the fuck did you just say?" Eric asked lowly.

"You've drank more in this past week than you have in an entire month. And that's saying something," Cameron continued.

"So?" Eric asked, pouring himself some coffee.

"Where's your girl?" Cameron tried again, approaching from a more sensitive angle.

Eric tensed and reached for a glass of whiskey sitting forgotten on the counter. "Dorms," he answered shortly.

If they were going to talk about this Eric needed another drink. Cameron walked up and snatched it away. "Come on, man. You've had enough to drink," he said.

Eric's eyes narrowed as he scowled at Cameron. "I don't need my mother or a damn lecture," Eric snapped.

"Where is Alex? I haven't seen her with anyone other than her friends in a week. What happened between you two?" Cameron asked softly.

A flash of anger shot through Eric's chest as he shook his head. "Doesn't matter. Give me the glass back," Eric demanded.

"Absolutely not," Cameron said, brushing by Eric and pouring the drink down the drain.

Eric watched Cameron with his fists balled. He didn't want to hit Cameron. He was his best friend. The one person that had been there through everything. He had never actually hit him before, except for the times that they had sparred together. But Eric was getting dangerously close to doing something that he might regret this morning.

"Is there a reason you're here or are we just chatting?" Eric asked sharply.

He knew that he was being a dick but he couldn't bring himself to care. Pity briefly flitted through Cameron's eyes and Eric growled. He didn't want pity. He wanted to be alone. "Eric. You might be a dick normally but you're never this bad. What the fuck happened between you and Alex? I haven't seen the two of you together in a week," Cameron tried to nudge his friend.

He was getting worried for Eric. He was on a self-destructive path. Eric went to grab a bottle that
was behind Cameron but the other man was faster. Cameron snatched it away before Eric could touch it. Angry that Cameron wouldn't let the conversation go, Eric took a quick swing at his friend. Cameron clearly saw the punch coming as he stepped back and avoided Eric's fist, just barely staying out of the path of the hit.

"Enough!" Cameron shouted.

The sharp tone of Cameron's voice made Eric drop back and stare at his friend. They had fought plenty but Eric had never tried to hit him. "Didn't mean that," Eric muttered.

"Eric, I'm your friend. I'm your brother. And I'm trying to help you. What happened, man?" he asked again.

Eric took a few steps past Cameron, who had backed off from his friend slightly. He was right. Eric knew that. He collapsed against the counter and let out a deep breath. He hated this. He hated feeling so weak because of a woman. Even worse, it was because of a stupid Amity. His Amity.

"It was her last fear sim," Eric finally admitted.

Cameron was watching him closely as Eric explained. "Go on," Cameron gently prodded.

"She had to have her friend Heather drag her here. She didn't want to see me. Her fear was me, killing her. She was too afraid to even look at me. She said that I shot her in her sim. I knew what she meant. That I was more than happy to shoot her. I was going to kill her but she got to me first. She shot me and killed me. She said that she wasn't sure whether or not I would really kill her. If it meant that I would get to keep my spot in Dauntless," Eric explained.

The room was silent and Eric wished that they would have at least been screaming at each other. He hated the silence. Eric had always thought that silence was worse than yelling. It reminded him of his childhood in Erudite. His parents would never yell at each other, or him, whenever they had been angry with each other. They had merely sat in a stony silence.

"Eric..." Cameron trailed off.

He wasn't quite sure where he should go with it. Cameron had never seen his friend like this before. Eric was never one to let girls get to him before. If he got bored of them, he let them go. If they were afraid of him, he thought that it was funny. No one had ever affected him quite like she had. Eric had been in initiates fear sims before. At least one a year. But none of them had ever bothered him like hers.

"Would you?" Cameron finally asked.

Eric tore his eyes from the ground when Cameron asked that. It was the same thing that she asked. There was something in the way that Cameron had asked it that bothered Eric to the core. He was asking like he was unsure. Just the way that she had. He glared back down at the floor. He wouldn't hurt her. He never would. No matter what anyone else thought. For whatever reason, she was different.

"That's the same thing that she asked," Eric finally told Cameron.

Cameron wore a straight face that betrayed no emotion. "I'm serious, Eric," Cameron said.

He sounded just like her. Maybe that was why he was as close to her as he was. She reminded him of his best friend. "I know," Eric growled.
"I don't think that you'd do it. I think that you care for her more than you care for anyone else in this Faction. And that's something that you deserve. You deserve to be happy," Cameron said.

"I don't deserve a damn thing," Eric hissed.

The only thing that he deserved was the job that he had worked so hard for. He didn't deserve her. He had gotten her and lost her. "You do. But she deserves things too. And one of those things is the truth. Tell me right now. If it was between your spot on leadership and her life, what would you choose?" Cameron asked.

Every fiber of his being wanted to scream. He hated that even his best friend didn't understand that he cared for her. He wasn't sure how much he cared about her. He was sure that he would never know how much he cared for her. The one thing that he knew was that he didn't love her. But he did know that he wanted her back.

"It astounds me that both of you feel the need to ask that," Eric growled.

Cameron sighed. He really knew the truth but he wanted Eric to have to say it out loud. "I want you to know yourself," Cameron said.

He needed Eric to know for a fact that she meant more to him than anything else. It was the only way that he was going to move past this. "Her. I'd choose her," Eric finally admitted.

"I know you would," Cameron said quickly.

"But they can't know that. Jeanine can't know that. She uses things against people. If she knew that Alex was so much as just my friend, she'd use her against me," Eric said.

It took a moment for Cameron to suppress his smile. From the first time that Eric had come into his apartment all those months ago complaining about some smart-mouthed Amity transfer, Cameron had known that they were going to be good together. He had always known that they would be good together. And now he was right.

"I know that. But push Jeanine out of your mind for a minute," Cameron said.

"Its not easy," Eric interrupted

"I know. But think about just the two of you. When you're in here and no one else is listening," Cameron said. Eric nodded after a moment. He was a different person when it was just the two of them. "You need to tell her that. She cares about you. And you care about her. But for some damn reason neither one of you will admit it to the other!"

"She knows that I care about her," Eric muttered.

"Obviously not. You guys are like children. Neither one wants to cave first. I don't care if you don't love her. I'm not asking you to love her. But just tell her that you care. Tell her that your position in Dauntless means nothing to you compared to her. Does it?" Cameron asked.

"Yes," Eric answered without hesitation.

He loved his position here in Dauntless and being able to boss everyone around. He loved only having to take orders from Max. But Cameron was right. Life was boring without someone to share it with. Eric wasn't going to marry her and he didn't love her. But he cared for her and he wanted her with him. The boys were silent for a moment and Cameron finally let a smirk cross his face. He knew that he had won this round. And it helped that Max had been yelling and Cameron all week to
get Eric to snap out of it.

"I'm not telling her that," Eric snarled.

The smirk dropped off of Cameron's face as he turned to look at Eric. If he'd had anything in his hands he would have chucked it at his friend. "Are you fucking kidding me?" he snarled.

"No."

"What was the point of this conversation?" Cameron snapped.

"You were the one that started it," Eric deadpanned.

"Eric, if you want her to stay in your life you need to get off your ass and do something about it. Look at this!" he yelled, motioning to the mess that had taken over Eric's apartment. "You have dishes piled up to the ceiling, your sheets haven't been washed in a week, your bed isn't made, you've gone through at least three bottles of liquor in a week, you're wearing the same clothes days in a row, and I've never seen you as angry as you are right now."

Cameron knew that Eric wasn't just going to sit there and take it. He was going to retaliate. Eric hated thinking that he was the bad guy here. "And it's all because of her!" Eric yelled.

His temper went flying through the roof as he grabbed the glass that was sitting at the edge of the counter and tossed it against the wall. It hit roughly and shattered, shards flying everywhere. Cameron didn't flinch as Eric's knuckles went white against the counter. He'd known Eric his entire life. He knew that was coming.

"Come on, tell me. When have you ever seen me like this?" Eric asked, motioning at himself.

"Never," Cameron answered automatically. "Because you've never cared about someone as much as you care about her. And it scares you. There's only one person in your life that you've ever genuinely cared about. Me."

Eric nearly snorted but he managed to keep it in. It was true. They were brothers. "Yeah," Eric muttered.

"But that's different then you feel with her. You've never experienced what it's like to have a real partner. Someone to share a life with," Cameron said softly.

Eric wasn't the type of guy that wanted to settle down and have a family. Not even for her. If that was what she wanted, she was looking in the wrong place. "I'm not that person. If she wants someone to share a life with, someone to tell her how wonderful she is, and how much they love her, she's with the wrong person," Eric said honestly.

Cameron nodded, having already known that. "She knows that, Eric. Do you really think that she would be with you if she wanted all of that?" Cameron asked.

He knew that she wasn't with him for the future. She was with him for the present. "I know she wouldn't," Eric said.

"She isn't that type of person either. She doesn't want all of that. I know it. She doesn't need the knight in shining armor. As far as I can see, that's not the type of person she wants. If she wanted someone like that she would go to one of her friends. But she doesn't. She wants the type of person that can keep up with her. Someone to make her smile and laugh. Someone that she can push around and will push her back. That's you. You're the one that she wants," Cameron argued.
They didn't say anything after that. Cameron had nothing more to say to Eric on the topic. Eric had nothing else to say. He knew for a fact that Cameron was right. Eric knew that if she really wanted a guy that would treat her right and be there until the end of time she would have gone to one of her friends. Or any other Dauntless member. But she hadn't. She had gone to him. And Eric was not that type of guy. She knew that. All he knew was that he wanted her with him.

He really wasn't sure what he thought about her. He didn't love her and she didn't love him. That much was obvious. But he did know that he didn't want her to leave. He wanted her to be his. Eric watched as Cameron began to pile clothes together and run water over the dishes. Eric joined him, trying to put away the mess that Eric had made. He knew that he wanted to go to her later and tell her that she was still his. No matter what.

They'd been cleaning for about ten minutes, and had made a fair bit of progress on the room, when another knock come from the door. Eric walked over to answer it, leaving Cameron to finish washing the dishes. He heard a voice coming from the outside of the door and immediately recognized Max's voice. Eric gripped the doorknob tightly before swinging the door open.

"Good morning, Eric. Cameron," Max greeted as he walked to the threshold of the room. "Good to see you both. Doing a little spring cleaning?"

He had a little smirk on his face and Eric wanted nothing more than to slam the door over Max's head. "Just tidying up," Cameron said quickly, so that Eric wouldn't say anything.

"The monthly mandatory fear simulations are happening now. Would you please join us?" Max asked, even though it wasn't a request.

Eric wanted to let out a groan the moment that Max said it. He hated the mandatory monthly fear sims. It was always the same thing that just ended up eating a good portion of Eric's day. It wasn't like the fear was going to be any different today than it normally was. All it meant was that Eric would waste a good hour or two.

"I'll see you later, man," Cameron said as he walked up to the pair.

"See you, man," Eric said.

"Just remember what I said. Think about it. Good luck," Cameron, brushing past Eric.

He said a quick good morning to Max on his way out of the room. Eric knew that Cameron was not a fan of Max. No one really was. Eric looked up at the clock and saw that it was already well past ten, nearing eleven. There was no way that he would be able to see her this morning. He'd have to wait until tonight to see her. She wouldn't have time until then and neither would he.

As Cameron headed for the offices that were near the top floors of Dauntless, Eric headed with Max into the sub-levels. It was where the fear landscape room was. It was one of Eric's least favorite rooms. It was the only place that had the potential to really make him feel weak.

They walked through the door and Eric looked around. It was similar to the room that they used for the fear sims, but it was much larger. It was where his Amity would find herself in a few weeks. Screens were all along the top of the room so that everyone watching could see the fears. These days were Eric's least favorite part of the month, but he knew that ten minutes of sitting in that chair were worth another month of leadership.

It also helped that there was only one fear that he ever saw. It was the same fear that he'd been seeing for four years. Losing to the man of the same name. His fear was always losing to Four. At
everything. Leadership, friends, and everything else he had worked so hard to earn in Dauntless. The one good thing about these fear sims was that Four never had to do them. He couldn't stand having Four know that he was afraid of losing to him.

Eric stood off to the side of the room with his arms crossed over his chest as they began with the fear sims. As per usual, Max went first as the other leaders watched on. Max's fears occasionally changed but the one that they saw today was his death. That was the one that he mostly had. It was a fear that had always struck Eric funny. Dauntless was the Faction of the brave. He felt that a fear of death, while perfectly reasonable, was also cowardly.

Cora, an older woman, went after Max. She wouldn't be on leadership much longer. Just a few more years before it was time for her to leave or die. Her fear was always the same. Not being able to save her son and daughter. She, like Max, was successful in her fear. Another leader, Jason, went through his fear of suffocating. He survived by the skin of his teeth. The last leader to go before Eric was Rick. He was just a few years younger than Max. He lived through his fear of torture.

The nurse by the name of Allison helped calm down Rick before allowing him to leave from the chair. She was around thirty and had always been one of the nicer nurses. She had come from Erudite, and Eric was positive that she should have stayed there. She didn't fit with the other Dauntless members. Eric rolled his shoulders as Allison went to fill up another vial. He knew that he had this. He's gotten extremely good at the fear sim. It wouldn't take him more than five minutes.

"Eric? I'm ready for you," Allison called.

Eric nodded and walked over to the chair. As Allison motioned to him, he went and sat back in the seat and waited to fall into the sim. Allison grabbed the vial and pushed the needle against his neck. Eric didn't even flinch. He was used to it. He barely felt the sting from the needle. The world grew heavy quickly as Eric's eyes slipped closed.

His head was extremely fuzzy as Eric found himself waking up in a strange room. He was sure that he had never been in the room before. Had he drank too much last night? How did he get here? Where the hell was he? This had never happened to him before. No matter how drunk he was, he always remembered at least parts of the night before.

He took a look around the room, searching for his gun. It was nowhere to be found. He was in a deep blue room with nothing in it. Eric had a good memory. He was positive that he had never been here before. So how did he get here? He didn't see anything until he turned around. There were two people in the room with him. And neither one was Four. Jeanine Matthews was standing in the corner with Max. The other leaders along with a few other people that Eric didn't recognize filed in behind them.

Eric tilted his head to the side. What the hell was going on? The people in the front row separated and Eric watched as two Dauntless men dragged in a limp figure, tossing it to the ground. It took everything in Eric to not react. On the ground was the worst thing that Eric had ever seen. His Amity was laying on the ground, bloody and beaten half to death. She was barely moving as he took a few steps closer to her, looking her over.

Her face was coated in blood and both eyes were close to being completely swollen shut. Her lip was broken in a few places and it looked like she may have been missing a tooth or two. A few patches of her hair were torn out and her ankle was bent at an odd angle. He looked over to her arms and saw that her wrist was very clearly broken. She looked up at Eric and sobbed softly. He had never seen her look so pathetic. So broken.

Any words that had formed in Eric's throat died at the sight of her. He had no idea what he could
say. How the hell did she get here? What was she doing here? Eric had seen her perfectly healthy only a day ago. He had seen her walking through the halls with her friends. She had been laughing and smiling. It hadn't seemed like she had a care in the world. So what the hell had happened to her? She looked up to Eric and coughed. Blood came up and she spit it across the floor.

Eric felt a little jolt in his stomach. He couldn't tolerate seeing her like this. "Max. Jeanine. What is this?" Eric asked, trying to keep any hint of anger or hesitation out of his voice.

Eric had expected Jeanine to be the one to speak up but, to his shock, it was Max. "A present. For you, Eric," Max said.

Jeanine was smirking behind him and Eric growled under his breath. "What is this?" Eric repeated.

The only present Eric wanted right now was Jeanine and Max's heads on a platter. "You see, you've grown close with her recently. We all know it. It's nice. Honestly. How someone like you can find themselves so caught up in a little Amity. She's caused you quite a bit of trouble," Max said, taking a few steps closer to Eric.

Eric's hands balled at his sides. He wanted to hit Max as hard as possible. There was no reason that she should be here. There was no reason she was nearly dead. Instead of walking up to Eric, Max stopped at her side. She tried to scoot away but Max was faster. He brought his leg up and stepped down on her already broken wrist. She cried out in agony and Eric winced as Max twisted his foot over her wrist. A loud sob emitted itself from her mouth as a tear leaked out of her eyes.

"What do you want, Max? Why are you torturing an innocent initiate?" Eric asked loudly.

Eric knew that the only way to handle this was like a level-headed leader. "Innocent," Jeanine scoffed.

He had no weapon to fight with. As Eric looked over his Amity one more time he saw that she was completely still, softly moaning in pain. Max still had his foot over her wrist. "She is innocent," Eric argued softly.

"She makes you weak, Eric. Look at you," Jeanine said.

Eric gritted his teeth. "Let her up," Eric demanded.

"You're having an internal battle with yourself because you want to save her," Jeanine said. Eric didn't bother arguing against her. She was right. "The poor, pathetic little Amity." Her voice made it sound like she was almost sorry. "There's only one thing that can be done. We like you, Eric. The spot on leadership is rightfully yours. Now you just have to take it."

Finally, after what had felt like an hour, Max moved off of her wrist. She cried out in pain as he purposely dragged his heel over her wrist. Eric had to do everything in his power not to run and rip Max's head off. Once more she coughed up blood. His heart was pounding in his chest as he looked at her. She was going to die soon if he did nothing. There had to be something internally wrong with her. She wouldn't be coughing up blood if there wasn't.

Max held out a gun and Eric went to take it. But Max was not a foolish man for all of his faults. He backed the gun out of Eric's reach. "You need to show us that you still want the leadership, Eric," Max said.

"Of course I want the spot," Eric growled lowly.

"We need to know. You need to eradicate anything that makes you weak," Max said, motioning to
where she lay. "Kill her."

If Eric didn't know that it was a medical impossibility, he would have thought that his heart had stopped from shock. Had Max just really asked him to kill her? An initiate no less. They never killed initiates. Sometimes it was an accident and other times initiates killed each other, but they never killed them.

"She's an initiate. We don't just kill the initiates without reason," Eric said, trying to push all emotion from his voice. Max couldn't know that Eric wanted to rip his head off. "They are the future of Dauntless."

Eric nonchalantly motioned over towards her, trying to keep his hand from shaking. Max shook his head as he motioned back to her flippantly. She looked like she was trying to get back to her feet, but she was too weak. She just kept falling back to the ground. It didn't help that Max was smiling the entire time.

"Not her. She's shown no promise. Not like the others," Max said.

Eric ground his teeth. "She's second in the rankings," he commented.

"She doesn't have the personality. Now kill her, Eric. Or we can leave you both on the Factionless doorstep with no medication for her. She dies anyways and you find yourself with no home. So tell me. What's worth more?" Max asked with a smirk, knowing that he was getting to Eric.

"You'll really leave her out there to die?" Eric asked sharply.

"You have to ask? What's worth more? Your spot here in Dauntless, or the knowledge that at least her death had nothing to do with you? She dies either way," Max pointed out.

Eric's heart was pounding in his chest as he looked down at her. He couldn't kill her. There was no way. But Max was right. She was going to die either way. They had done too much damage to her and the Factionless had no medication. They died from diseases all the time. He had to kill her. He needed to stay in Dauntless. He couldn't be in the Factionless. He had worked too hard for his entire life to become Factionless. Even for her.

It didn't matter what he did. No matter what choice he made, his Amity was going to die. He didn't want to do it but he knew that he had to. Maybe this would be kinder. A quick and painless death. She was suffering right now. He hated even thinking that he was going to do it, but he needed to. It was the only way that he could stay a leader. He would forget about her. He would have to. Plenty of girls had come through his life before and he had always forgotten about them. She would be the same. No, she won't.

He nodded and took the gun from Max. "Eric. Please. Don't. I know you're better than this. Please," Alex begged him.

The emotion and desperation in her voice nearly made Eric drop the gun. It felt like his heart had frozen over and the ice was puncturing every organ in his body. He had never heard her plead before. Not for him. Not for anyone. Not like this. It was the weakest that he had ever seen her. She looked like she might cry, but she remained strong, trying to silently plead with him. But he still had to do it. He needed to keep his spot as a leader.

He needed to prove to everyone that he was more than some freak science experiment. All that people had thought that he was when he was growing up. She was just another initiate. And an Amity at that. But deep down, Eric knew that she was so much more. He knew that she meant more
to him than anything even had. Even leadership. But it was too late. She had begged once more and cried out his name as Eric pulled the trigger.

The shot went straight through her forehead, in between her eyes, and Eric wanted nothing more than to fall to the ground with her. Her body. Her corpse. He had done it. He had actually killed her. Just for a damned spot on leadership. Her empty eyes stared up at him accusingly. Eric waited for her to blink or to scream. To do anything. Even to see the rise and fall of her chest. But it never came. She was still. She was dead. Because of him.

He cocked the gun for another bullet to put through Max's skull, but the gun was now empty. Only one bullet had been in the chamber. Max was smart to only give Eric one bullet. Eric wanted to run and grab her body, shield it from their prying eyes, but he couldn't. He was rooted in place as Max came up to Eric's side and grabbed his shoulders tightly.

"Well done, Eric," Jeanine said from across the room.

Eric wanted to move and bash Max's head in with the gun but he never got the chance. It felt like he had been sucked through a vacuum as Eric woke up in the main room once more. A sim. It was just a stupid sim. A sim that everyone else saw. But she was safe. His Amity was safe and alive, doing her sim elsewhere.

Everyone else in the room was chattering among themselves and Eric scowled. He could care less if they all knew about his soft spot for the Amity. All that mattered was that he had done it. He had killed her. Just like what she had told him a week ago that he would do. And he had done it. She was right. He would kill her. No. Not really. He wouldn't. Some part of him must have known that it wasn't real. He wouldn't kill her. He wouldn't.

"Nine minutes and fifteen seconds," Max said.

"Okay," Eric muttered.

"Eric? Might I have a word with you for a moment?" Max asked.

He would have been foolish to think that Max would let Eric get away with the fear sim without a word about it. Their relationship was forbidden but the fear hadn't explicitly revealed that they were together. Sleeping together. Whatever. Max led Eric out of the sim room as they made their way into the hallway, the door to the fear landscape room closing behind them.

"Interesting, your fear. I don't think in the years that I've ever known you, you've ever had a fear that didn't involve Four," Max stated.

"I suppose," Eric said through gritted teeth.

"Curious. Instead it shows you with a young Amity transfer. Alex, correct?" Max asked.

"Yes," Eric said stiffly.

"I've never known you to be fond of the initiates," Max said.

"I'm not," Eric snarled.

And it was the truth. Eric had always hated the initiates. There were only a handful that he had ever been able to tolerate. She hadn't even been one of them until recently. For the longest time he had wanted to toss her over the Chasm. He nearly had. Max merely laughed and gave one of his small smiles. One that had always bothered Eric. Max looked more creepy than friendly when he did that.
"No. Of course you aren't. Only her," Max said. Eric opened his mouth to argue that his fear had just been about killing an innocent initiate but Max beat him to the punch. "Not to worry, Eric. Only another month and a half left anyways. You've done a good job keeping the two of you under wraps."

"I suppose we have," Eric muttered.

His eyebrows went to his forehead. Max had always hated people breaking rules. And being with an initiate was a big rule. So why was Max being understanding? "She's a pretty girl. A strong and smart one too. Number two ranking, set to pass into the number one spot in another day or two. I'm impressed. I knew that when you chose a woman it would be a strong one. But you're also the type that would never let a woman stand in his way. You know when enough is enough. You make a good soldier, Eric. It's one of the many things I like about you," Max said.

Eric had never wanted to knock Max's teeth in more than he did right now. And Max had frequently made me want to hit him in the face more than once. Eric just wanted to forget about her dead eyes staring up at him. He had killed her just for a fucking spot. And it had been reality. He'd thought that the entire thing was real.

"Thank you," Eric managed to grit out.

He was shaking with fury and wanted nothing more than to leave. He had done exactly what she had been afraid of happening. Eric turned to leave, having nothing more to say to Max, and he was grateful when the older man didn't call him back. He walked through the halls, stomping angrily. Members jumped out of his way as he headed up to Cameron's office.

Eric knew that no one would interrupt him. Everyone knew that an angry Eric was not someone to trifle with. It was something that he appreciated through all of the years that he had been in Dauntless. Eric was planning on hiding out in Cameron's office for a few hours, not trusting himself to speak with anyone else, until he could get to her. He wanted his Amity back.

Alex's P.O.V.

The walk was silent and I appreciated it. Our breakfast had been deafening and people had been especially chatty waiting for their fear sims this morning. The silence was welcome. I knew it wouldn't last. I was currently on the way to lunch with my friends. The rankings had come to an essential stand-still so I was walking with my usual group. I sighed as I thought about how close I was to the number one spot. Four had told me to give it a few days and I would finally overtake Aaron.

It was good that Aaron hadn't seemed that broken hearted about it. The number one spot would set me up for leadership. But I wasn't so sure that I wanted it anymore. I didn't want to have to face Eric anymore. I had only seen him once over the past eight days and it hadn't gone well. We had just sat awkwardly together until I had decided that it had gone on long enough and left.

Every part of me wanted to pretend that I was better off without Eric, but it was a lie. The biggest lie I had ever told myself. I missed him. I missed him more than I would have ever thought was possible. The past week had been one of the most boring of my life. And it had all been because Eric wasn't around to mess with me.

Heather had apologized profusely for what had happened between us after I had told her what had happened the following day, but I had shaken her off. I knew that Heather had only meant the best. And even if she hadn't dragged me to Eric he would have eventually hunted me down and the same thing would have happened. Heather had been trying to get me back into Eric's good graces but
nothing she had come up with had seemed viable. She didn't know what to do. And neither did I.

Four had been a good person to hang around the past week or so. Since I was no longer spending my nights hanging out with Eric I had been going to Four instead. We spent most nights working on my fear. I knew that Four hated seeing me spending so much time in that fear, but I knew that I had to conquer it even before Jeanine appeared. I hated seeing it and every time I shot Eric in my sim it made me feel a little sick.

But thankfully I had been able to make it work. Four had taught me to shoot Eric the moment that he walked through the door with Jeanine directly behind him. It had worked well. I was in and out of the fear in just over a minute and I hadn't had to plead with Eric in the fear since the first time I had seen it.

Despite my arguments, Four had given me tonight off. It had been a long argument, but I had still lost. Four was sure that I hadn't been sleeping enough lately. And he was right. Even when I went back to the dorms at night I still didn't sleep. My nightmares kept me up and I found myself unable to quiet my thoughts. My friends had noticed my change in demeanor over the past week and they had all taken turns in trying to cheer me up. Heather had been the leader of their little attempts.

It had definitely helped my attitude over the past few days, but I still hated going anywhere that I might run into Eric. I saw him all over the place. The only benefit was that I hadn't seen either of them yet today and I hadn't seen him at all yesterday. I had thought about maybe going to his apartment tonight but I knew that I was better off going back to the dorms and going to bed.

Heading straight into the dining room, I grabbed myself a burger and a piece of Dauntless cake. It felt a little silly since I never ate the cake, but I figured that I had earned it. Dante smiled at me as we walked through the line and I gave him a little grin back. We didn't need to speak to each other but we were always there to make each other feel better. We joined our friends at the table and I smiled. I took my normal seat in between Heather and Buck. Both were already eating and getting close to being done.

"Alex!" Heather yelled.

I jumped slightly and looked up from my food. "Heather" I chirped back teasingly.

She looked happy that I was at least acting happier. "I think that we should go to the Pit after dinner tonight," Heather stated.

My brows knitted together. No part of me doubted that this wasn't another one of her little ploys to get me back with Eric. She knew that the Pit was one of the easiest places to find Eric. "Is that so?" I asked.

She merely smiled at me as our friends watched us with little hints of curiosity. They clearly knew that there was another silent conversation being had. I knew for a fact that Heather was trying to get me to see Eric once more. She had taken every chance that she had gotten to drive the two of us together in the past week.

"Not really," Heather said with a small shrug.
I scowled at her. I wasn't as stupid as she thought that I was. "Okay," I mumbled.

"I just thought that we've all been having such a hard time over the past few weeks that a trip to the Pit might do us all some good," she said.

I certainly wasn't the only person who had been down in the dumps over the past few days. "That sounds like a nice night. I could use some time to get away," I muttered.

Everyone was having a hard time getting over what they were seeing in their fear sims. It was time for all of us to have some fun. Heather was smirking proudly as everyone else nodded their approvals. She knew that she had me caught here. If I said that I didn't want to go, I would have to give them a reason. And I had no good reason that I could tell them. Heather was a gigantic pain in my ass but she was, and always would be, my favorite person in Dauntless.

"Sounds like a plan to me," Dante said.

"Everyone's going?" I asked.

There were affirmatives exchanged all along the table. "Gives us a chance to pick up a few Dauntless chicks," Dante added cockily.

Heather and I stared at each other with little scowls as Buck, Cole, Draven, Dante, Jax, and even Jet all high fived each other. Heather scowled at Cole, who sobered quickly. I was shocked by Jet. He had been quieter since Raven had left, but over the past few days he had been getting back into his old self. It was good to see. But now they were all being brats. I rolled my eyes in sync with Heather. They all had way too big of heads. Even I wasn't that big headed. And I had a pretty damn big head.

"Pick them up?" I asked.

The boys all nodded as Heather smirked at me. She knew where I was going with this. She was smarter than they were. "Of course," Buck said teasingly.

"Pick them all up because they're running away from you guys?" I asked.

The boys all looked down at their laps as I smirked and nudged Heather, who was laughing loudly. It took a few minutes but the muttering of my male friends ceased as they all smiled at me. Most of them were shoving me like older brothers would after being picked on by their little sisters. Which was essentially what had just happened. They all knew that I had been out of it lately. They were clearly happy to see that I was coming back into myself.

"And what about you, missy?" Buck asked.

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously.

"We can find you a Dauntless guy for yourself if you'd like?" he suggested.

Smiling at him, I shook my head. It was a sweet sentiment but my taste in Dauntless men clearly wasn't that good. One of them had tried to kill me and I was afraid that the other one would kill me. It didn't matter. There was only one guy that I wanted in Dauntless. And, currently, I was not in a good place with him. Hell, I hadn't even seen him in two days. And I fucking missed him. A lot. Which I hated.

"If he's anything like you guys, I want nothing to do with him," I told them jokingly.

My friends all laughed and nudged me in between them. "Excuse you!" Cole barked.
This was probably the most that I had laughed in the past week. This had been a terrible time for us all to go through. "You love us!" Dante added.

"Oh come on, Alex! We're charming!" Draven yelled, reaching across the table.

"You're all horrible," I said.

Draven went to grab me but I was faster. I shoved him away from me and he laughed, reaching his arm around me to wrap me in between them. I laughed loudly once more and shoved him off of me. I loved them all to death and would do anything for them, but they weren't right for me. They were so annoying. They were more like the brothers that I had never wanted. Which was very sweet, but they still weren't Eric.

He was the one that I would always want. With his strong and brooding personality that fit him better than anything else would. While my friends all kept themselves on the same level as me, Eric had that domineering personality. It wouldn't work well on just anyone, and it didn't. Eric was the only one that I knew that could pull it off.

Smiling at them, I shoved Draven off of me once and for all and downed a large chunk of my cake. As everyone joked back and forth, the laughter from our end of the table roared once more. Glancing around, I smirked when I saw that Jade and Colt were clearly pissed with our happiness. They had been furious ever since Phase Two of initiation began.

We all sat and chatted together as we went back to eating our lunches. I leaned back into the cake and began to devour it. I wasn't a fan of cake, but Eric was right. Dauntless cake was amazing. We all talked among ourselves as I talked to Heather about going to the Pit after I finished my fear sim. I was sure that we were going to end up near the bar but it didn't matter. If we were going to get on our asses drunk, the only way that we were going to do it was together.

Jax was currently trying to balance a spoon on his nose and I crept up behind him, knocking the spoon from his nose. He cried out as the spoon went flying across the room, smacking a Dauntless member on the knee. The member hissed in pain and I laughed for a moment. But Jax and I quickly sobered when we realized that the member had been Four. And he did not look happy. We both straightened up as Four glared at the both of us. At least it wasn't Eric.

"Initiates!" Four yelled, clearly angry with Jax and me. "Everyone who still has their fear sims to do, come on back."

I departed from the table without another word, not wanting to tempt my fate with Four even more. Buck, Jax, Dante, and Draven all fell into step with me. Greg, Michael, Jackson, and Aaron walked with us after a moment, coming from their own table. We all talked softly together as we headed back to the sim waiting room. Once we were all in and the door closed behind us, Buck walked into the sim room without prompting from Four.

As we took our seats, I sat near the door and leaned my head back against the wall. I'd be waiting at least another hour. I was dying to see what my fear was going to be today. I was hoping that it wasn't Eric anymore. Every time I saw him it felt like a little bit of life had been drained from me. And I had been doing it at least once a day for the past week. Four kept telling me that he thought that I had it perfected and it would be changing any day now. But he had been telling me that for three days.

So far I had only seen two fears and it felt a little strange to know that I still probably had at least ten more to go. Four and Eric had both said that normal people had between eleven and fifteen fears. The thought had made me blanch. I wasn't sure how many more times I could do this. But it wasn't over. No matter what. I still had another month and a half of training before I was finally able to call
myself a full Dauntless member.

My mind was flitting all over the place as I heard the door open and close time after time, letting more and more of my friends go through their fear sims. Finally my mind landed on the thought of being down in the Pit tonight. It would be the first time that I would be there in a few weeks. Deep in the back of my mind I hoped that Eric would be there. I wanted to try and get things sorted out with him. I just had no idea how to go about it.

But it didn't matter. Tonight I was going to drink up the courage to go and be able to speak with him once more. Was it a good idea? Probably not. But was I going to do it anyways? Absolutely. I wanted things to go back to normal. So tonight I was going to buck up and put on my big girl pants. I was going to go and get him back. No more waiting.

The door opened once more and I cracked my eyes open. If my counting was right, it should be my turn now. "Alex?" Four called.

"Hey, Four," I greeted, smiling and rising to my feet.

"Come on back."

As much as I would have liked to put this off a little while longer, it was time for me to leave. I nodded and went to go walk with Four back into the sim room. I hadn't even realized that the room had grown nearly silent since I had gone into my little trance-like state. But it was the easiest way to pass the time while we waited.

"Good luck," Aaron said as I walked in.

"Thanks," I said, smiling and walking into the room.

The door shut behind me and Four motioned for me to go to the chair, which I did. It always made me nervous walking over to the chair, considering that I knew what was coming. I reached over and stole his water off of the counter and took a small sip. Out of the corner of my eyes I noticed that corner of his lip quirk upwards.

"You're looking better today. How's it going, kid?" Four asked, turning to me.

My eyebrows knitted as I turned back to Four, who was trying to keep a smile off of his face. "Kid?"

I asked with a hint of laughter.

"Kid," Four confirmed.

Over the past few weeks, Four and I had gone from being a leader and an initiate to an older brother and little sister. He had been furious with Eric the past week and more than once I had stopped him from saying something with a sharp glare. As far as Eric was concerned, Four had no idea that the two of us were... whatever we were. But Eric and my argument had driven Four and I a little closer. As friends at least.

"I'm only four years younger than you," I argued.

Four merely shrugged his shoulders. "Which makes me four years wiser," Four said, making me roll my eyes at him.


"Good," Four responded immediately. "Didn't like how you were looking for a while there."
I smiled softly and reached over to give Four a quick hug. "Thank you. Half of it was because of you. You got me to get back to myself." I said sweetly.

"You're welcome."

As much as I didn't look forward to the fear sims, I did look forward to seeing Four. I was always glad to see him. Particularly when he said things like that. Four pulled back from me and I watched as he flicked the tip of the needle. I shuddered and leaned my head back. I wasn't afraid of needles, but I sure as hell wasn't a fan of them.

"Alright. Don't worry about it today. Take your time and remember, it's not real," he said softly.

It was the same warning that I had become accustomed to hearing him give me over the past week or so. Ever since Eric had shot me for the first time in the fear sim, Four had been telling me that. I had appreciated it. Even though I knew that it wasn't real, the warning always helped. Sometimes it all felt so real that it was hard to remember. Still, I knew that my Divergence was the only reason that I was able to keep a level head in the sim. I could only imagine what it was like for those who weren't.

"Thanks, Four. See you on the other side," I told him happily.

He grinned at me once more before pushing the needle into my neck. He had a hand laid comfortingly on my shoulder, probably to keep me from panicking before even going into the sim. I grimaced as the cold liquid froze my veins, feeling like my body was on ice. A moment later it felt like I was falling into a black pit.

Unlike the other times that I went into the fear sims, I did not wake up in a room. It didn't feel like I had woken up at all. It was like one moment I had been laying in the chair, I had blinked, and now I was here. Standing in the middle of Chicago. I was in the main stretch of Chicago, in between the Erudite and Candor headquarters. The School was only a block away. Was this not a sim? Although as I turned to face the Erudite headquarters I swallowed a lump in my throat. It wasn't another fear with Jeanine.

If nothing else, at least my fear with Eric was over. He was nowhere in sight. This was my third new fear. It seemed like a normal day. People were walking back and forth everywhere. There were mostly Erudite and Candor citizens but there were also a few Amity and Abnegation passing by. There were even a few Dauntless members scattered around. A few of the faces seemed familiar but I didn't know anyone by name.

Kids were running past me and a few brushed by my legs. I took a step back and smiled at a young Dauntless boy who had fallen over, helping him to his feet. Nothing seemed out of place at the moment. For the life of me I couldn't understand what my fear was. But I was sure that it was going to change any second now. A flash of yellow and red shot by my peripherals and I glanced up.

These people I knew. I pushed through the crowd slightly, trying to get to my parents.

"Mom! Dad!" I yelled out loudly.

They both turned to me and I smiled. They seemed unharmed, which was a good thing in one of these sims. My mother was huge. She looked like she was ready to give birth at any second. Her stomach seemed a little more swollen than it should have been, considering she was still a few months away from giving birth, but I pushed that thought out of my mind. She looked unconcerned, walking hand-in-hand with my father. They were leaning against and looking very happy.

As they realized it was me calling to them they both smiled and waved at me. "Alex, dear. Come join us!" Mom called out. "We're headed to the doctor's."
I made my move to go head over to my parents. Nothing would make me happier than getting to see my new sister. My parents were standing across the street with their arms around each other. Each one had an arm open to welcome me. I was only about twenty feet away when a man stepped out of the shadows. Judging by his torn and mismatched clothing, I assumed that he was Factionless. There were a few of them wandering around the plaza.

They normally hung around to see if they could get something to eat from a soft hearted person in the square. The man headed straight for my mother and father and I scowled at him. Even though he looked harmless enough, I wanted him away from my parents. I wanted him away from my mother.

"Miss? Sir? Do you have anything to eat? I have no money and I'm starving," the Factionless man pleaded with my parents.

He was polite but I still didn't like him being so close to my family. My parents were shaking their heads and I sped up. He didn't look particularly violent, but I knew that Factionless could get a little out of hand. My trip to Amity had shown me that. I knew that my parents weren't carrying any money on them. They believed that people were more important than money. Amity used a bartering system. Most people kept their money or gave it to family members outside of the Faction.

Amity was the only Faction that didn't regularly use a credit system. "We're sorry. We don't have any money. You could try in Abnegation. They are always willing to help the Factionless," Dad said with a soft smile.

The Factionless man let out a little sob. I saw the emotion flicker through my parent's eyes at the sound. "I can't make it to Abnegation. I can't. It's too far away. I'll never be able to make it there," he sobbed to my parents.

He was on the verge of tears. But to my parent's credit, they didn't waver. "We're very sorry. We have no money on us," Dad said.

"Kind woman, please help me. Help an old man," the man pleaded.

He turned to my mother and grabbed her arm. "Please let go of me," Mom said.

That was when I'd had enough. I wanted that man off of my parents and on his way. My slow walk sped up to a short dash as I reached my mother's side in a matter of seconds. The bad feeling that I had become so used to during these sims had formed in the pit of my stomach. Something terrible was going to happen.

"Hey," I snapped, walking up to the man.

He turned back to me in shock. I grabbed his thin arm tight in my hand and wrenched it off of the man. "Let go of me!" the Factionless man shouted.

Not today. Not until he left. Although my grip was probably a little harder than necessary, I heard a little crack in his shoulder and he hissed in pain. I didn't mean to move him that hard, but I wanted him away from my mother. He looked a little underweight but he certainly didn't look like he was going to be starving to death. He probably needed to eat a meal full of fat and protein but he would be able to make the two mile trek to the Abnegation compound.

"Listen to them, they don't have any money. Hop a train and get to Abnegation. They'll help you out," I told the man, trying to solve it diplomatically. He opened his mouth to say something but I was faster to speak. "Either go on your own, or I'll remove you."

It wasn't like me to speak like that. To anyone. I had no idea where the sudden attitude came from.
Maybe Eric. Or Four. I sounded just like them. It made me feel like I was a full Dauntless member now. I was acting like one. After all, these were the types of problems that Dauntless members had to deal with all the time. The panic set into the man's eyes and he acted before I could.

The man ripped his arm from my grasp and turned to run. He stumbled roughly into my mother, who couldn't move fast enough, and knocked her out of his way. I watched in horror as my mother spun out of the way and fell before my father or I could get to her. She fell backwards into the edge of the fountain that was directly behind us, slamming her stomach roughly against it as she hit the ground. She leaned over herself, starting to gag.

"Mom!" I yelled, running to her side.

The Factionless man was forgotten by everyone around us as I dropped to her side. I wanted nothing more than to run after the man and smash his head in, but I knew that my mother needed me more. She was on her side, cradling her stomach. Her loud cries were filling the walkway. I turned to my father, who was watching completely dumbfounded.

"Get a doctor. Get a doctor!" I yelled when my father didn't move.

"Okay, okay," Dad said, jumping to his feet and sprinting into the Erudite Medical Center. "Mom, Mom, it's alright. Don't panic. We're gonna get you to the Erudite Hospital and you'll be fine. The baby will be fine. I promise."

But it was an empty promise and we both knew that. I didn't know much about children or childbirth, but I knew that this was a serious problem. It was easy to see that some serious damage had been done. My mother had hit the fountain hard. Her stomach had been the only thing to take the impact of the fall.


Dad was on his way. They would get the doctor in time. I knew that they could. I was holding her hand, but it didn't seem to be calming her at all. Of course not. Mom cried out as she leaned over and vomited up blood. I gasped as I grabbed Mom to steady her once more. My sister. Her new child. Something was seriously wrong.


She was right. We had to get a doctor out here within the next few seconds. I nodded at her and jumped up. Dad was taking too long to get help. I turned and stood, getting ready to run. But before I could take a step, it felt like a hole had opened up in the ground and I was falling through, swallowed by the sudden darkness.

My eyes sprung open and I gave a small jolt in my chair. Four was standing above me and held an arm on my shoulder to keep me from falling out of the chair. I nodded to him and sank back in the orange seat. I wiped a bead of sweat from my eyes and sighed. The only positive thing about that fear was that for once neither Eric nor Jeanine appeared. But my sister, my innocent sister, had died because of a stupid accident. I didn't even understand how I could get past the fear. Kill the man first? Grab Mom faster?

"Here," Four said, handing me some water.

"Thank you," I said, taking a few sips.

"You were pulled out of the fear because there was no saving it," Four said.
"Oh," I muttered dumbly.

That was the first fear that I hadn't been able to beat. "Your sibling..." Four trailed off slowly.

Shaking my head, I let out another little sigh. "I know. I know. I made a mistake," I said.

Four nodded at me. We both knew that I could have handled the fear differently. "Don't worry about it. It was the first time," Four said reassuringly.

"I shouldn't have shoved him away from her like that. Or maybe I shouldn't have startled him. I don't know. But there had to be something that I could have done differently," I said, leaning back against the chair once more.

Four merely shook his head as he walked over to me again. My heart was still beating rapidly in my chest as I forced myself to calm down. It was just a damned sim. It wasn't real. My sister was not dead. They were fine. My Mom and Dad were being careful up until it was time for the delivery.

"You'll work on it," Four said.

"Okay."

"But, Alex, there are occasions when some fears can't be conquered. The point of those fears are to understand that some things can't be controlled. This might be one of them," he said.

"Wonderful," I muttered.

I understood that, but there had to be a way that I could save her. "Don't worry. You've got time to figure this one out. You took just a little over four minutes," Four said.

The good thing was that I had still made it out of the fear quickly. It felt like it was nearly ten minutes. It was always the way that it felt. "I'll work on it. There's got to be another way to get the man away from my mother," I told Four.

He nodded absently at me as he went to type something into the computer. "We can work on it during your sessions," he said blankly.

"Hey, Four?" I called.

He turned back to me and waited for me to speak once more. "What's up?" he asked.

A little blush flooded my cheeks as I cleared my throat. No point in being bashful. "You wouldn't happen to know where Eric is going to be tonight, would you?" I asked.

Even though it was only there for a minute, I knew that Four was conflicted on whether or not he should tell me where he thought that Eric was going to be tonight. But even if he didn't tell me I was sure that I could find him. There were only so many places that he could be hiding. I knew that Four still didn't trust Eric, but it was easy to tell that he did want me to be happy.

"He had to go with Max this morning but he should be done by now. He'll either be in his apartment or in the Pit tonight," Four said.

I smiled softly at him. "Thanks," I said.

He looked a little upset that he had told me but I was thankful that I didn't have to go hunting for him. I stood to leave and Four called back to me. "I'll see you tomorrow, Alex," Four called after me.
As I walked to the door, I threw my head back to give Four one last smile. "Bye, Four," I chirped.

He waved to me as I walked out of the room and left the door open for Aaron. I called a quick good luck to him before heading from the room. It was times like this that I wished that I had a phone. Only Dauntless members were allowed to have phones so that they could communicate with each other. I would have asked to borrow Eric's, but we were on thin ice as it was. I just wanted to call and make sure that my mother's pregnancy was going alright. I hadn't seen or heard from them since Visiting Day.

The only thing that I had gotten since seeing them was a letter from Erudite giving me the approximate date that my mother was going to be giving birth. It was about two months after initiation was over. I walked into the dining room and headed straight for my friends. I could see that a plate was already laid out for me.

"Hey guys," I said, smiling as I sat down.

"Hey," Dante greeted me with a little smile.

I shifted into my normal seat in between Heather and Buck and smiled at the both. There had clearly been a food fight before I had gotten here. "Food fight?" I asked teasingly.

Buck had a little piece of bread in his hair and I smiled as I plucked it out and threw it behind our table. "Just a little one," he said.

My friends all laughed as Buck gave me a bashful smile. "What happened?" I asked.

"Trust me when I say that you don't want to know," Heather said.

And I believed her, so I went silent. In the meantime, I was glad to see my friends laughing and smiling once more. The air had been very quiet since the fear sims had started a few weeks ago. And it was worse now that we were really getting into it, people were seeing new and worse fears. Everyone had seemed out of it the past few days.

"How'd the fear sim go?" Dante asked, once the laughter had died down.

"Freaky," I answered honestly.

The small chatter had died down so that everyone was now silent and watching me. "What happened?" Heather asked carefully.

"I've never had to see a fear that I couldn't conquer. It was my mother and father walking around that big business district. You know, the one in between Candor and Erudite?" I asked my friends. They all nodded. With me being the exception, the rest of the transfers were all from Candor and Erudite. "This Factionless man came up to them while I was trying to get to them to walk with them. He was asking them to give him money or food but they didn't have money. I walked up and tried to get him away from my mother. He panicked and ran, shoving into my mother. She hit her stomach on the edge of the fountain. She lost the baby."

My friends all sighed and kept silent. I knew that it was a hard thing to hear. Or to try and defend. Anything could happen. This fear could very much turn into a reality. My Mom could easily lose my sister. And there might not be anything that anyone could do. Miscarriages happened sometimes for all kinds of reasons.

"Sweetheart, your sister is gonna be just fine," Heather finally spoke up.
I turned to look at her with a little smile. "I hope so," I muttered.

"Whether or not they stay or leave Amity, they're gonna have a kick-ass big sister," she continued.

I laughed and grabbed Heather into a hug. "Thanks, Heather."

"Yours is better than mine," she muttered.

"What happened in yours?" I asked curiously.

"I had a sim where I was standing above everyone else and executing the people that I loved. All because they were giving me money to do it," Heather explained.

"Seriously?" I asked.

"Seriously," Heather muttered.

My eyebrows rose to my hairline as I stared at her. Of all of the fears that I could have expected Heather to have, that was not one of them. It seemed that everyone else was a little thrown by her fear too. She must not have told anyone yet. Heather blushed and looked down at her plate as I sighed and spoke up once more.

"Heather, we all know that you would never do something like that. Besides, who else is going to tolerate you?" I asked her.

Heather laughed as she shoved into me and I smiled at her. "No one sane," Cole teased.

She gave her boyfriend a horrified look as he pressed a small kiss on her cheek. We all went back to eating our dinners, chattering about different things. For most of dinner I found myself talking with Buck about the likelihood that he was going to actually get together with this Dauntless girl that he had been pursuing. I was positive that she wanted nothing to do with him. She hadn't seemed very happy with him whenever I saw the two of them speaking a few times.

After a little while, we finally stood and headed into the Pit. It was getting a little boring being in the dining room. Everyone wanted to party. It wasn't long before we all made our way over to a table in the middle of the Pit. It was the first time that I'd really had fun in a long time. I started watching as Buck started pouring different liquids into the cup he had in front of him.

"Buck. What the hell are you doing?" I asked.

It seemed that I wasn't the only one that was curious. All of our friends were watching him work. We all went back to eating our dinners, chattering about different things. For most of dinner I found myself talking with Buck about the likelihood that he was going to actually get together with this Dauntless girl that he had been pursuing. I was positive that she wanted nothing to do with him. She hadn't seemed very happy with him whenever I saw the two of them speaking a few times.

"Buck. What the hell are you doing?" I asked.

It seemed that I wasn't the only one that was curious. All of our friends were watching him work. We were standing around a high top and I watched as the once amber liquid turned black. It had a little green swirl going through the middle and for a moment I thought that I might be sick. It looked like poison.

"Trying something new. Greg was telling me that the Dauntless born do this. They call it a suicide," Buck explained.

"That sounds wise," Jet put in, making me smile.

"It's when you take all of the liquor that you have and you mix it all together to take one drink," Buck explained and I nodded.

That sounded like something completely safe and not at all a bad idea. "And you think that listening to the Dauntless born is a good idea?" I asked him.
Buck gave me a sly grin as my friends all laughed. "Don't be a buzzkill, it'll be fun," he teased.

"You're really deciding that making something called a suicide is a good idea? Now I see why you didn't go to Erudite," I told him.

Once more my friends laughed as Buck shoved into me. I turned to look behind us as Aaron, Jackson, Michael, Greg, Lisa, Darren, Sara, and Serena came up to us. We all greeted them but I was the only one to hug them. I was the only one that really knew them well enough to give them a hug. Even though my friends were getting more comfortable with the Dauntless born, I was still the only one that genuinely thought that they were my friends.

Although Lisa did hug Heather, as they had gotten a little closer during the past few weeks that we had been in Phase Two. They were the only other ones to physically greet each other. Aaron leaned over the table, squeezing in between Heather and me. I groaned and moved to the side to give him some room.

"Ah, so I see we're making a suicide. Welcome to Dauntless, kids!" he yelled.

We all laughed at each other. "Of course this was your idea," I said.

I rolled my eyes as Buck poured in the last shot that he had ordered from the bar. "Don't be shy. It'll be fun," Aaron said.

The drink was done but no one looked like they were ready to touch it. "That looks anything but fun," I said.

"So who goes first?" Aaron asked, receiving no answer. Not even Buck looked like he wanted to try it. "Come on, Alex. You're about to pass me as the top ranked initiate. Prove you aren't a demure little Amity anymore.

His voice was teasing as he held out the drink to me. Of course they were going to make me go first. My eyes bulged as he held it out to me. Why the hell did I have to drink it? Just because I was about to be number one in rankings didn't mean that I was brave enough to probably poison myself.

"Come on, Alex!" Lisa yelled from across the table.

I turned to scowl at her. "Don't egg them on!" I shouted.

The cheers got a little louder after that and I sighed at my friends. They were not making this easy. "Go, Alex!" Heather yelled.

I reached around Aaron to smack her on the arm. "You're supposed to be on my side!" I barked.

"I am on your side. And that's why I'm doing this. Come on, show us how Dauntless you really are," she said.

I rolled my eyes at her. "You are so useless," I said.

"Come on, Amity. If you do it I will too," Serena said.

It was rather surprising. I smiled at the other blonde. Even though we still weren't really friends, I had a feeling that this might put us on the right path. All of my friends had now joined in on egging me on and I took a deep breath, scowling at them all. Four and Zeke were in the corner of the Pit talking and both were watching us with smirks. Damn them. I couldn't back out now. I would just look weak. Four would never let me live it down.
"Alright, fine! Shut up," I growled at them.

Slightly nervous, I picked up the cup that held the drink and blanched at it. It looked awful. And it smelled horrible. I took the cup tight in my hands and tipped it back. I took a larger gulp then I meant to and drank it down. It actually wasn't half bad but the stench nearly mad me gag. I set the cup back down and looked at my friends who were patiently waiting for my judgement.


Everyone laughed loudly as the drink was passed. Like promised, Serena went next. She thought that the drink tasted awful. She only drank water after that. We all talked and drank together for a long time as I downed drink after drink to work up the courage to go and talk to Eric. I had been looking around for him in the Pit but I hadn't seen him yet. Perhaps he was hanging out in his apartment tonight. I made myself a promise that if I didn't see him in another hour I would go looking for him.

"Alex, I gotta go to the bathroom. Wanna come?" Heather asked.

"Sure," I said.

The two of us backed away from the table, stumbling slightly. Draven caught me, looking a little unsteady as well. Everyone had been drinking too much. I handed Lisa my last drink, knowing that I at least needed to be slightly sober to speak with Eric. We headed into the bathroom, each of us stumbling a little as we walked to the restrooms. Heather popped into the first stall as I checked myself in the mirror.

"You're looking better today," Heather commented.

Smiling in the mirror I shook my head at myself a few times, trying to sober up. It didn't work that well. "I feel better, Heather. The fear finally changed, I've gotten some time to screw my head on straight, and I've gotten some time to think and come to a conclusion," I told her.

"That's good," she said, opening the door to the stall. I moved off to the side so that Heather had room to wash her hands.

"I don't think that Eric will kill me. Some part of me trusts him. He still scares me but I don't think that he's going to kill me," I told her honestly.

She turned to me with a smile. Heather hadn't drank as much as I had, but I could tell that the alcohol was getting to her. "Good. I'm glad that you've come to that conclusion. Because I agree with you. Eric might be a bit of a dick and I'm sure that he has no qualms against killing someone. But he does care about you. Probably more than you think he does. Why don't you go find him? Or head to his apartment? I'll let them know that you found a friend," she said.

I smiled at her. We both knew that she meant that she would tell them that I ran into 'my man' as they had all so affectionately dubbed him. We headed out of the bathroom together, back towards the table. "Thanks," I said softly.

She was always there to watch my back. There were a few people walking back and forth throughout the room and I smiled at them. None of them were Eric, but he was around here somewhere. I thought about going to say goodnight to everyone, but I knew that it was better for me to leave before I lost my nerve. So I turned from the table that we were all at to head into the Dauntless members hall but I was cut off by a familiar voice.

"Initiate," Eric called.
Heather and I both turned back to see Eric standing behind us, his arms crossed over his chest. My heart lodged itself into my throat. I hadn't thought about what I'd wanted to say to him. He didn't look happy. I knew that one day it was going to be a hard habit to break answering to that name.

"With me," Eric said, clearly trying to look the part of the tough leader.

"I'll see you later, alright?" I asked Heather, turning back to her.

"Sure thing. Night," she said.

She gave me a quick hug before departing and heading back to our friends. I saw them laughing and adding more to the awful drink as I headed into the halls with Eric right ahead of me. It was good to see him. I really did miss him, but I found myself extremely nervous to be near him. I'd wanted to be the one to come to him so that I could prove that I really had wanted to make things right between us.

We kept a distance between us and neither one of us wore any emotion on our faces to detract attention. Still though, a few people turned to look at us with strange glances. We headed straight to Eric's apartment and Eric let me walk into the room first. He came in behind me as I took a seat at the kitchen counter. We were silent as Eric walked over to me.

"I was on my way to come and find you," I said awkwardly.

Eric hummed at me and gave a little nod as I shifted awkwardly in my seat. This was one of the most uncomfortable moments that I had ever experienced. At least with him. After all, the last time that I had been in Eric's apartment I had found myself in a disturbing argument with him. But I was determined to not let that happen again.

Not when it had upset me so much the first time around. I looked over at the rest of the room and saw that it was in a state of disarray. That was probably also my fault. It looked like he had gone on a drunken rampage. I glanced into his kitchen and saw that he still had the picture of me in the red dress. It was propped up on his refrigerator. I couldn't help but to smile at it.

"You should have brought that dress here," Eric said.

I didn't need to turn back to know that Eric was standing directly behind me. We stayed silent for a moment before I turned back and saw that Eric was looking over my head, towards the picture of me, with the corners of his mouth quirked up. For now I knew that our fight was over. Or, at least, we were trying to move on from it. Maybe we weren't going to say sorry to each other but we knew that we both meant it.

"Take me back to Amity and I'll go get it," I told him, glancing up at him. I had missed his half-smile.

He leaned into me but he wasn't quite touching me. He knew that it was what I wanted. He wanted it too. We would only last for so long against each other. "Last I checked you don't follow the rules when you want to leave the Faction," he said.

I smiled up at him. He was right about that. When I went to Erudite I hadn't bothered telling anyone that I was going to be leaving. Strictly because I couldn't have gone there with anyone. I had just gotten unlucky that I had met Eric along the way. Or maybe it had been lucky.

"I wonder where I got that from? A desire to break the rules," I teased.

"Certainly not me," Eric said.
Smiling at him, I shifted forward in the seat slightly. Eric was looking down at me and I felt the familiar rumble in the pit of my stomach. All I wanted was to be back with him, and here I was, finally back together. I was a little happier to see him than I had thought that I would be.

"Well what reason would I have to wear it?" I asked him with a smirk.

He was a smart man. He knew that it was a challenge. Eric walked up to me as he placed himself in between my legs, widening them so that he could stand pressed against me. His hand wrapped around the base of my neck and tilted my head up so that I could meet his lips with my own. It had been a week and I smiled into the kiss, drinking in the taste of him. We might not have been the most typical couple but we worked well enough.

He was the only person that I wanted. His teeth tugged at my bottom lip and I let my jaw fall slightly slack. One of his hands was at the base of my neck while the other grabbed my hip, pulling me flush against him. My head was already a little fuzzy from the alcohol and this was only making it even worse. But I never wanted him to stop. I'd gone a week without him, I didn't want that to happen again. His tongue darted into my mouth and he pulled back almost instantly, making my eyebrows knit together.

"What?" I asked, somewhat worriedly.

"What the hell have you been drinking?" Eric asked.

My lips turned up in a little smirk. Of course that had been what he had noticed. His hands were tight on my hips as I pushed myself into him. His hands only tightened on me a little more. I knew that just as happy as I was to be back with him, he was happy to be back with me. Even though he would never admit it.

"Everything," I said with a little laugh.

Eric leaned down and placed a kiss on the inside of my collar bone. I shivered and let my inner thigh trace against his. "Good. How about another?" he asked.

"Please," I said.

Tonight I would definitely have to stay with him. There was no way that I was going to be making it back to the dorms tonight. Not without his help. Not at the rate that we were going. I wasn't sure how much he had drank tonight, but he definitely seemed a little on the verge of being drunk. I watched as Eric went and poured us both a glass of clear liquid. It was obvious that he had been drinking too. I could taste it on his tongue.

He mixed the liquid in with some ice and I watched as the muscles in his back contracted and expanded with his movements. Even under the shirt that he was wearing it was easy to tell that his body was corded with strong muscle. So much more so than anyone else that I knew. It was always fun to run my hands over the muscles that he had on his back and arms. It was even more fun to dig my nails in, knowing that he liked the harsh movements.

Part of me couldn't help but to wonder if the scratch marks that I had given him the last time we were in bed together were still on him. I shook my head off of those thoughts as I remembered why I had come here in the first place. To explain to him what I had thought about my fear. I didn't want to talk about it, but I knew that I had to.

"Eric," I called and he hummed back. "There's something that I need to talk to you about."

He didn't even bother to turn back from pouring the drinks. "Don't ruin it," Eric called back.
"I'm serious," I said, keeping my arms crossed over my chest as I waited for him to turn back and look at me.

He didn't miss a beat. "So am I," he said.

Despite being irritated with what he had said, a small smile turned up on the corner of my lips. Finally finishing off the drinks, he walked back over to where I was seated. He put the drink down in front of me and I scowled at him as he raised his glass to his lips. I wanted to talk, but I knew that he would try and cut me off the moment that I opened my mouth. He downed his drink quickly but I left mine in front of me, untouched.

It didn't take Eric more than a second to get up, presumably to go get another drink. I knew that he didn't want to speak to me about what I wanted to talk about, but I needed to get it out. We couldn't just leave it like this. He was about to move, but I was faster for once. I reached out for his arm to tug him back into the seat next to me.

"Eric, you are going to listen to me, damn it," I snapped at him.

His pierced eyebrow raised and I stared at him. "What?" he asked.

I cleared my throat and awkwardly started up once more. I hadn't expected it to be that easy. "Look, I shouldn't have said what I said to you last week. It was wrong of me. I know that you wouldn't hurt me. Not on purpose. I believe that. I'm sorry. I guess it's just hard for me to put myself in the same position as someone that doesn't have any fears. At least not like mine," I mumbled.

The moment that I said it, I saw the crass look fall over his face. It was easy for me to know that I had said something wrong. Eric stood from his chair and walked so that he was standing directly in front of me. Definitely not good. I should have kept my fat mouth shut. I took a deep breath and puffed out my chest.

"What did you just say?" he asked.

Shaking my head, I reached for the drink that I had pushed away a moment before. Maybe I did need it. "You heard me," I said.

"Explain," he hissed.

"You don't have to deal with fears. Not like mine. Come on, Eric. You're one of the bravest people that I know," I told him, hoping that it was coming out as more of a compliment.

I knew that I probably sounded terrible but it was like word vomit. Once I started I couldn't stop. "You don't think I have fears?" Eric snarled at me.

I knew that he was afraid of something, but I didn't know what. "I can't even imagine what a guy like you is afraid of. You're lucky. Anyways, I'm sorry about what I said before," I said, hoping to end the conversation with that.

The anger was evident in his eyes, but there was something else too. "I don't care about what you said before," Eric snapped. "I care about what you just said. You don't think that I have fears? Just like you and the rest of your little friends?"

A little hint of anger spiked through me at the memory of my mother vomiting up blood, knowing that my little sister was dead inside of her. I couldn't ever imagine Eric having any fears like that. He had always come off as so fearless. Maybe it was just that he made me feel weaker than him. Maybe I didn't like the thought that, for once, the person that I was with was so much stronger than me. It
wasn't something that had ever happened before.

"You sure as hell don't act like it. So, no, I can't imagine what you're afraid of. Becoming Factionless?" I asked, more of a cruel joke than anything else.

His eyes blazed with fury and I knew that what I had said had struck a chord deep within him. "You think that I'm that cruel? That cold? That my fears are only conceited like that. You think that no one else appears in my fears?" he asked, hovering over me.

"That's not what I meant," I muttered.

Had I meant that? I wasn't really sure what I'd meant when I was speaking. I just meant that I knew that he didn't have the same types of fears that I did. I just knew that I hadn't meant to insult him. But that was the way that it had come out. I just couldn't imagine what Eric was afraid of. Nothing made sense to me.

"Come with me," Eric snarled.

Eric grabbed my hand and yanked me off of the chair, towards the door. "Wait -"

"Don't talk. Walk," Eric hissed, not giving me a chance to speak.

He led me through the back halls and nerves began to bundle in my stomach as we walked to the fear sim room. It felt like my heart nearly stopped. Did he want to see my fear? He wrenched the door open angrily and went to the chair. Completely surprising me, he took a seat in the chair and grabbed the needle off of the tray next to it. He wanted me to see his fear. Was he serious? Not that I wasn't curious, but it felt like an invasion of privacy. He shoved the needle towards me but I didn't take it.

"Push it into the jugular vein," he instructed.

Part of me was dying to push the needle into his neck and know what he was afraid of but another part of me wasn't sure that I really wanted to know what he was afraid of. And that was the part that won over. Honestly I didn't want to see what he was afraid of. I had a feeling that it was something to make me feel guilty.

"I don't know how," I muttered.

"It's the big vein right in the middle of the neck. You've seen Four do it a million times," he said.

"But -"

"Watch on that screen," Eric interrupted, pointing to the computer that Four normally stood at.

"Eric -" I started to argue.

"Do it. Don't ask questions," he snapped.

Feeling extremely nervous, I nodded numbly and took the needle from him. Eric was right. I knew well enough about what to do. Four had done it to me enough times. I didn't want to do it, but I knew that one way or another Eric was going to get me to do this. At least my lessons with Four weren't tonight. That would make for a strange conversation.

"Make sure that the entire serum is emptied," Eric instructed.

"Okay,"
My hands were shaking as I put the needle against his vein, pushing it in slowly. He didn't even give the tiny flinch that I usually did. He just stared at the wall ahead of him. I pushed down the plunger to empty the liquid and watched as a second later his eyes slipped closed. It felt strange to be on this end of the sim. I walked over to the computer station where Four normally watched me and put the needle down on the table.

The fear came to life on the screen and I crossed my arms over my chest to watch. Four was right. The screen was a little hard to watch. It was very pixelated and a little fuzzy, but it was clear enough to get the picture. Eric was standing in the middle of a room, looking around. It was a room painted a deep blue with only a door on one end. There was nothing that I recognized in the room. It appeared that it might have been somewhere in Erudite.

He was only alone for a moment when the door opened and Eric turned around. Two people walked into the room with him and my jaw tightened at the sight of them. Jeanine Matthews walked into the corner of the room with Max on her heels. The other leaders and a few more people that I didn't know followed them in. My heart picked up its pace as I watched the screen. Was he afraid of them?

Two more men walked into the room, dragging a limp figure into the room. Even though I automatically knew who it was, I kept repeating to myself that it was someone else. That it was anyone else. But it wasn't. There I was. Clear as day. As clear as I was standing here right now. The men dropped my figure on the ground and I looked over myself. I was bloody and beaten half to death. My body was barely moving and I was able to get a good look at myself as he walked over to me.

My eyes were blackened and nearly swollen shut. It was easy to see that my lip was broken in multiple places and it looked like I might have a broken tooth or two. A few patches of my hair were torn out and my ankle was bent at an odd angle. He looked over to my wrist and I could see that the breath catch in his throat. He kept an even look on his face. My wrist was very clearly broken. The sim me looked up to Eric and sobbed softly. My heart was pumping fast and hard. Why the hell was I in his fear?

I glanced over at the Eric in the same room as me and saw that his leg gave a little twitch. Eric in the sim was silent and a hand flew over my real mouth. I couldn't believe that I was seeing this. I couldn't believe that I was the person in Eric's fear. Eric looked like he wanted to tear apart every person in the room. The sim me looked up to Eric and gave a little cough. Blood came up and my sim spit it across the floor. I shook my head at the screen. It seemed that at any given second I might die.

"Max. Jeanine. What is this?" Eric asked, finally speaking.

Even though his voice was hard, I saw the softness in his eyes. A thought hit me as I watched the screen and I cringed slightly. It was very hard to remember. Eric was not a Divergent. He thought that this was real. He thought that I was really almost dead. Max smiled as he took a few steps closer to Eric.

"A present. For you, Eric," Max purred.

Jeanine was smirking behind him and Eric growled under his breath. "What is this?" Eric repeated.

My eyes narrowed into little slits. I had never liked Max and even though this was just a little sim it still didn't help me like him. "You see, you've grown close with her recently. We all know it. It's nice. Honestly. How someone like you can find themselves so caught up in a little Amity. She's caused you quite a bit of trouble," Max said, taking a few steps closer to Eric.
I rolled my eyes as Max walked up to my limp figure. Why was it that everyone insisted on calling me Amity? Only Eric was allowed to call me that. My body tensed as Max took his foot up and stepped down on my broken wrist, twisting his foot. Thanks, asshole. The version of me in the sim screamed out in pain and I winced in real life. That was exactly what my scream of pain would sound like. A tear leaked out of my eyes and I shuddered. Eric's mouth had tightened into a thin line. He was furious.

"What do you want, Max? Why are you torturing an innocent initiate?" Eric asked loudly.

He had to be diplomatic. He didn't have a weapon to use. I was still laying on the ground, moaning in pain. Max's foot was still on my wrist. "Innocent," Jeanine scoffed.

Bitch. "She is innocent," Eric argued softly.

"She makes you weak, Eric. Look at you," Jeanine said.

Eric gritted his teeth. "Let her up," Eric demanded.

"You're having an internal battle with yourself because you want to save her," Jeanine said. My heart twisted in my chest. "The poor, pathetic little Amity." Her voice made it sound like she was almost sorry. "There's only one thing that can be done. We like you, Eric. The spot on leadership is rightfully yours. Now you just have to take it."

The breath caught in my throat. I knew what his fear was. And I knew the reason that he had it. It was all because I had placed the thought in his head. Max finally moved off of my wrist and I cringed as my sim cried out in pain and coughed up more blood. Max handed Eric a gun but immediately retracted it when Eric reached out. Real life Eric twitched one more. At least Max wasn't stupid. He knew that Eric would kill him before he would kill me.

Max held out a gun and Eric went to take it. But Max was not a foolish man. He backed the gun out of Eric's reach. "You need to show us that you still want the leadership, Eric," Max said.

"Of course I want the spot," Eric growled lowly.

"We need to know. You need to eradicate anything that makes you weak," Max said, motioning to where she lay. "Kill her."

Even though I'd seen it coming, the words still made me cringe. Max never seemed like the sweetest person but I liked to think that he wouldn't really send me to slaughter. But I had heard that meeting in between him and Jeanine a few weeks ago. He would. They would kill me without a second thought.

"She's an initiate. We don't just kill the initiates without reason," Eric said. I knew that Eric wanted to rip his head off and was desperately trying to push all emotion from his voice. "They are the future of Dauntless."

Eric nonchalantly motioned over towards me, obviously trying to keep his hand from shaking. Max shook his head as he motioned back to me flippantly. It looked like I was trying to get back to my feet, but I was too weak. I just kept falling back to the ground. It didn't help that Max was smiling the entire time.

"Not her. She's shown no promise. Not like the others," Max said.

"She doesn't have the personality. Now kill her, Eric. Or we can leave you both on the Factionless doorstep with no medication for her. She dies anyways and you find yourself with no home. So tell me. What's worth more?" Max asked with a smirk, knowing that he was getting to Eric.

"You'll really leave her out there to die?" Eric asked sharply.

"You have to ask? What's worth more? Your spot here in Dauntless, or the knowledge that at least her death had nothing to do with you? She dies either way," Max pointed out.

The internal struggle was easy to see. It was right in his eyes. He might as well have been telling them outright that he wasn't sure if he could do it. I wanted to look away from the screen but I forced myself to stay facing forward and watch. I knew that with every fiber of his being he didn't want to do it. But I knew what he would do. And I didn't blame him. He finally gave a little nod and took the gun from Max. It felt like I couldn't breathe as I heard myself speak up for the first time.

He nodded and took the gun from Max. "Eric. Please. Don't. I know you're better than this. Please," I begged him.

If that didn't break his heart, I was sure that nothing would. I looked pitiful as I begged him again. His eyes held a little waver but he remained strong. Eric's entire body was jerking in the chair in the sim room, betraying the emotions that he was keeping calm in the sim. My sim called out to him once more but the plea fell on deaf ears. He shut his eyes and pulled the trigger. A little sob escaped my mouth as I watched.

The shot went straight through my eyes and Eric's limp figure in the chair gave a massive jolt. It startled me out of my shocked daze. My sim body fell to the ground, dead. He killed me. He had really done it. He cocked the gun for another bullet, more than likely to kill Max with, but the chamber was empty. Max was smart to only give him one bullet. Eric's figure was rooted in place by Max's hands, but his eyes never once left my body.

"Well done, Eric," Jeanine praised.

And that was it. The computer screen went dark and I glanced over to Eric. The sim was over. He shot up in the chair and I made my way over to him quickly. His breathing was faster than usual and he looked like he was about to bolt. The moment that I walked into his sight, his face went pale as he looked me over. I grabbed his hand and leaned in front of him. He thought that it was real. He thought that I was dead.

"Alex," he muttered, placing his hand on my leg.

"Hey, it's alright. Just a sim. It was only a sim. I'm alright. I'm right here," I muttered softly.

Eric looked like he was about to shove me away, but he didn't. Instead he stood and brushed softly past me. He turned off the computer and turned to leave. I wasn't sure whether or not he was inviting me to go with him, but I did anyways. And considering he didn't yell at me I figured that he didn't mind me going with him.

Our walk back to his apartment was made in silence. It made me feel a little tenser than normal. Once we arrived back inside and Eric shut the door behind us, I felt the awkward air grow thick once more. He grabbed the bottle off of the counter and took a long swig of it, walking back over to the bed. I followed.

"Once a month, every month, for the past four years, I've done these mandatory fear sim checks. Leadership has to do them. To ensure that they're still willing and strong enough to conquer anything
thrown at them," Eric explained. I nodded at him. "Every time I've done one of these my fear has always been the same. Losing to Four. Losing something. Leadership, a fight, anything. No one but him has ever appeared in that sim. No one." My brows knitted together. His fear was really losing to Four? "Not until today. Not until you." A small blush rose to my face. "You're wrong, Amity. About everything."

I knew what he meant. He meant that I was wrong about choosing to believe that he wouldn't hurt me. He was wrong about thinking that he was better than he really was. Maybe he thought that, but I didn't. No matter how afraid I was that he would find out that I was Divergent, I would never believe that he would really hurt me. He wouldn't.

"No. I'm not. I might not be as smart as an Erudite but I'm not a moron either. Your face in that sim. You didn't want to do it. You regretted it the moment that you did it. You wouldn't hurt me. Not for anything. I trust you," I told him, watching a strange emotion flit through his eyes.

"You don't," Eric growled.

"I do. I really do."

"You shouldn't."

"But I do. Time for you to trust me. I'm sorry for what I said before," I told him softly.

Eric was sitting on the edge of the bed as I sauntered over to him. The bottle of liquor was hanging loosely in his hand as I pried it away from him. One of his hands went to the back of my thighs and goosebumps rose as he traced over the skin there. My spine straightened at the sudden feeling.

"You have too much blind faith, Amity," Eric muttered.

His head was near my chest and the sound of his voice vibrated through me. I shrugged, knowing that he wasn't looking. "Maybe one day I'll feel like a fool for it then. Today is not that day. Come here," I told him softly.

To my surprise, he did as told. His hands wrapped around my thighs and I smiled as he tugged me into his lap so that I was sitting on him. My arms stretched out to reach up around his torso and I grinned into the crook of his neck. He took a moment, but one arm finally wrapped around my shoulders. Maybe one day he would make me feel like a fool, but for right now I didn't want to worry about it. For now I just wanted to be with him.

Using the full strength of my weight, which wasn't much, I rocked us back against the bed and Eric laughed softly, letting me knock us back. The sound vibrated through me and I smiled, leaning against him for a kiss. One that he easily responded to. One of his hands wrapped in my hair as the other one undid the zipper of my jacket.

It was too hot in his room anyways. I leaned up off of him for a moment to toss the jacket off to the side of the bed. His carpet monster would probably make a good meal of another one of the articles of clothing but I couldn't care less. The only thing that I was worried about right now was that he was with me. We were back to normal, and that was what made it worth it.

"You know," I said, leaning down to kiss him once more. "There is one thing that Four doesn't have."

His pierced brow rose and it made me want to twist the piercing around. But I was sure that he would appreciate that. And we didn't need to get into another fight after just making up from our previous one. His hands traveled back up from my ankles to the tops of my thighs, over the back
pocket of my jeans, and settled on my hips.

"What's that?" he asked.

His voice was huskier than normal and I loved the sound of it. "Me," I stated proudly, giving him a cheesy grin.

But Eric never missed a beat. "Lucky him," he muttered more to himself than to me.

"Excuse you!" I shouted.

It was in that moment that it didn't matter that his fear was of having to kill me. All that mattered was the happy laugh that escaped my mouth as I shoved Eric back roughly. It did nothing to him, but it still made me feel better. He easily rolled me over underneath him and I smiled as I began to undo the buttons on his jacket.

Unlike normal, we were slow to disrobe each other. We usually rushed and scattered our clothes throughout the room but it was nicer this time. I helped Eric shrug out of the offending garment and toss it over the edge of the bed. My legs wrapped around his hips as his hands went down to the lower buttons on my shirt. I was faster though. I knocked his hands to the side and twisted underneath him, escaping from his tight grip.

"I don't think so," I said.

"What?" Eric snapped irritably.

"If you think that Four is lucky to not have me... I can go change his luck," I teased.

Of course it was a lie - as Four was definitely just like my brother - but I knew that Eric wouldn't stand for my words. He reacted just the way that I wanted. He grabbed my ankles and tugged me back underneath him. I had to fight to keep the smile off of my face as his hands went to the top of my shirt and ripped off a button, popping it open over my chest.

"You are mine," Eric snarled, heat spreading through my entire body.

I finally let the smile rise to my lips as I shook my boots off of my feet. It was a little harder than I would have liked to admit. Using my foot, only caged in the black ankle sock, I pushed Eric back away from me. His easily could have advanced on me once more but he merely let me push him back. He smirked down at me as I undid the rest of the buttons on my shirt and leaned up, pulling if off of my shoulders. Eric's hand gently traced over my stomach, tickling me slightly, as I let my shirt slink to the floor.

We met in a somewhat chaste kiss and Eric smirked against my lips. "Show me," I whispered against his mouth.

He really was so easy. Eric's hands went down to the button on my jeans and I took his moment of weakness against him. He had always called me Amity. I wanted to show him that I was Dauntless. I wrapped my legs tightly around his waist and yanked him off of me. Eric fell to the side, having not expected it, and I took the moment to kick out at him. His stunned face fell into a smirk as he realized what I was doing. He caught my ankle and threw me off of the side of the bed. I yelled out as I hit the ground.

Eric was leaning over the edge of the bed, leering at me. I rolled my eyes, a little upset that I hadn't done anything more than knock him off of his knees. He was smiling as I leaned up, grabbing his arm and yanking roughly. Thankfully I could use my weight to my advantage. He came falling to the
floor and spread his legs to avoid crushing me. I didn't give him a chance to recover as I flipped over myself to get away from me.

He was faster as he came charging at me and knocked me flat on my back. I coughed and threw my thigh over the back of his neck, pulling him to the side. He had barely moved from my shove, but it was just enough to wiggle out of his grip. He was waiting for me to make my move. He had always beaten me in our wrestling matches, so I wanted to show him that I had learned something, even if I couldn't beat him.

"You'll lose, Amity," he teased.

"Wanna bet?" I asked.

"You don't seem to do very well with bets."

"You can do whatever you want to me if you win."

The darkness sank into Eric's eyes as he looked at me. "Deal," he finally said.

That was all the confirmation that I needed. I threw my leg out to kick Eric in the stomach, but he saw it coming. He grabbed my foot and shoved it down, leaning forward to hit me with a right hook. I barely managed to duck out of the way before coming back up and elbowing him in the ribs. He grunted at the hit and made a move to hit me in the ribs, which definitely hurt. I ducked underneath his second hit and grabbed his arm, twisting it backwards.

He grunted and leaned down towards the ground, making me think that I'd won. But he managed to turn it around on me as he used one of his legs to sweep out my own. I landed flat on my back before rolling back upwards. Eric made a move to hit me again - which I blocked - as I twisted around, stepping so that we were standing shoulder-to-shoulder. I grabbed his hands before rolling the two of us up and over into a somersault.

We were thrown to the ground roughly and I used Eric's moment of weakness against him. I threw out my leg towards Eric's face. He caught my foot at the last moment and used it to roll us on the ground twice. He used his spare leg to kick me in the stomach as I kicked him roughly in the face. We got back to our feet and I turned to Eric, who was smirking at me.

"You've gotten better," he commented.

"I had a good teacher," I shot back.

I threw out another hit at Eric, hoping that he wouldn't be expecting it, but he was. He ducked underneath my hit and threw an arm out to me that I was just barely able to catch, jamming his arm downwards by hitting his elbow with my own and using my spare arm immediately after to grab onto his jacket and punch him in the face. To my shock, I actually did hit him.

I sent another hit to his ribs and made to hit him in the face again, but that time he caught me. I tried to kick him in the stomach but he shoved my knee back downwards. I tried to punch him again but he swung under my hit before reaching up and punching me in the face twice. I was groaning in pain as I caught what would have been his third hit, locking his arm underneath mine, and turning us. I sent out a roundhouse kick that he ducked away from as I backed off of him.

He jumped up and sent two kicks into my chest, both of which I managed to narrowly avoid. His third kick hit the side of my head but I was smart enough to jam my foot into his knee. He groaned and collapsed on the ground. I ducked to the ground to swipe out his legs, but he was up and stumbling backwards already. I used my momentum to jump into the air and send a full roundhouse
kick into his jaw. That one connected. He was sent flying up and over, landing hard on his stomach.

My happiness at getting a good hit in only lasted for so long. He stood back upright and rushed at me, immediately punching me in the face, blocking two of my own hits. We exchanged blows back and forth, neither doing much damage to the other, when Eric managed to grab my hand. I knew immediately that I had made a mistake.

I jammed my elbow back into his nose but it wasn't enough. He grabbed my hair and yanked me towards him so that we were standing with my back to his front. He had twisted my arm painfully so that my own arm was wrapped over my throat. Eric was still holding my wrist when he turned so that our backs were pressed against each other and I was being pulled up into my own arm, choking myself. Unable to move, I was useless to stop his attack. He ripped my arm downwards so that I was thrown over myself and painfully thrown to the floor.

As I tried to suck air back into my lungs, Eric was standing above me, smirking at his work. "Good work, Amity. I almost had to try that time," Eric teased.

"You're an ass," I said breathlessly.

"You're a sore loser," he teased. "That was for kicking me."

It took me a while to get back to my feet. The fight was over and I had lost. But I'd made the bet with that in mind. I let out a little laugh as I stumbled to my feet and took a gulp of water. My head was spinning, partially from the fall and partially from the alcohol. He rolled his eyes at me and walked over to the bed, sitting down once more. He had a letter on his bedside and he grabbed a small letter opener to open it. I rolled my eyes and sighed. No fun.

I'd thought that he would come to collect. I made my way back over to the bed and went to grab my shirt once more. If he was going to respond to letters, or whatever the hell he was doing, I was going to go to bed. As I walked back to the bed Eric grabbed the belt loop on my pants and yanked me over the bed. I yelled out as I rolled over myself against the sheets.

He laughed and leaned over me. There was a small black mark forming on his head from where I had kicked him. I was sure that I looked worse. Eric was holding the small knife out to me. A lump formed in my throat as I stared at it, glinting in the light of the room. Was he seriously going to hurt me? His only laughed and dropped the knife to my pants.

"Eric, I like these pants!" I cried out as the blade bit into the top part of the fabric.

"Shut up or I will cut you," Eric warned.

It was this dangerous side of him that I really liked. I nodded and watched as the sharp blade sliced through the fabric of one of the legs. I whined as they fell limply off of me. Eric rolled his eyes, tracing the blade gently back up my leg to the inner thigh. I shivered at the invasion of the cold and metal object. There was something seriously wrong with me if this was what had turned me on. This and a fist fight a moment before.

"I'll buy you new pants." Fuck the pants, I just want you.

Something was seriously wrong with me. Eric rolled the knife over my core, splitting the fabric there and I sighed as the blade moved its way over my other upper thigh and rolled around my backside to finally cut the fabric free from me. There was definitely no saving those pants. As the fabric fell away from me, I found myself wishing that he would do that more often. A thought that made a blush rise to my cheeks.
A few months ago I would have thought that someone doing this to me would be the scariest and most offensive thing that someone could do. But now it was something that I couldn't get enough of. And I almost liked that he hadn't placed the knife down yet. What the hell is wrong with me?

"Something is wrong with me and it's your fault," I said.

Eric's eyebrow raised. "There are lots of things wrong with you," he teased.

I laughed and nudged him gently. "I didn't want you to stop," I admitted.

The sound of Eric's laugh was something that had once unnerved me. It had always sounded so cruel and cold. Now it sounded warm and inviting. It was a different kind of laugh from the one that he had given when I had found myself getting hurt during training. This laugh was from a man sharing an intimate night with his woman. This was a laugh that only I heard. At least, I liked to hope that I was the only one that heard that laugh.

"Welcome to Dauntless, Amity," Eric teased. I laughed and grabbed the knife from Eric. "You won't like what happens if you cut me."

"You have no faith in me," I told Eric.

"Not with a knife," he said darkly.

I knew that it was a hit at the time that I had thrown a knife at him. But this time I didn't want to actually hurt him. Eric nodded at me as I leaned up from the bed and pushed him onto his back. Eric grunted and watched with dark eyes. One of his hands followed the curve of my spine and back down so that he could tug down the band of my underwear.

"Stop or I will cut you," I told him honestly.

He chuckled under his breath. I had still drank a little bit too much and I didn't trust myself to focus on more than one thing at a time. Eric laughed and moved his hands away. I pulled the top of his shirt away from his torso, running the knife underneath it. I easily sliced through the material, laughing as it fell apart and Eric shrugged out of it.

Without giving me any warning, Eric snatched the knife and tossed it away from us. It landed with a little thud in the wall, sticking in its place. Not bad. I hoped he didn't like that wall too much. He laughed and rolled me over onto my back once more. I sighed and struggled to open the button on his pants.

"Getting a little excited, Amity?" Eric asked.

"Shut up and take your fucking pants off," I snarled at him.

Eric's eyebrows rose in question and for a moment I thought that he might say no. But he didn't. He laughed and leaned away from me, helping remove his pants. Once they were thrown into the corner of the room I laughed and pulled his mouth down to mine again. He groaned as I tugged on his lower lip, wrapping my arms around his neck.

He leaned up and I held on as he grabbed me and lifted me into his arms. I sensed that he knew where he was going so I didn't bother to pull away from him. He had lived here for years. He didn't need his eyes to know where he was going. Our lips tangled together as Eric walked us backwards. His hands were tight on my upper thighs. One of his hands bunched the fabric of my underwear and ripped it away from my body. Literally.
"Six," I said against Eric's mouth. He opened his eyes long enough to look at me. "Six pairs of underwear of mine you've ruined."

Eric merely shook his head. He walked us backwards and I smiled as he opened the door to a large balcony. I had seen it before but had never bothered asking Eric if I could walk out here. It was beautiful. The lights from Erudite, Candor, Amity, and Abnegation were shining out in the distance. Erudite was the closest and their Faction was the brightest. Although the Candor tower was bright too, lighting up the sky. I smiled, saying a silent hello to Iris and Florian. My Mom and Dad too. I could tell by the positioning about where my house was.

"I'll buy you new ones," Eric repeated himself, his lips mumbling against the skin of my neck.

"Nice view you have out here," I said.

He nodded as he seated me on the thin railing. It was the only thing that separated the balcony from the three of four story drop to the ground. And an impact from up here would definitely kill me. No other balconies seemed to be on this side of the building and I titled my head at him. He couldn't be the only person with a balcony. Was he?

Eric hummed as he kissed my lips quickly. Our mouths tangled together for a moment and I smiled into it. His lips traveled down my neck and I shivered as they traced the line of my bra. One of his hands slipped down over my stomach and spread my legs. I was a little nervous that one false move would send me plummeting to my death, but Eric didn't seem bothered with it.

"One of the perks of being a leader," Eric said and I nodded. "None of the other leaders live out of this side of the compound and I'm the top level. No one else can see out here."

I smirked at the thought. We could be out here without worry. Our relationship was still forbidden. "Not bad. I'll be sure to get one of these myself," I boasted.

Eric laughed as he popped open the button on the front of my bra. I smiled and rolled my shoulders back so that he could pull it free, leaving me completely disrobed. He smirked as he took the bra in hand and chucked it, overhanded, off of the balcony. I turned back as Eric's mouth dropped down to my chest and watched it go flying off towards the Erudite compound.

"Oh, come on! You did that on purpose," I snarled at Eric.

He merely smirked at me once as he leaned me back a little further on the railing. His lips made their way to brush past my ear. "I'll buy you a new one," he purred at me once more.

Heat pooled in between my thighs as he dropped a hand down and stroked my core. I groaned and threw my head back. It spun slightly from the alcohol and I jerked up, suddenly remembering just how precarious my current position was. Even though he was strong, I didn't trust that he would forget to help support me.

"What?" Eric snapped at me.

"Don't you dare drop me," I hissed.

Eric rolled his eyes as he slipped his finger in between my folds, essentially ignoring what I'd told him. I groaned deep in my throat, throwing my head back. Yep, I'm drunk. The world spun around me and my vision went fuzzy as he slid his finger in and out of me. A soft sigh escaped my mouth. It felt like it had been a long time since we had done this. Far too long. I wished that we hadn't been fighting for all of this time.
I wrapped my arms around his neck and drew him closer for a kiss. His forearm was pressed against my stomach as he slid his finger out of my body and replaced it with two. I groaned into his mouth and he took the moment to slip his tongue into my mouth. We wrestled for dominance as his fingers curled inside me. He certainly knew how to get me going. I gasped and he smirked into the kiss, breaking our fight for dominance.

His mouth went down my lips and my jaw, trailing down my neck. More than once he would suck a mark into the skin, leaving his own little mark on me. My entire body shivered at the feeling. I knew just how much he wanted the world to know that I was his and it sent chills down my spine. The air outside was cold but our bodies pressing together were boiling. I knew what he was saying as he created a new mark and bit down over it, leaving the mark an ugly black and reddish color. You're mine. I sure was.

My legs spread a little wider at his insistence, considering that he was pressing the inside of them apart. I groaned when his head dropped down and caught my nipple. His mouth suctioned over me and I let out a little gasp at the feeling. It didn't seem that anyone was out on the walkway below us, but I didn't want to attract any attention to myself. Just in case. His tongue flitted over me and I wrapped my fingers in his hair at the feeling.

Giving it a tug, Eric bit down roughly and tugged slightly. It sent a shock of pain and pleasure through my body and I leaned my head back once more. His hands were still tight around my back, ensuring that I wasn't going to fall. I was sure that his fingers were going to leave bruises on my back. But I would have preferred that to becoming a human pancake. The only thing to catch me was the concrete ground a few stories below.

Eric pulled his fingers out of me for a moment to add a third in. At the new angle that he was hitting, one that he had never hit before, I threw my head back and loudly cried out his name. It echoed throughout the air. His movements became more frenzied as his name spilled from my mouth repeatedly. I groaned as they began to curl inside me once more. I ground my hips down over Eric's hand, wanting nothing more than for him to be completely inside of me.

But naturally that wasn't the way that it was going to go. His hand tightened over my back even more and I hissed as they dug into the sensitive skin. Eric backed away from me for a moment but left his fingers inside of me. I raised my brows at him, wondering what he was planning on doing now.

"Don't move," he said.

In all honesty, I wasn't planning on moving at any point. I went to ask him what he meant, but before I could, his hand left my back and he dropped down into a squat in front of me. My hands went tightly on the bar that I was sitting on, keeping me from slipping backwards. He shoved my legs apart, straining the muscles in my thighs as his mouth met the spot right over where his fingers were placed.

At the sudden feeling I moaned loudly, throwing my head back. His tongue swirled around my clit and his fingers curled inside of me. His name poured from my mouth as my hands tightened on the railing that I was propped up on. The icy wind hit my chest and I shivered as his teeth dragged against my clit. My entire body gave a small jolt at the sudden feeling of him tugging at my clit. His fingers continued to pump inside me over and over again as I groaned in a mix of pain and pleasure.

"E-Eric," I stuttered as he pulled on my clit and tugged it slightly.

I was getting close but I didn't want to tell him. He would stop. I knew that he would. Because he only wanted me to hit my end with him inside of me. His fingers curled up against the spot deep
inside of me and I knew that was it. My eyes slipped closed and I wrapped my shins around Eric's neck to keep from falling off of the railing. My entire body erupted in spasms as I threw my head back, crying out in ecstasy.

"Eric!" I yelled out, knowing damn well that if anyone was walking around in the plaza below they would hear me.

That was all that I wanted. That was what I had needed over the past week. My walls clenched around his fingers and he curled them once more, rubbing his thumb against my clit, making my spasms even harder. He knew that I had given in and he wanted to make it as good as possible. My entire body was shaking as stars flooded my vision. He gave me one last, long, lick and stood, slowly retracting his fingers. He was watching me with dark eyes as he stood back up and kissed me roughly.

The moment that he broken away from me, I grabbed onto him. "Get inside me. Now," I snarled under my breath.

My chest was still rising and falling rapidly from my previous high, but Eric didn't bother stopping me. I had gotten what I'd wanted, and now it was his turn. His hands dropped to the waistband of his underwear but I was far too impatient. My hands dropped with his and I ripped them off of him, watching as he sprung free.

One of Eric's hands suddenly wrapped around my back as the other shoved my legs apart. I grunted loudly as he shoved himself inside of me. I threw back my head at the sudden intrusion and gasped loudly as he rocked in and out of me, not giving me a chance to get used to him. Not that I wanted a chance. I liked the way that he took charge of everything.

His movements were fast and harsh. His fingers were tearing at my skin slightly and I used one arm to loop around his neck. I kissed him deeply as his hands tightened on my hips and he thrust into me. He was large and it stretched me as far as I possibly could, but it felt so damned good. I never wanted him to stop.

As he thrust into me roughly, I raised my hips and rolled them slightly. His eyes slipped closed as he kissed me once more. I bit down on his lip and he groaned, thrusting into me so hard that I was sure it would leave black bruises on the inside of my thighs. His lips went to my neck and I groaned as he kissed the inside of the crook. It didn't take long for his tongue to start tracing patterns. The bundle was once more building in my stomach and I groaned. He was the only person that could ever do this to me.

For a while we rocked together, each of us grunting and thrusting our hips to meet the other's. His thrusts were hard and fast while my body twisted up to meet his, making him hit the deepest part of me. I cried out once more as Eric's teeth nipped at my neck again, sending a jolt through me.

"Say my name," he snarled.

Breathing heavily, I opened my mouth to say it, but it was taken over by a moan as Eric rocked roughly into me. It was so hard that it nearly shoved me backwards. I could feel the pressure building in my stomach and I knew that I was getting close to my end again. Eric gave a few more sharp thrusts and I knew that he too was near his end.

"Say it!" Eric yelled loudly as he hit another sharp thrust.

"Eric!"
His name spilled from my lips loudly as another orgasm rocked my entire body. Every muscle in my body began to tighten and that included around him. He lifted my body from the railing so that he was carrying my entire weight as he let me ride out my orgasm. I wasn't sure how he was managing to carry my own weight without letting some of my weight off on something else, but it didn't matter. Whatever he was doing was perfect. It made my orgasm even stronger.

It was so strong that I could barely see through my lidded eyes, my breath almost impossible to catch. We were completely pressed up against each other and my nails raked down his back. God, he felt good. My juices were flowing over him and down my legs as he grabbed my hair, pulling it back, only increasing the pleasure that I was feeling.

His thrusts had become messy as he jabbed upwards into me, trying to hit his end. I knew that me tightening around him was only getting him closer to his end. By the way that he caught my mouth in a searing kiss, I knew that he was nearing his wits end as well. His body had begun to shake and I waited for him to join me in complete bliss.

"Alex," he groaned into my neck.

It was one of the rare times that he said my name. Even during sex. I felt him come inside of me and it didn't stop for a while. His thrusts were desperate as he rode his own orgasm, jerking into me. He finally stilled and lifted me completely from the railing. We were both panting as my legs tightened around his waist. He walked us back inside of the apartment, not bothering to close the sliding glass door behind him. My head had dropped against his chest as I looked at our torn clothes, scattered across the room.

We made it to the bed quickly and I laughed softly as he dropped us back onto the bed. As I hit the sheets I realized that there was sweat all over my back from our movements. Eric twisted halfway through the fall so that I fell over him. I leaned up slightly, finally letting him fall out of me. We both shivered at the sudden loss of each other as Eric moved over onto his side, letting me slip softly off of him and onto the bed.

He kissed me softly on the lips before leaning over and grabbing something off of the floor, tossing it over to me. I thanked him softly and pulled his shirt on over my head. The one that I hadn't cut off of him. He pulled me in for another kiss that quickly became heated. It wasn't long before he rolled me underneath him and jammed my legs apart, thrusting back into me. It had brought us into round two and rounds three and four not long after that. Not that either of us had lasted a long time during any of the following rounds. It was easy to say that make-up sex was the best.

Once we had both finished our final time, I fell off of him once more, panting heavily. Somehow the shirt had stayed on me the entire time. He was completely bare and I smiled, kissing him one last time. His hands twisted in my hair softly before releasing me. I almost wanted another round, but I was tired and it was late.

I went to roll over, his shirt riding up on my thighs. To my surprise he caught me. His arm wrapped around my waist and he yanked me painfully into him. I smiled and grabbed one of his legs in between mine. His laughter was low and rumbling, the sound making me smile. Eric tilted my face up to kiss him once more. As I finally fell asleep, I realized that tonight had made me happier than I had been in a long time.
Chapter Nineteen

The sunlight was pouring through the windows, thrown off by the icy air that surrounded the room. I shivered softly and huddled underneath the blankets a little further. Eric might not have been a super soft guy but he had the best taste in blankets. They were so much better than the scratchy and moth-eaten blankets that were in the initiate dorms.

It had been another week since Eric and I had made up after our nasty fight. Things had been better over the past week than they had been since we had gotten together. Since we had first met really. I'd spent the majority of nights with Eric lately but I usually didn't come until late. Long after my friends would fall asleep. I would spend my evenings with them and wait for them to fall asleep. Heather would always be the last one awake so that I could say goodbye to her.

She was the one person that might have been happier than Eric and I that we had made up, besides Cameron. If Heather wasn't with Cole I would have tried to set them up. They could have all sorts of fun planning out how they could shove Eric and I closer together. It wasn't just Heather and Cameron. All of my friends were happy to see me back to normal. I was too.

Part of it helped that I had moved on from the fear of killing Eric. I knew that both Eric and I were happier in this past week than we had been in a while. I was extremely grateful that Eric had shown me his fear the other week. We hadn't spoken of it since that night but we both knew that there was a silent agreement. We would never hurt each other. Not like that. Although despite what Eric thought, that could change soon.

But that was the last thing that I wanted to think about right now. All that I wanted to think about was how damned comfortable his bed was. I was seriously hoping that when I became a member I would get a bed like this. If I managed to live that long. Shaking those thoughts from my head, I glanced over to where Eric was cooking breakfast and popped one eye just barely open.

Eric wasn't wearing any clothes as he tried to cook the bacon. He rarely actually put clothes on in the morning. We had learned recently that we were both lousy cooks. But somehow he was better than me. I watched as a pop of grease came soaring out of the pan and landed on his nether regions, burning him. He jumped back and began to curse as I let out a soft snort.

Eric's head shot in my direction when he heard my snort and I turned to bury my head in the pillows quickly. I wasn't ready to get up yet. And I knew that Eric was going to kick me out to get to training. Despite the fact that he was no longer really my trainer, he still acted like it. A few nights this past week we had snuck into the training room and Eric had gotten me to run drills with him.

Part of me had a feeling that it was because of the wrestling match that I had started with him the other night. Of course I'd lost, but I had enjoyed the bruise that I'd given him on his temple. I was glad to see that my skills hadn't lessened any in the past few weeks but Eric was still able to get me to the mats without a second thought if he really wanted to. Girlfriend, or whatever I was, or not, he was still going to show me that he was stronger. Not that I didn't know that.

Despite his enjoyment of beating me in the ring at night, Eric had been rather open to me in the past few days. Nothing startling or more than what normal friends would share with each other, but I knew that it was a big step for Eric. He was rather closed off about his life before Dauntless. And even when he had been in training. Just to hear the occasional story about his time in training made me smile.

We weren't really that affectionate towards each other - we hit each other more than anything else -
but I didn't mind that. I didn't like laying all over each other and whispering sweet words. I preferred to get in shoving matches, trip each other, and make snide remarks. But he was finally starting to act more like a boyfriend to me. Not that we were boyfriend and girlfriend.

That didn't really bother me. I had thought that maybe I was insane but Heather had agreed that calling him my boyfriend was stupid. She didn't even call Cole her boyfriend. They were just together. Maybe it was a Dauntless thing. Even if it wasn't, Eric was not the type of guy to put a name on a relationship.

As I laid in bed I let my mind wander back to the progress that we had made in the past week. I still knew next to nothing about his childhood in Erudite. The only things that I knew about his childhood were from what I had read in the file back in Erudite. He had told me a few stories about his initiation. Apparently it was shorter when he was an initiate; it was only four months. We both agreed that initiation was too long but I also thought that four months was too short. Five sounded fair to me.

Maybe if I ever got the chance to be a leader I would handle a change in initiation to make it a little shorter and change the rule about kicking low ranking initiates out. There were plenty of ideas that I already had, but I knew that it would never happen. I would never be a leader with Max around.

While Eric had told me stories of his initiation, I had told him a few stories of my childhood. I had told him that my grades had always been on par with the Erudite children in my classes. Eric had laughed and told me that I wasn't that smart. I had agreed with him. I was no moron but I certainly wasn't that smart. I would have stayed away from Eric if I was.

In the kitchen I heard Eric mutter another curse and I smirked. He was no chef. I rolled in Eric's bed once more, accidentally knocking the sheets off of me. His shirt that I was wearing rode up around my hips but I didn't bother to fix it. It was like Eric had said, it was nothing he hadn't seen before. I heard Eric snort on the other side of the apartment and I rolled my eyes.

My mind wandered to the rankings once more. It was something that I frequently thought about. Even more so now that we were approaching the end of training. A few people had moved around the board but for the most part we had stilled where we were.

Heather has finally moved up to the tenth spot, keeping her safe from Fence duty. Of course we had celebrated with a girl's day when I had seen that. Lisa had taken her place at the eleventh spot but I had assured her that she wouldn't be on the Fence. She was a good shot. I had a feeling that she would be off with the patrols. As for me, the last time that I had checked my ranking yesterday morning I had only been eight points away from the number one spot. I could very well be there this morning.

Four had been absolutely thrilled with my progress lately. As had Eric, but he hadn't been there to see it. Through three more midnight sessions with Four, he had taught me how to save my sister. As it turned out, it was possible. I had been forced to turn and run in a sprint to be able to shove the Factionless man to the ground before he could reach Mom. From there a Dauntless guard would come and take him away. As cruel as it was, Factionless weren't even supposed to be in the main City areas.

Speaking of my new sister, just the other day my Mom had sent me a letter that was a sonogram, showing me my sister for the first time. Eric had brought me the letter during dinner, written in my mother's loopy hand. I could tell she had been excited when she had written it. The letters were messy. I had been so happy that I had nearly kissed Eric. Which would have been a bad idea. Thankfully Heather had noticed and she had thought to grab me in a hug first.
As I shifted slightly in the bed once more I gave another shiver. The apartment was freezing this morning. The same way that we had left off a week ago Eric had left the balcony door open last night. But we hadn't fooled around out there. It was too damn cold. The weather had taken a dive in the past week. It was getting towards winter and the harsh wind was proof. We hadn't lasted long out there.

We had each taken a cup of coffee and crammed together in the only chair out on the balcony. It had probably been a sweet sight. I had been draped in his sweater and sitting on his lap, laughing together like we didn't have a care in the world. I just wished that every day could have been like the past few. But I knew that in another five weeks, when training ended, Jeanine Matthews would have me right where she wanted. I was going to find out what 'hold for Phase Three' meant.

But that was a problem for another time. Right now my only problem was how bloody cold Eric's stupid apartment was. I wanted to pick up the blanket, but I would have to officially wake up. Maybe it was time for me to wake up anyways. In the meantime, maybe all that hot air in Eric's head left him unaffected.

"You happened to ever read Dante's Inferno?" I asked Eric.

He didn't even bother to look up at me. I figured that he had already known that I was awake. "I have," he said.

"Well it feels like Cocytus in here," I said.

In the book, Cocytus was the ninth circle of hell and it was where Lucifer himself resided. He was frozen up the neck in ice and his wings were so huge that when they beat they would send icy chills through the air on the entire circle. It was always one of my favorite stories, despite being banned in Amity.

Even from all the way back in the bed I could see the smirk in Eric's eyes. He was intensely focused on the bacon and I nearly laughed. It was already burning. I could smell it. Although my bacon had tasted more like rubber. I wasn't sure which one I preferred. The only thing that Eric made that was really stellar were drinks. He was better than the bartender. Maybe if he had ranked lower during his initiation that was what he would have done.

"Get off your lazy ass and close the door then," he said.

I rolled my eyes but stood anyways. "Don't be rude," I teased.

He glanced back at me and scoffed, turning back to the bacon. I thought about closing the door but decided against it. Instead I grabbed Eric's discarded sweater from the night before and pulled it on, heading into the kitchen. I hopped up on the counter and watched Eric stare down at the pan. His gaze alone was probably enough to burn the meat that I was sure was already well past burnt.

"Isn't that burning?" I asked.

Eric merely shrugged as he left the stove and turned to me. "It's not," he said.

"I'm pretty sure that it is," I said.

"I don't care."

One of these days I was sure that he was going to burn this place down. But he was right about not caring. I'd rather just spend time with him. His fingers hooked around the bottom of the sweater as he stepped closer to me. I smiled softly as he grabbed the bottom of the sweater and yanked it over my
head. I opened my mouth to complain but Eric beat me to it.

He grabbed the back of my head and pulled me into him for a harsh kiss. It immediately stopped any complaints that I might have had beforehand. He yanked me across the counter towards him and I moaned softly. He was always warmer than me and right now I drank it in. Eric grabbed the garment in his hands and tossed it to the floor.

"Hey wait, I wanted that," I said, breaking away from him.

He merely shrugged his shoulders and smirked. "Too bad. It's mine and I want it over there," he said.

I rolled my eyes. "You're such a five year old sometimes," I pointed out.

He grinned sideways at me. I knew that he only did that because he knew that it would bother me. Not that I didn't do things to bother him all the time. I leaned into him slightly to kiss the spot right over his clavicle. He let out a low growl as he grabbed my hair and pulled me away from him, placing a searing kiss on my mouth.

"Besides, you look better without it. Without this too," he said.

His hands dropped to remove the shirt from my body - the only article of clothing that separated us from each other - before I smacked his hand away. I was starving. All I wanted was to get some food in me before I could think about anything like that. Of course Eric took it the other way.

"Prude," he growled.

I shook my head and laughed. "After what we did last night you're going to call me a prude?" I asked.

Eric smirked and nodded at me. "I don't remember what we did. You'll have to remind me," he teased, pressing his mouth against the crook of my neck.

In all honesty, I knew that he did remember what we had done last night. He knew that no prude would do anything that we had done last night. I was sure that his neighbors had gone to find somewhere else to sleep. Not that I cared. Eric was a leader and no one would say anything against him.

"I intend to remind you," I whispered.

"So do it."

"Food first. Feed me and you can do whatever the hell you want to me," I told him honestly.

"Deal."

Eric smirked at me and tugged on a strand of my hair before turning and walking away, heading to the bacon. He grabbed the strips out of the pan and split them up on two plates, giving himself a few more than me. He set down a plate for himself at the stool in front of the kitchen sign before sliding the other plate over to me.

"Thanks," I said softly.

The two of us sat together as I leaned over the plate and began eating. It was definitely burned. Once we were allowed to go out in public we would have to eat only in the dining room. We were going to poison each other if we kept trying to cook. Eric pulled on a pair of black underwear and I
grinned.

"I liked you the other way better," I said, biting off a tiny piece of bacon.

He looked up from his plate to give me a suggestive smirk. "Then come here and take them off," he said.

I returned his smirk and decided to take the challenge. "No problem," I growled.

Breakfast could wait. I hopped off of the counter and sauntered over to Eric. He watched me come closer to him as I took a step between his legs, reaching my arms up and tugging on his hair. Which he hadn't bothered to brush. He wrapped one arm around my lower back and tugged me flush against him.

We were standing right together as I let my hands very slowly trace up his legs. I could feel him shivering at my touch. I smiled and pushed my mouth against his. He tasted almost like someone would have after a night of barbecued vegetables at Amity. The thought made me smile. To think about how different the two Factions were, but little things like that could happen to show me that we weren't so different. The kiss lasted for a long while before I sighed and backed away from him.

"I don't recall saying you could leave," Eric growled.

His hands tightened on my back and I smiled at him. "I don't recall asking your permission," I snapped back.

Eric glared at me as I looked up at the clock. It was already well past seven. I needed to be down to training in just under thirty minutes and the longer I hung around here the more I would have to try and explain to Four why I was late. I might have made it on time but I didn't want to risk it. Especially not when Four would know what I was doing to make me late.

"It's late, I gotta get to training," I told Eric, who merely shrugged.

"Four has to listen to me. I can tell him you had business to attend to beforehand," he said.

"I have to be at training. I can't be late again," I whined.

"I don't care. Four won't know," Eric hissed.

I had to hold back a laugh. Sometimes I forgot that Eric didn't know that Four knew about us. I hummed under my breath and moved a little closer to him. Maybe I could risk being just a few minutes late. Four would understand. I moved in between Eric's legs again and he smirked, grabbing me tightly. His lips met mine once more and I smiled as Eric's tongue dipped into my mouth. Despite the fact that I knew he hadn't drank since last night, he still tasted like alcohol. He always did.

"Get over here," Eric purred.

He mumbled it against my lips and I laughed, moving into him a little more. He didn't need to tell me anything more than that. All I wanted was to be near him. His hands wound their way over my waist as he grabbed me underneath my thighs and lifted me up to straddle his lap, keeping our mouths connected the entire time.

His hips lifted to meet mine and I let out a soft moan into his mouth. I could feel Eric's lips turn upwards at the knowledge that he could affect me like that. His hands traveled down to the hem of the shirt and I felt him bunch the material up, about ready to pull it free from my shoulders. But before he got the chance to do so, the door to Eric's apartment flew open. God damn it!
Short on time, I panicked and flung myself off of Eric, immediately remembering that our relationship was against Dauntless rules. I looked for a place to hide myself but I knew that it was too late. There was a soft laughter coming from the door and I glanced back up. I suppose if anyone were to see the two of us like that it was a good thing that it was him. Cameron was leaning against the frame of the door as he slammed the door shut. I blushed a magnificent red and took a few steps behind the counter.

"Good morning, kids. Sorry to interrupt. Good to see you, Alex," Cameron greeted.


"Eric, never wasting a moment," he joked.

Instead of laughing with Cameron, he snapped. "Get out!" Eric yelled.

Cameron merely laughed and walked past Eric, patting him on the shoulder. I smiled slightly at the scene. Had anyone else done that Eric would have laid them out. Cameron walked into the kitchen towards where I was standing and I smiled when he wrapped his arms around me. Although I was hyper aware that Eric's shirt was the only thing that I was wearing.

"Interesting timing you have," I teased Cameron.

He smiled at me. "I have a knack for it," he responded.

"What do you want?" Eric hissed.

A small smile fell over Cameron's face as he released me. "Well I just came to say hello but I didn't realize that I would be interrupting something," he said with a smirk.

He turned his head away from Eric and me, the former who was muttering cruel curses, and looked around the room. I followed his line of sight and blushed. The blankets on his bed were thrown everywhere and our clothes were scattered throughout the room. It was all obviously revealing what we had been doing last night.

"You weren't interrupting something," I said awkwardly, knowing that Cameron wouldn't believe me.

"That so?" Cameron asked. I nodded dumbly. "I see someone was in a rush last night. Or maybe this morning." I smiled and looked down at my bare feet. "Alex, you weren't thinking of being late to training, were you?"

Another blush rose to my face as I smiled at Cameron, giving a little laugh. "Ask your friend," I said, motioning towards Eric.

Eric was going to make me late for training. Cameron laughed loudly as Eric glared at me. "That sounds about right," Cameron said.

"Anyways, I think I'm going to go now," I said, now that Eric had someone else to mess with.

As much as I would have liked to hang around, it was time for me to head out and get to training. I'd been late enough. Four was going to kill me if I kept making myself late for everything. I walked through the room and grabbed my shirt and shorts, continuing to hunt for my underwear, bra, and jacket. Not to mention my shoes. Where the hell did all of my clothes go? They seemed to always go missing at the most inconvenient times.
Cameron was poking fun at Eric as I hunted for my clothes. I knew that Eric was fuming. I was a little upset too. I had wanted a quick go with Eric. As I searched the room there was a knock at the door and I tensed. It wasn't Four. And he was the only other member that knew about us. As I glanced back at the other men I saw that they had straightened up as well.

"Get the door!" Cameron hissed at Eric, who jumped up and began to tug on the clothing that was the closest to him.

Cameron turned to me and I nearly cried out. "Where do I go?" I asked desperately.

"Just get those with you. Under the bed," he said as I grabbed my clothes in my hand and shimmied myself under the bed. "Go. Go!" Cameron shoved me underneath the bed quickly.

It was a little tough to find my spot underneath it. Cameron began to shuffle the blankets over my hiding spot and I managed to find a little crevice where I could see out of. I saw Eric pull on his pants and toss the sweater that I had been wearing moments before over his head. He walked over and opened the door to reveal Max. Both men looked unconcerned as they stepped back to let the leader into the apartment. My stomach twisted in knots. This was the worst person that could be here right now.

Max moved to the side to enter the room and I slapped a hand over my mouth when I saw that it wasn't just Max. It was all of the leaders in Dauntless. I didn't know their names but I recognized the leader tattoos. There seemed to be a few other important people here as well. And in the background Jeanine Matthews and Jack Kang were speaking softly. Damn it. What were all of these people doing here? Why were they in Eric's apartment?

"Good morning, Eric. Cameron," Max greeted.

"Morning."

"Morning."

Both Eric and Cameron sounded very stiff. "I didn't realize that you two weren't ready yet," Max commented.

He was still standing in the threshold of the room. But the others were all still out in the hallway. "We were about to leave," Cameron said quickly.

"May we come in for a moment?" Max asked.

I wasn't fool enough to know that it wasn't a question. Eric had done that to me enough times. "Of course," Eric said.

He moved off to the side. The members of their little group came walking into the room and I watched as they all fanned out near the door. I knew that somewhere in the room were the rest of my clothing and some of Eric's too. I scuttled back under the bed a little further and nearly shrieked as something rubbed against my leg.

As I glanced down I saw that it was only a pair of my torn underwear. So that's where they went. I knew that my clothing had to be going somewhere. I knew that we hadn't destroyed all of it. I suppressed the urge to scoff as I looked back out into the living room to see what was happening. Eric had scooted into the kitchen and I quickly realized what he was doing. He was knocking over the picture of me in the red dress.

"Can I inquire to what this visit is for?" Eric asked. I had to hand it to Eric. He was good. Even in a
I shifted slightly so that I could see Max standing a few feet away from the bed. I had the most terrible feeling that he knew that I was here. "A few meetings here and there today. I have some with Jeanine and Jack. You have a few as well. They've been scheduled on the board in your office. You might want to check it out soon. Your first meeting is at ten," Max informed him.

Both Eric and Cameron were moving enough to keep the attention on them. They clearly wanted to make sure that no one was looking over to my pathetic hiding space. "Alright. Thank you," Eric said.

Max nodded blankly. It felt like my skin was crawling as Jeanine's cold eyes ran over the room. She stopped on each of Eric's garments and I noticed her eyes brighten when she tracked my underwear and bra. Both were lying near the sliding glass door that led to the balcony. Damn me. They were right there. Her eyes followed the pathway of clothes to the bed and I knew that she was smirking at the ruined sheets. She had to know that I was here somewhere. Her smile said that she did.

"Is there anything else?" Eric asked, breaking the silence.

Everyone had been looking over the mess and I was grateful that Eric had broken the awkward silence. "Yes. One last thing," Max said. Eric nodded and motioned for the man to continue. "I'm looking for an initiate of yours. An initiate that's just taken over the top ranking spot. Quite impressive."

Thankfully I hadn't made a noise to indicate that I knew what he had been talking about. Honestly I'd almost let it out. Ensuring that I wouldn't make a noise, I immediately covered my mouth. Taken over the top spot? That must have been me. I must have taken over the top spot this morning. But that meant that Max was looking for me. Why? He'd only spoken to me once that I could remember. I wasn't even sure that he knew what my name was.

"The Amity transfer. Alex, I believe her name is," Max said.

There went my theory that Max didn't know my name. Even from here I could see the muscles in Eric's jaw tighten. He clearly didn't like that Max was looking for me. "I'm not sure why'd you be coming to me for this, Max. I don't keep tabs on the initiates and after Phase One I don't have much to do with them. Four would be a better person to go check with," he said.

I knew that he was just trying to get Max out of the apartment. Max merely smiled. "Perhaps I'll do just that. You just seemed a little close with her. I thought that you might know where she's hiding," Max told Eric.

The tangled hair on the back of my neck stood on end and goosebumps began to spread over my entire body. It was the way that he said it. The mere fact that he had said that I was hiding. Did that mean that Max knew that I was in here? Or did his words reveal something more sinister? It made me sick to my stomach. Nothing made me happier than when Cameron stepped forwards and in between the two men, clearly trying to diffuse the tension that could have been cut with a knife.

"Max, perhaps I can give you a hand in finding her. I could have sworn that I saw her in the halls earlier," Cameron said.

"Did you?" Max asked curiously.

Clearly he wanted everyone out of the room as much as Eric did. "Maybe we can still catch her. Shall we?" Cameron offered.
It wasn't really a question, considering that he was holding out his arm for the men to leave the room with him. Max nodded and led Cameron from the room. As the other leaders and Jack Kang left the room I noticed that Jeanine Matthews stayed seated. She was sitting on the same stool that Eric had held me in his lap in just a few minutes ago. Max and Cameron stopped walking the moment that they realized that Jeanine was not following them.

"Jeanine," Max called to her.

I noticed Eric watching her with sharp eyes. He seemed to trust her about as much as I did. "That's a nice jacket, Eric. Although it looks a little small for you," she said, motioning to my jacket, which was on the floor from last night.

My stomach rolled over. I knew what she meant. Jeanine's eyes were sparkling and it became quickly obvious that she knew that it wasn't his. Obviously it wasn't his. The chest had excess material that was strictly a female design. Eric grunted irritably at her and Jeanine smiled before walking out of the apartment. Eric followed them and threw the deadbolt on the door, leaving just the two of us in the room. Eric turned back and walked back over to the bed.

"Come on out," Eric called.

I nodded and squirmed awkwardly out from under the bed. He tossed the blankets that were over my hiding spot back onto the bed and gave me a hand up. I brushed myself off and glared at my previous spot. Eric really needed to dust under his bed or something. Just in case I would have to hide under there again.

"Why does Max want to talk to you?" Eric asked.

I shrugged my shoulders, running my fingers through my hair. "Your guess is as good as mine," I said.

Eric merely narrowed his eyes. "Why?" he repeated.

"I'm not sure, Eric. But I guess I should be getting gone. Something tells me that Max isn't the type to like waiting," I said.

Making Eric mad was one thing but making Max mad was probably something on a completely different level. I turned back to the bed where I had left my clothes and grabbed them to get changed. I was about to lift Eric's shirt over my head and get changed when his hand shot out to stop me. Turning back to ask him what he was doing, I was cut off by the sly smirk that had once more returned to Eric's face. He certainly wasn't thinking about anything good.

"Can't go to a meeting with a Dauntless leader without taking a shower first," he said.

I laughed and nodded at him. He was partially right. I probably smelled like liquor and sex. I smiled and turned to head into Eric's bathroom. So maybe I would get that morning romp in. When I saw that Eric wasn't following me I grabbed his hand and dragged him with me. He chuckled under his breath as I shut the door behind him and stripped off the shirt. Eric was disrobing when I stepped into the shower and turned the water on. The heat of the water running over me immediately made my muscles relax.

Part of me was dying to know what it was that Max wanted from me. I couldn't think of a single damn thing that he would actually want to discuss with me. Maybe a possible job for being the top ranked initiate? Maybe talking about joining up on leadership? I wasn't sure. In the back of my mind I had a feeling that I didn't want to know. But I could only avoid Max for so long. The door behind
me opened and I moved forward so that Eric could have room.

He didn't speak as he walked into the shower. I merely moved out of the stream so that he would be able to use the shower. He quickly stripped and walked up behind me. He shifted my hair in front of my shoulders so that one of his hands could work their way up my spine and rest on my neck. I sighed and leaned back against his hard chest.

"Damn that feels good," I groaned, dropping my head back.

Eric leaned forward and placed his mouth against the crook of my neck. "Does it?" he asked.

I hummed softly as his mouth slid upwards to the back of my ear. "I wish I didn't have to go to training," I moaned.

He hummed back at me as one hand traveled back over my neck and slid down my spine. It made every muscle in my body and each bone in my spine tense. I could tell that he was laughing at me, judging by the rumbling that was echoing through my body. I rolled my eyes at him. Not that I would ever admit it, but Eric's touch did things to me that I had never felt with anyone else. They were things that I knew no one else would ever make me feel.

"Five weeks and your training is over," he mumbled in my ear.

I sighed under my breath. "It still seems so far away," I muttered.

"Goes fast."

"I hope so."

"Don't you dare think that you're leaving this room once it's over," Eric growled.

I laughed and shook my head at his words. "I don't want to," I said, reaching back and grabbing his forearm.

"Even if I have to tie you down."

"I might like that," I said teasingly.

It didn't work the way that I wanted it to. Eric growled under his breath and shoved me forward. I grunted as I was trapped between the shower wall and Eric's body. My heart was thundering in my chest. I did feel the slightest bit flattered that Eric wanted to keep me in his apartment once training was over. His hand worked its way to the front of me and slid over my stomach, just barely dipping above where I wanted him most.

"Maybe I'll tattoo my name right here," Eric purred.

The tips of his fingers were dragging over the bottom of my stomach. It made the butterflies start to act up slightly. I laughed once more and shoved back against him. Partly to get him off of me and partly for the comment. He wouldn't dare do that. I hadn't even thought about the bet in a while. But he was right. We still owed each other tattoos.

"If you do that I'm putting my name right here," I told him, reaching back and letting my nails run down his most sensitive spot.

His entire body gave a little jerk. I laughed under my breath and shoved back against him. He grunted as I accidentally hit him a little harder than I'd meant to. In response - feeling a little bad for
almost hurting him - I gently ran my nails down his lower stomach. It made all of his muscles tense. I heard his intake of breath and smirked at myself. He wasn't the only one that could do little things like that to the other.

"That's cute Amity. You think that something like that would bother me," he said.

There was a little laugh in his voice. It made the corner of my lips turn upwards. In all honesty I had thought that something like that would bother him. He probably just thought that it was a turn-on. He must have liked having someone that could at least try and control me. So I decided to try with another approach.

"No," I hissed.

He merely laughed, clearly not thinking that I was telling him the truth. "Oh?" he asked.

"I just want to let everyone know who that really belongs to," I mumbled back.

Eric's hands stilled on my body and his grip tightened almost painfully. He clearly hadn't been expecting me to say something like that. I hadn't really been expecting it to come out either. It had more slipped out. But it wasn't a lie. It was the truth. I hated thinking that Sarah had once laid her hands all over him. And probably a million girls before her. I knew that there had at least been a large number. Eric turned me around to him and shoved me back against the wall. His lips hit mine and I sighed deeply.

Groaning into his mouth, I let one leg hang over his hip as he brought me closer to him. Evidently he thought that my momentary possessiveness was hot. It was a trait that we both shared. His lips dropped down to my neck and I gave a few guttural moans as his teeth grazed over my throat. He knew every little button that he could push on me.

"You do that Amity, and I'll be impressed. But just know, you're always going to be mine," Eric growled.

"I might like that," I said teasingly.

The corners of Eric's lips turned upwards as he tightened his grip around my waist and yanked me into him. Our lips met in a harsh kiss and I smiled into it, wrapping my arms up and looping them around his shoulders. We kissed for a long time and I sighed as Eric's hands made their way from my back and hips over my body. My entire body was tingling as his fingers dug into my skin and kept us attached at the hips.

As his hands tightened on me I moaned loudly, hearing it echo off of the walls. Of course it only lasted for so long before Eric broke away from me to wash his hair. At least we still had time. As he walked back under the water I watched him closely, rubbing his soap over my arms. As I looked around I couldn't help but to wonder if I was going to get an apartment like this once I was a member. Or if we would all get apartments. I couldn't imagine that they would keep us in the horrible initiate bunks forever.

"Am I going to get an apartment when training is over?" I asked.

Eric washed out the last bit of shampoo in his hair and turned back to face me. I walked back to the water and closed my eyes as Eric's hands ran over my arms, running the soap off of them. His hands dropped down to my hips but he didn't look at them. He was staring into my eyes and I had to repress a shiver. His eyes were so startling. I had thought that they were cold once upon a time. Now I saw the teasing gleams and happy sparks.
"Yes. Depending on where initiates finish in final rankings, they get their apartment assignments according to it. People that have guard duties, like on the Fence or in Factionless sectors, get the smaller apartments. Leaders get larger ones. Some Dauntless born choose to live with their families for a while. Others choose to move in with friends or significant others," he said.

The stupid part of me wanted to ask if he would ever let me move in with him. But that would have made both of us uncomfortable and I didn't want to push it. Maybe if I didn't want to live alone I would ask Heather if she wanted to get an apartment together. I had a feeling that she would want to move in with Cole. An apartment to myself wouldn't be bad. But I had a feeling that Eric would make an appearance more than once. If I lived that long. I shook my head. I had to stop thinking like that.

"Maybe I'll take this apartment," I teased.

Eric laughed at me. "You can pry it from my cold dead hands," he growled. "You can stay when you want."

That surprised me. Was he offering to let me stay with him. "Really?" I asked.

His hands tightened on my hips again. "As long as you let me do whatever I want," he groaned against my neck.

"Deal. I can't wait to be away from that stupid cot," I muttered.

Eric grinned sideways and kissed me. I sighed into his mouth and tilted my head back so that the water rushed over our heads. His hands were tight on my stomach as he crushed me against him. It hurt a little bit but I didn't want to tell him that. I just wanted him closer. Eric shoved me back into the wall of the shower and I shivered at the sudden intrusion of cold.

"I'm sorry, are you cold?" Eric asked.

His eyes were gleaming with amusement and I rolled my eyes. Leave it to Eric to make me feel like a fool. "Not at all, asshole," I growled.

Without giving him a second to say anything more in retaliation, I shoved him backwards and backed him into the other wall. He laughed softly, obviously surprised by my sudden actions. He watched me with dark eyes as I leaped up into his arms. He laughed and caught me at the last minute, kissing me deeply. His tongue invaded my mouth and I responded, fighting against him for dominance. Not that I would win, but I would always want to try.

Things might have been getting complicated, and this certainly wasn't helping, but as his hand dropped lower on my body I couldn't bring myself to care. All I wanted was to be with him. He tilted my head back a little more as his hands wrapped in my hair and he tugged me towards him. I bit down softly on his lip. That was all that it took as Eric shoved my legs apart.

He placed himself in between my thighs and I smiled softly as his feet slipped against the shower floor. We were probably going to end up dying. Not that either one of us minded. His head moved from my lips to my neck, leaving a bruise in his wake, before landing at the juncture of my neck and shoulder. A sharp shiver shot through my body at the sudden contact and I rubbed myself against him. He knew that I wanted him. And that meant that he was not going to give me what I wanted.

Without giving me a chance to do anything back to him, he backed his hips away from me and I let out a pathetic whine. All I wanted was him, while I could still have him. Eric merely laughed and nipped against the already tender skin. My breathy sigh bounced off of the shower walls. Another
shiver shot through me as I wrapped my legs tighter around his waist. He ground his hips down against mine and I let out another soft groan. He knew exactly what to do to me.

Leaning closer towards him I kissed down the leadership tattoos and left a small mark just underneath where his vest would come up to. He let out a dark moan at the feeling and I smirked into his neck. Knowing that I could do anything to him sent a sharp pleasure shoot through me. I gently ran my nails down his back, hearing Eric hiss at the slight pain. His head fell back slightly so that he could let out a little moan.

Eric's hands wound their way over my chest and came down to rest on my thighs, squeezing underneath the skin tightly. It was almost painful. His fingers were tight against me and they were leaving marks, but I couldn't have cared less. We always seemed to be leaving marks on each other. It was nice. I enjoyed being able to mark someone as my own. Although I wished that he would be a little more discrete about where he put his marks on me.

It didn't matter. All I wanted was to feel him against me. Eric's hands tightened against me a little more before one of them ran up my thighs. His finger brushed against my core and I moaned softly. It reverberated off of the glass walls as I shoved my center against his finger. He merely laughed and pulled the finger away. I whined softly and tried to buck up to him once more.

"Eric," I groaned, as he lifted his lips up to meet mine once more.

He merely laughed again. His lips were searing against mine as his tongue forced its way inside of my mouth. As much as I wanted to prove that I was tougher than him, I didn't bother. I allowed myself to melt into him. Our tongues wound together as his finger stroked against me. His finger circled my clit but I was unable to moan through Eric's assault on my mouth. My entire body gave a soft shudder as he gently fingered around my clit.

His hand that wasn't busy playing with me left my thighs and I wrapped myself tightly around him, not planning on ending up on the floor of the shower. His hand grabbed the roots of my hair and he yanked it back. I hissed at the feeling, somewhere between pain and pleasure, as his finger finally dipped inside of me. A flurry of curses escaped my mouth as Eric pushed me up against the wall of the shower roughly. I thrust my hips forward to meet his finger and he laughed against my lips.

"Eager, are we?" Eric asked.

Of course I was, but I wasn't about to tell him that. I let one of my hands slip off of his neck and use to grab his member. Eric groaned and his eyes slipped closed as I squeezed it once. His hand tightened underneath my thigh so painfully that I was sure that he would tear the skin there. But it still felt incredible. As I tightened my grip on Eric's member, he groaned again. My name spilled from his lips as I began to pump slowly up and down his length.

He pulled his finger out of me before plunging another two in with it. A soft gasp escaped my mouth and I groaned as my walls stretched to accommodate him. His fingers curled inside of me as my grip against him tightened slightly. His mouth dipped from my mouth to my breast, catching a nipple in between his teeth. He yanked softly on it and I cried out, bucking my hips roughly against him. He laughed against my breast and I groaned once more. God I wanted him in me.

His back arched slightly as my nails dug into his skin. My grip on him tightened once more as I began to pump up and down his shaft. I heard a few curses from him as well as he began to twist my other nipple in his hands. I was throbbing as his fingers worked inside of me and my head fell into Eric's shoulder at the feeling. I wanted nothing more than for him to thrust himself in me. But he knew that it was what I wanted and he was going to take his time.
His fingers went completely inside of me and I panted as he stopped pumping them and instead curled inside me. Juices were beginning to run down my thighs and mix in with the water. I knew that it wouldn't be long before I came undone. My breathing was getting shallow and my entire body had tensed as spasms were slowly starting to take over my body.

His mouth finally left its assault on my breast as he came back up to kiss me once more. I groaned into his mouth as his fingers left me, trailing up and back around my thighs. His hands grabbed my thighs before shoving them apart so that the side of each of my thigh was pressed against the glass wall of the shower. He pried my hand off of him before coming to stand against me.

We were just a few inches apart from each other. I thought that he would say something, but he didn't. He gave me no chance to prepare for him as he shoved himself in me. Even through his kiss I let out a loud yell at the sudden intrusion. A sharp roll of pain washed over me and I let my head fall back. Eric ignored the slight pain that I was now in. Instead he continued to move against me and, after a few seconds, the pain turned into pleasure. Hips hips were hitting mine painfully as he pumped in and out of me.

My hands wound their way up to tangle in his hair again. He grunted as my nails scratched against his scalp roughly, shoving his hair out of place. His hands were tight on my thighs, keeping them apart as he shoved himself into me. The position that we were in was making him hit all the way against my deepest spot and I moaned loudly, calling out Eric's name a few times. My back was thrust back into the tile wall. It was slightly uncomfortable, but the pleasure that I was feeling overruled it.

Eric growled deep in his throat as he shoved himself into me and leaned forward to give me a quick kiss. His tongue forced its way into my mouth and I moaned as the strokes of his tongue followed his strokes into me. They were quick and hard. I rolled my hips against him and he groaned once more, grabbing my hair and yanking my head back. His teeth scraped over my neck before biting roughly against my clavicle. All that did was make me call his name once more.

To my surprise Eric pulled out of me and dropped me against the floor. I thought that he might rearrange the position that we were in, as I figured that I had been getting too heavy for him, but he merely stared at me. I stood staring at him, wondering what the fuck he had stopped for. The moment that I opened my mouth to ask him, he cut me off.

"Over there. Now," he growled at me, barely able to form words.

Obviously he wanted something that I couldn't understand. I turned back to see that he was motioning to the stoop where someone could sit to shave. I nodded at him and walked on weak legs over to the stoop. My legs were still shaking from our actions. Clearly I wasn't moving fast enough as Eric grabbed me and shoved me against the stoop.

"Bend over," he ordered.

It definitely wasn't something that anyone from Amity would have said. I didn't bother to argue so I did as he said. He once more gave no warning as he shoved into me. One of his hands wrapped around my waist to stroke my clit and the other wrapped itself into the roots of my hair. He pulled me up slightly so that I had nothing to lean against except for his chest.

Pain was rolling through my scalp but it was nothing compared to the pleasure that was rolling through my core. Our back and chest were pressed together as he kept our bodies practically melded together. He was holding my back against my torso as he shoved into me. His thrusts were jolting me forward slightly and I panted loudly as he continued to enter me from behind.
"Eric," I moaned breathlessly. He gave a sharp thrust in response. "Fuck me harder."

My head dropped back onto his shoulder and my hand wound backwards to wrap around the back of Eric's neck. He was looking over my shoulder, spotting my chest bounce up and down. Eric easily took my order to fuck me harder. His thrusts became harder and sharper as he pounded almost painfully into me. My entire core was throbbing as I began to tighten around him. He was the one person that could always do this to me. It didn't take him long to get me to this.

His thrusts were getting harder and more desperate as he grabbed my hips and ordered me to put a leg up. I did so and gasped as he turned me around to face him, half seating me against the stoop. He jammed himself into me and pressed our mouths together. But the kiss was open-mouthed and heated. A sharp wave of pleasure shot through me as I leaned back and yelled out for him one last time. Pleasure began to roll through my body as my head hung back and I let out a stream of profanities.

It wasn't long after that that Eric followed. He pumped himself into me a few more times before I could feel him release himself inside of me. I moaned against him as my body let off a few last spasms. He fell against me, his head falling into my chest. I groaned softly against him as he kissed against my chest once. He lifted his head up to kiss me on the lips before grabbing me and standing. I wrapped my legs back around him as he shut off the water and walked us out of the shower.

It always did astound me just how strong he was. I laughed against his lips as he walked us back to the bed and dropped me underneath him. Our lips moved together and tongues twined with each other's as we ground against each other. He hadn't pulled out of me yet and I let out a moan from the sensitive skin rubbing against me as he did. I laid on the bed, trying to catch my breath as Eric walked back into the bathroom and grabbed two towels. He tossed one to me and kept the other to himself.

Not long afterwards I found myself out in the living room of Eric's apartment, combing out the knots in my damp hair. I had one of his towels wrapped around my chest as he had one wrapped around his waist. He was in the kitchen, making himself some disgusting looking smoothie. It was green and reminded me far too much of something that I would have seen in Amity.

"What is that?" I asked.

"Try it and find out."

"No, thanks. I'd like to live."

"Big baby."

Laughing softly, I nodded. I didn't have time to hang around. I needed to get changed and find Max. Eric and I had taken a little longer than I had thought to actually make our way out of the shower. I grabbed my tight black pants and shimmied into them. It seemed that my underwear had moved again as I couldn't find them. I'd find them later. Instead I grabbed my bra and shirt, tossing them both over my head. The shirt was a little stretched out but I didn't bother with it. I didn't have any time to change.

As I straightened myself out and took a drink from the water glass sitting on Eric's counter, he turned back to me. "I'll let Four know that you're in a meeting and won't be there until later," he said.

"Thanks," I said, giving a quick glance up to the clock.

It was already approaching nine thirty. I probably wouldn't be able to make it to the fear sim room
until ten. And that would be at the earliest. I walked over to Eric and gave him a soft smile. He was staring at me sideways as I walked in between his legs. He was grinning, watching as I let my hands linger near the edge of his white towel and gave it a tug. As much as I really wanted to have another go, I knew that it was time for me to leave. But I wanted to mess around with him for a bit.

"Don't tease me like that Amity, I'll make you even later than you already are," Eric warned.

I smiled and nodded at him. "That so?" I asked.

No part of me doubted that he wasn't about ready to drag me back to the bed and make me another half an hour later. "Tug at it again and find out," he said.

"I don't think I'd mind that too much," I teased.

Eric smirked before tugging on my hair and giving me another kiss. I'd noticed that he never gave me little pecks or anything soft. They were always crushing and searing. Not that I minded. I wrapped my arms around his neck and dragged him closer to the edge of his seat. I pulled away from him after a moment and felt the growl from deep in his throat.

"Don't think that you're getting out of this. I want round two later," I said as I headed to the door.

There was a grumbling of his laughter behind me. It made me smile down at the ground. I turned quickly to flash a wink back at him and Eric laughed again. Had he been a little closer to me I knew that he would have done something. But I was already at the door so Eric just gave me a little smirk back.

"I look forward to it. Initiate," Eric added with a little snarl.

I smiled once more and turned away from him. Tonight was a training night with Four so I knew that I wouldn't be back until later tonight. Potentially nearing one in the morning. But I knew that he would still be awake. Eric wasn't one for turning in early. And we were never ones for telling each other what time to come by. It was just whenever one of us was free. Even if he was asleep I would be sure to wake him up.

Heading down the halls I began to hum a sweet tune under my breath. It was something that had never died from my time in Amity. I still liked to sing. I didn't do it around Eric though. He would never let me hear the end of it. A part of me did wonder if he might actually like my singing. I liked to think that I had a nice voice.

As I walked down the halls I thought about the new fear sim. I was sure that it was going to change today but I wasn't sure what it was going to be. Hopefully something that didn't involve Eric or Jeanine. Right now I didn't want to have to worry about them and what was going to come. Eric and I were doing well right now. I wasn't really sure what we were and I couldn't go out in public with him, but our relationship was good. But I wasn't foolish. I knew that it wouldn't be long before it came crashing down.

As I walked down the hallway I ran my hands through my hair and sighed. This was not the way that I had intended for my initiation into Dauntless to go. But no matter how fucked up it got at times, I knew that I wouldn't trade it for the world. I had made some of the best friends of my life, I was truly happy, and I was stronger than I ever had been. And there was Eric. Stupid, annoying, pompous, Eric. I wouldn't trade him for anything.

"Alex?" a man called.

I turned back to see Four and I smiled at him. "Hey, Four," I chirped.
"What are you doing out here? I was wondering where you were," Four said.

I stopped walking so that Four could catch up to me. Evidently no one had told Four that Max wanted to have a meeting with me. "Sorry, I was on my way to a meeting with Max," I said.

Four nodded at me with narrowed eyes. "Why does Max want to talk to you?" Four asked sharply.

"Uh - Cameron came and told me that he wanted to see me. Something about my new ranking. Number one, huh?" I asked Four.

"Yes, you are," Four said with a smile.

"That's pretty impressive. For a Softie, "I teased, using the same name that he had called me when he had first pulled me from the net all those months ago.

Four merely rolled his eyes at me. "I'm proud of you, Alex. I really am," he said.

I smiled at Four softly. As much of a hard ass as he was, Four really was a sweet guy. I just wished that someday he would get himself a girl. A good girl. He deserved one. "Thank you," I said softly.

"Just be careful, alright?"

"Of course."

"There's a lot of people here today. Jeanine Matthews, Jack Kang, even Johanna was here for a while earlier," Four said.

I perked up slightly. "Johanna's here?" I asked.

"She's gone already. Sorry," Four said.

I shrugged as we walked. It made no matter. The only thing that I would have wanted was for her to tell my parents that I missed and loved them. "That's okay," I muttered.

"Just... Don't say anything too stupid," Four ordered.

"I'm not that stupid!"

"I know. But these people are dangerous. And even though he doesn't always seem that way, so is Max," Four warned.

We walked up the stairs that took us up to the higher-up Dauntless member offices. "Thanks, Four. But I can handle myself. I'll let you know if anything off happens, alright," I promised.

As expected Four didn't agree right away. He merely scrutinized me for a moment before saying, "I'll hold you to that."

I went to head upstairs before stopping short. "Four? What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be helping the other initiates?" I asked.

He motioned for me to head up the stairs, which I did. "Ran out of the serum. They're waiting in the sim room while I go to get more," he said.

"Oh," I said dumbly, unsure of what else to say.

"Come on, I gotta head towards Max's office anyways. I'll walk you over there," Four said.
"Thanks."

As much as I would have loved to turn and run for my life far away from Max, I knew that I had to go to his office and see what he wanted. So I nodded, walking with him. He looked down at my shirt and a flush of color rose to my face. I was surprised that Four was an ex-Abnegation not an ex-Candor. He could always see right through me. So I glanced down at my shirt instead and cleared my throat.

"That shirt might be getting a little big for you," he said.

Even though he was scowling at me I could see the slight hint of amusement in his eyes. Damn Eric for stretching out my shirt. "Yeah? Well those pants are still hideous," I told him.

A bright smile rose to my face as the smirk faded from Four's. He stared at me with a scowl but I knew that I amused him. He was just broody. We would have to work on that one day. There were times that even Eric had a better sense of humor than him. And that was saying something.

"You're an ass," Four snapped.

"I'll tell you what. When you go and get different pants I'll go get a new shirt," I said with a little smile.

"I'll make that deal with you," Four said.

We both smiled at each other. We walked in silence for a few moments as we headed through the halls. I had only been here twice before and I didn't like either of those times. These places seemed so dark and lifeless. It was so much different than the rest of Dauntless. We passed Four's and Eric's office as we headed back to Max's. It was the only office to have an oak door rather than a metal one. A bundle of knots formed in my stomach as we stopped at the door.

"Alright, this is it. Head back to the sim room when you're done," Four ordered.

I nodded as I turned back to the door. "Alright," I said.

My hand hesitated on the door and Four took it upon himself to knock. I noticed that he still hadn't left my side. I knew that he didn't trust Max either, but maybe it went deeper than I thought that it did. If nothing else I felt a little stronger having Four at my side. Although I wasn't sure how long he would be allowed to stay for.

The door swung open and both Four and I grinned at Max. He was a reasonably friendly man but he still set my nerves on edge. Maybe it was because of the conversation that I had overheard. "Good morning, Alex. Good to see you," Max greeted.

Max had more tattoos than I had initially thought. It looked like his leadership tattoos went all the way down his neck and arms. And he was taller than I thought. Although Eric and Four still dwarfed him. But being not very tall myself, it was very easy for people to tower over me.

"Good morning, Max," I greeted awkwardly.

"I'm glad that Four was able to find you. Thank you Four, I can handle her from here," Max said.

Four nodded as Max stepped to the side. He looked like he was about to leave, but suddenly he stiffened. I turned to ask Four if he was alright but the words died in my throat. In the background of the room, standing right behind Max's desk, was Jeanine Matthews. What the hell was she doing here?
Jeanine's presence in the room had sent Four into protector mode. "I don't mind staying and waiting for her. If she needs someone to be able to vouch for her and how well she's been doing," Four said with a tight-lipped smile.

It was just an excuse for Four to be able to stay with me and I really appreciated it. Jeanine was still sitting on the windowsill behind the desk, smiling, probably knowing damn well that her being here made me uncomfortable. Max smiled at the two of us and I felt some bile rise in my throat. The last thing that I wanted was to be stuck in a room with Max and Four, but I also didn't want to make things any worse for him.

"Very sweet of you, Four. But I wouldn't be too concerned with Alex. We'll be sure to escort her out later. And this meeting may take some time," Max said, making me gulp.

"Waiting really wouldn't be that hard on me," Four said.

"You have the other initiates to attend to. Not to worry, she'll be down later," Max promised, giving me a small smile.

Four was not that easily deterred. "I can have Eric take over for the day," he insisted.

That might be worse for them. It would certainly be worse. I might manage to enjoy myself more than them. I would hate for them to have to go through a fear with Eric. I could only imagine how much they would hate that. Hell, I wouldn't want Eric looking at my fears. So I decided to take it upon myself. Max and Jeanine wouldn't kill me here. Not when Four, Cameron, Eric, Jack Kang, and the other Dauntless leaders knew that I was here. It would be dangerous for them to make a move right now.

"Four, it's alright. I think I'll be able to find my way back afterwards. I can have Max call you back if I get a little lost," I said.

"You sure?" Four asked, looking unconvinced.

"Yeah. Thanks though," I said, trying to plead him to leave with my eyes.

Four finally nodded and laid a hand on my shoulder. "Okay. I'll see you after," he said.

I really did want him to be able to stay but I knew that Max would not stand for it. "See you later," I said softly.

Max allowed Four to walk out the door before closing it softly behind him. If I hadn't been nervous before I sure as hell was now that Four was no longer with me. I felt like I was in a shark tank. They were two of the most powerful people in Chicago. They were not two people to have on your bad side. And I was sure that I was already on both of theirs. I shifted awkwardly in the doorway as I waited for Max to speak.

"Please, take a seat. This might take a while," Max said.

"Okay."

On shaky knees I walked over to a chair directly in front of Max and took a seat. The room felt much tenser without Four here. Max looked somewhere in between happy and somber. Just like always. Jeanine leaned on the window with a smile. I tried to look only at Max. Jeanine made me even more nervous.

"Tell us, Alex, how has training been for you?" Max asked.
Maybe this was a standard thing. But Four and Eric had seemed a bit concerned about this meeting. "Is everyone coming to speak with you about their training?" I suddenly blurted out.

I couldn't help it. I had the old habit of babbling when I got nervous. It would have been alright if it were just Max in here but Jeanine unhinged my nerves. Max merely smiled at me. It didn't seem quite friendly. More like he was amused. Almost glad that I was nervous.

"No. No one else," Max admitted.

"Oh."

"Honestly I wouldn't have even called you in but there's just something so curious about you," he continued.

I sucked in a breath. "Is that so?" I asked.

Was that why Jeanine Matthews was here? Were they here to rat me out about my Divergence? "An Amity member has never been in Dauntless before," he continued.

I let out a breath. They were here to talk about me becoming a Dauntless member. "So I've heard," I said.

"The closest one was removed after Stage Three. They didn't finish their Fear Landscape. Not to worry, I'm sure that you will," he said.

Maybe he was trying to be friendly but it set me off. "Thank you," I said.

"I'd just like to hear it from you. Very impressive, your story. Tell me about your training," Max said.

I pushed my shaking arms against my thighs, hoping to steady myself. "It's just like everyone else. I came in here and worked as hard as I could to ensure that I would get a good spot in Dauntless. I knew that I would have to work harder because I was an Amity. So I did. And it paid off," I said, praying that he would let me leave.

"Please, Alex. You're so modest," Jeanine said. I nodded, fighting to not narrow my eyes at her. "I've unfortunately only had the pleasure of speaking with you a few times, and each time we've had to watch what we say around each other. That's not the case here. Not today." The way she was looking at me sent shivers down my spine. "So tell me, what exactly have you thought about Dauntless training?"

"It's interesting," I answered awkwardly.

Both Jeanine and Max motioned for me to continue talking. "Explain," Jeanine prompted.

Now I really wanted Four here. "It's a little different than I thought that it would be. I mean you certainly start the initiates off right away. Climbing the side of the train station, jumping onto the moving train, and then jumping to the Dauntless roof. Not to mention the fall to the net," I said.

The start of training was one of the most intense things that I had ever experienced. Max was chuckling under his breath and I looked over at him. No doubt was he remembering his own initiation. I couldn't even imagine someone like Max jumping off of the roof or onto a train. Of course I knew that he was able to do both. He wasn't a leader for nothing.

"You couldn't have been that nervous. After all, you were the first jumper. That's quite the feat in Dauntless. Not even Four was the first jumper," Max said. I knew why Four hadn't jumped first. He
was afraid of heights. "I believe that it was Eric during his initiation year."

That wasn't a shock. "Of course I was nervous," I told Max, a little harsher than I had meant to. "We were being told to jump off of the roof of a building without being able to see what was at the bottom. It could have been a test of blind faith. A lesson. The first person could have jumped to their death and Eric could have turned around and told the rest of the initiates about trusting people blindly."

It was true. When I had been up on the roof I had been wondering whether or not it was a test of blind faith. More than once I had wondered if the jump would kill me before I'd actually jumped off. I supposed that I was just lucky that it wasn't. Instead of getting upset with my slightly snarky attitude Max just smiled at me. It was that smile that set me off.

"Fair point. But that's what makes you different from the others," Max said, making me cock my head at him.

"I'm not sure I know what you mean."

"They would have just jumped because they wanted to look brave. You jumped after long and careful deliberation. It's not an Amity trait though, is it?" Max continued.

Once more I cocked my head to the side. "I'm still not sure I understand," I said.

"I'd always heard that Amity were instinctual people. It seems to me like that's more of an Erudite trait."

Every inch of my body tensed as I stared sidelong at Max, doing everything in my power to avoid looking back at Jeanine. For the life of me I couldn't tell if Max was trying to hint at something or not. If Jeanine was here I was sure that he was hinting at something. I shifted awkwardly in my chair once more but managed to keep an even look on my face.

"I'm sorry Max, I'm not entirely sure that I understand what you're getting at," I said politely, hoping that Max would reassure me that we were not talking about what I was trying so desperately to hide.

Max merely smiled and waved me off. "Nothing dear. Just an old man's ranting," he told me with a little laugh. His smile was bright and I forced one on my face as well. Maybe he really didn't mean to say it. Although he wasn't a senile old man. Max wasn't even old. He seemed to be around forty to me. At the absolute oldest. "Tell me, how else have you fared in the initiation process?"

"I'm still here, so I think I've done alright for myself," I said.

"You've been quite something to watch. You've gone from twenty-first to number one in a matter of a few short months," Max said.

His words made me smile. I had made a staggering amount of progress in the last six and a half months. "It's been a tough road but not one that I would ever want to redo. I've had so much fun here in Dauntless. I know that this is where I truly belong. Initiation is hard but I know why you have us work like this. We need to be ready for absolutely anything. And I am," I said.

Even though I was looking at Max the last comment was directed at Jeanine. "We need that in Dauntless," Max said.

"Physical training hurt and sometimes it was hard to get out of bed but I always knew that I had to keep working. Mental and emotional training is even worse. But I know that it will all be worth it in a few weeks," I continued.
This time both Jeanine and Max smiled. "Spoken like a true Dauntless," Max said.

"Thank you."

"I must say it's rare to see someone improve like you have. You were only below the red line for a few days but still. To go from one of the worst to the best. Beating out even the best of the Dauntless born. It's something alright. You must have had some help. Friends are always good. So are the trainers. Even the leaders," Max said.

Once more I knew that Max was trying to hint at something. It was all from the way that he had said leaders. I was sure that some people were already suspicious of Eric and me, but there was no way that Max could know. He was the one person that I was sure would kick me out of Dauntless if he found out the truth.

"Of course. We all have support systems. My friends have been wonderful since I've been here. They are all going through the same things that I am at the same time. It's been good to have them around me. And even though I rarely see them I know that my family is supporting me too. The trainers have been wonderful. Four has worked wonders with all of the initiates," I told Max.

He nodded at me, leaning back in his chair and crossing his hands over his stomach. "There is a reason that Four is the trainer that works with the transfers," he said.

"I figured that there was a reason," I muttered.

"I could keep him in surveillance all year round but I feel that he's better used in training. What about the leaders?" Max asked.

I knew that he was trying to steer the conversation in that direction but I refused to make it easy. "You mean yourself?" I asked.

"Yes."

"I'm not sure, Max. I have no doubt that you're a good man and you care for Dauntless. But I just don't know you that well. Not that I blame you. I know you have better things to be doing," I said, giving a quick glance at Jeanine. "I don't know the other leaders that well. Other than Eric. His training methods are a little... harsh. But they work well enough. They helped me."

This time the smile on Max's face grew as I shifted slightly. "Yes. I've noticed that Eric seems a little fond of you," Max said.

The color drained from my face as I nodded numbly. "I suppose," I mumbled.

Suddenly I found myself not liking where the conversation was headed. "Not to worry. We all have our favorite initiates. The ones that we root for to do the best. In fact, it isn't just Eric that is rooting for you. We all are," Max said.

Alright so maybe Max wasn't thinking that it was an emotional attachment. Maybe he was just thinking that Eric liked me as an initiate. A potentially strong addition to Dauntless. I nodded, grateful that it didn't seem that Max knew what was going on between us. Or if he did maybe he was just ignoring it. Just the way that Four, Cameron, and Heather were doing.

"That's a nice jacket, Alex," Jeanine said.

My face heated up as I stared at the blonde-haired woman, who was giving me a sly smile. I knew that Jeanine had seen the jacket on Eric's floor this morning. It made my stomach churn nervously. I
knew that I should have grabbed the rest of my clothes before ducking under the bed.

"Thank you," I told her through gritted teeth.

She continued giving me her tight-lipped smile. Sensing the rising tension in the room, Max decided to step in. "We've brought you here for more than just your opinions on Dauntless training," Max said.

"Okay," I said, waiting for him to continue.

"I happened to be going through your file yesterday. I noticed something a little strange. You scored Amity on your Aptitude Test," Max said.

"Yes," I said, bile rising in my throat. I should have told Tori to put Dauntless on my Aptitude Test results.

I hated that Jeanine was here to hear this. At least Eric wasn't here. "What makes someone that scores Amity on their test come to Dauntless?" Max asked, seemingly genuinely curious.

It wasn't that I was the only person that hadn't scored Dauntless. Heather had gotten Candor. But she wasn't Divergent. She wasn't in the number one spot. She wasn't from Amity. I was different. That didn't change the fact that my heart was now thumping in my chest anxiously.

"I just knew that it didn't matter what the test said. I'm not Amity. And I think that I've proven that. I'm number one in the rankings. Maybe the test thought that I was Amity but I disagree. It's like you said, Ms. Matthews," I said, finally looking back over to where Jeanine was seated. "We are free to go wherever we feel, despite what the test tells us."

Instead of looking angry, Jeanine stood and smiled at me. "You're right, Alex," she said softly.

A chill shot down my spine as I watched her walk over to where Max's chair was. Whatever we had been speaking about was over. The air in the room had shifted drastically. "Thank you," I muttered.

"But you still picked where the test told you to go, didn't you?" Jeanine asked.

I nearly fell out of the leather chair at her words. "Excuse me?" I asked dumbly.

"Do you remember the trip to Amity you made?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Good. I do too. The Factionless were making a move. We now know what the move was. They were looking for people called Divergent's," Jeanine purred.

Had anything been in my stomach I would have tossed it up and onto the floor. Now I knew where this conversation was going. She really had been trying to bait me into saying something about what I was. The friendly smile had fallen off of Max's face and he was now staring at me through narrowed eyes.

"I don't know what that is," I muttered.

"They were looking for Aptitude Test results. Inconclusive. The Factionless gave up names. House numbers more than that. Yours was one of them. Not your mother. Not your father. Your room. They knew you down to the room," Jeanine said.

Her gaze narrowed at me. I knew that it wouldn't matter what I said about anything. She knew what
I was. There was no point in me hiding it. My eyes narrowed as I waited for her to continue but she
never did. The ball was in my court now. I had already known that Jeanine knew who I was and
now it was obvious that she had already told Max who I was as well.

"Get on with it. Enough of this back and forth," I sneered. The smile on Max and Jeanine's faces
only brightened at my words. "What do you want?"

Jeanine laughed softly and I found that it rocked me to my core. "You never do disappoint me.
Amity. Erudite. Abnegation. Dauntless. All of them. All but one. I now see why you didn't score
Candor as well," Jeanine told me with a smile that Max echoed. "It's impressive. I've never seen
someone like you. I want you to listen to me. I want you to do as I say. After the final testing, your
Fear Landscape, in five weeks you are to come to Erudite. You'll be a full member. No need for
someone to escort you. Which they will not. You'll come alone. You need to be there at eight.
They'll know where to send you. I have something that I need to show you."

Did that mean that she didn't want to kill me? It didn't matter. She wanted something from me and
she was not going to get it. Not while I had something to do about it. "And what if I say no?" I
asked.

Clearly that was the answer that she'd been banking on. "I'd suggest that you don't. Candor. I believe
you have two friends there right now. Iris Gelsey and Florian Rose," she said with a little lilt in her
voice.

The hair on the back of my neck stood on end. How did she knew about them? "Leave them out of
it," I snarled.

"Your friends here in Dauntless. Heather, Buck, Dante, Draven, Jax, Jet, and Cole. And the
and father. An unborn sister," she continued.

"You wouldn't dare," I hissed, believing that she wouldn't kill an unborn child.

"Four, Zeke, Uriah, Cameron, and Tori. So many more. All of them at risk. Would you place their
lives after your own?" she asked.

No. There was no way that I would let any of them die because I was afraid of going toe-to-toe with
Jeanine. There was no way that I was going to let her kill my friends or my family. If she wanted a
fight she was going to get one. But that didn't mean that I wasn't going to try and find a civil way out
of this.

"You're going to kill innocent civilians just because I don't come to you?" I asked.

She had me right where she wanted me. She knew my weak spots and I knew none of hers. "Not all
innocent. Not your sweetheart. Eric," Jeanine teased. So they did know about Eric and I. But we
weren't each other's sweethearts. She was only doing that to tease me. Max even gave a little smirk at
her words. "It's sweet. Honestly. I never saw Eric care about anyone. I never thought that he was
even capable of it."

"Then you obviously don't know him," I hissed.

"But I do. Even more than you do. But I was wrong. Now I see that he is. And how curious it is that
the girl he would find himself tangled with is one of the people that he's hunting. It's poetic, really,"
she said, laughing happily.

Jeanine had finally confirmed that he was working with her. There had to be a way to get him out of
"Leave him out of it," I snarled.

Eric was better than her. I knew that he was. She shook her head at me and took a few steps so that she stood to the side of Max's desk. I could kill her. I knew that I could. But Max would beat me to it. He might have been older but he was still a better fighter than me. I had no doubt in my mind about that.

"You think that he'll be left out of it? He's already in this. Too deep. Far too deep to get out. You honestly think that Eric won't figure out what you are? Or even better, he'll figure out what you are and still care for you?" she asked. I couldn't deny that her words sent a little pang of hurt through my chest. "He's my soldier. And a loyal one at that. You? You're nothing. Not to him." It only drove the knife in further. "To me. You could be my prize. I believe you're the one that I need. Which, mark my words, is the only reason that you're still alive. It's the only way that you're walking away from this meeting."

So there was a reason that I wasn't dead. She wanted me for something. "You honestly think that you could tell me all of this and I'll just lay back and watch? As you start a war on Abnegation? On the Divergent? Kill off the Factionless? Attack Candor for a serum? Track down the rest of the Divergent's?" I asked.

Her eyes widened and I smirked at her. So there was at least one place in this argument that I had the upper hand in. "You saw it," she growled lowly in her throat.

"Yeah, I saw your file in Erudite and I read it too," I sneered at her.

Max stepped forward, out of his chair, and he came to stand next to her. Both looked like they had won the lottery. "Very well done, Alex. But it's too late," Max told me and I raised my eyebrows.

"Excuse me?" I asked sharply.

"There are already entire Factions on our side. All of Dauntless. They'll be behind this," Max told me.

My jaw almost dropped, but I forced myself to remain calm. "You're lying. There's no way that you have all of Dauntless standing behind you," I growled.

"You're only one girl. A little Amity. What can you do against the entire Faction system? You have no one in your corner," he said. Wrong. I have Four. He was my ally in this. "You make one wrong move. Your friends, family. Everyone you love. Gone. There is nothing that you can do other than follow orders and be at Erudite at eight o'clock the night of your final test."

He was right. There was no way out of this. Not without shedding someone else's blood. My teeth grit tightly together. For a moment I thought that they were going to shatter from how tightly they were pressed together. There was nothing else that I could use against them. No one on my side that I could risk. Eric was already with Jeanine. No one at Amity could fight. Dauntless was behind Max's cause. They were right. Four was my last hope. They would know if I tried anything. I just needed to keep Eric in the dark for as long as possible.

"Anything else?" I asked them.

The smiles had come back to their faces. They were happy that they were winning. "Speak of this to no one," Max ordered.

"Okay," I said weakly.
"Enjoy the rest of initiation, Alex. Spend time with your friends and appreciate that number one spot. It will put you in a good position to be a leader here," he said.

I cocked my eyebrows at him. "Really? You still want me in position to be a leader?" I asked.

"You might be different but that doesn't mean that we don't want you on our side. Enjoy the last few weeks that you have with Eric. After all, the moment he realizes what you are... he might get to you before we can," Max said, laughing.

Jeanine joined in as I stood from the chair and turned to leave. I didn't need to hear that. As I turned and placed my hand on the wooden doorknob I was stopped by Jeanine's voice. "Have a nice day, Alex. Be sure to keep that ranking up there. We only want the best for our own," she said.

Furious with everything that they had been saying to me, I tried to force myself to leave. But I couldn't with the sound of their laughter. So I briefly turned back to see her smile at me. Shuddering slightly, I turned back and pulled the door open. As I walked out of the room and shut the door once more, I heard the two of them go back to chatting with each other. I knew that I should have stayed, but I didn't stay to hear what they were saying. All I wanted to do was get as far away from Max and Jeanine as possible.

So I turned on my heel and broke into a dead sprint. I dashed through the corridors as fast as possible - very nearly knocking down a few people that were in my way - before dropping against a wall near the hallway for the fear sim room. I would have to be in the fear sim room, but I couldn't go in yet. Not when I was feeling the way that I was. So I stopped in the hallway and breathed out weakly. It was one that I knew people barely walked through. I just wanted to be alone right now.

What the hell could Jeanine want from me? What did she want me to do? I didn't understand. The only thing that Four and Tori had told me was that they wanted me to know that being Divergent wasn't good. But I knew that much. They had told me that Jeanine thought that they were dangerous. Even the file in Erudite was saying that she wanted to eradicate people like me. Was there something that I didn't understand?

The whole thing made no sense to me. I had no idea what she could possibly want. She had said that there was something that she wanted to show me. Could it be a weapon that she was planning to use to kill me? I didn't think so. She had seemed like there was something that she genuinely wanted me to see. The question was, what did she want me to see?

And was there a chance that it was going to be the last thing that I saw? They had made it obvious enough that if I wasn't going to be helpful to them I was going to die. So that meant that I had better damn well be helpful. It wasn't that I was afraid to die. I wasn't. I was afraid of what would happen to the people that I loved if I didn't. She didn't even just know about my family or friends here in Dauntless. She knew about Iris and Florian.

Unfortunately she had far too many things to hang over my head. The people in my life were completely innocent. They hadn't done anything. They were trying to enjoy their lives together in Candor. I wasn't going to rob them of that. But I couldn't just do whatever it was that Jeanine wanted. I couldn't aid her in her quest to destroy Divergent's. I would not destroy my own people.

Something had to give though. I could fight against Jeanine as hard as possible and stall her for as long as I could but I knew that there was no way that I could make a real plan. Not without knowing what it was that she wanted me to look at. She had me curious. But that didn't mean that for one second her mystery object was more important to me than my own friends and family were. There had to be some way to save them all.
I knew what I could do to save them all. Just do what she said. But I couldn't. I would not give Jeanine and Max what they wanted. But I had to keep them safe. I would do anything. But I was also afraid of what might happen if the people that I cared about found out what I was. Would they all care about what I was? Would they think that I was dangerous? Or would they still think that I was the person that they had grown up with and the person that they had come to love? I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure that I wanted to know the answer.

The one person that I knew I didn't want to answer that question was Eric. People had made it clear enough that if Eric ever found out what I was he would give me up. Or maybe kill me himself. I wasn't sure whether or not I believed them. Maybe I did. Maybe I didn't. I knew that he would certainly be thrown for a loop.

I was absolutely positive that he was going to find out. There was no doubt in my mind that he wouldn't. There was the tiniest chance in the back of my mind that maybe I would tell him. Maybe it would be better coming from me. But I just couldn't think about how to go about telling him. And maybe it would end up being a terrible decision. What would happen if he decided to kill me? I could only pray that he wouldn't. I wanted him to understand that I hadn't asked for this.

I wasn't sure how long it was that I had been sitting out here with my head in my lap but I knew that it must have been hours. No one had walked through the hall yet and I wondered if someone ever would. I wasn't sure that I had the motivation to get the hell off of my ass and get to my fear sim. I heard footsteps finally come through the hall and I glanced up to see Heather turning the corner. She seemed to be in the middle of an internal battle with herself.

"Oh my God," Heather said, her eyes widening when she spotted me slumped against the wall. "Alex."

"Hey," I mumbled.

"What are you doing out here? Where have you been all morning? I thought that you and Eric might have forgot about getting out of bed this morning," Heather teased.

I smiled softly at her and held my hand out. Heather took it and helped lift me to my feet. "Very funny, Heather," I said.

Although that had been very close to the case this morning. "Am I right?" she asked.

"I was with him this morning but Max wanted to have a meeting with me. Just about my path after initiation. He thought that since I was the number one ranked initiate now I should be thinking about going down the leadership path," I lied to her.

Thankfully I could lie so well that it slipped past even an ex-Candor. Heather smiled brightly at me. "Wow," she whispered.

"Pretty cool, right?" I asked, trying to keep any hint of hesitation and nervousness off of my face.

Heather laughed and wrapped me in a hug. "Girl that's awesome!" she yelled.

"Thanks, Heather," I said softly.

My face was pushed away from her and I was glad. I didn't want her to see the frown that was marring my face. She was jumping around and I smiled into her shoulder. I wished that I could tell her. But I needed her to be safe. And that meant keeping her in the dark. Maybe one day she would know. I just hoped that day would not be my funeral.
"I'd love to stay and chat with you for a while but you should probably get back to the sim room. I don't know what you were doing out here," she said.

I laughed softly. "I was just lost in thought," I said. She didn't need to know. But my laughter abruptly stopped and I looked around the hall for a clock. "What time was it?"

"Alex, it's almost six. Aaron was the only other person to have to go last time I checked," she said.

How the hell was it six already? Four was going to kill me if I missed out on training. "Oh shit! It's later than I thought that it was! Gotta run. See you at dinner!" I yelled.

Without giving her a chance to say anything back, I turned and sprinted from the hallway. Heather laughed and yelled back a goodbye as I darted through the halls to get back to the sim room. As I turned the corner I saw Four locking up the door. He looked somewhere in between shocked and irritated when he saw me.

"Hey," I panted, leaning my arms against my thighs as I fought to get my breath back.

"Alex," Four greeted irritably.

"Perfect timing, right?" I asked with a smile.

Four shook his head and glared at me as he pushed us back into the sim room. "Come on," he ordered.

He must have thought that he'd get out of doing my fear sim today. It was obvious that Four wanted to know what had happened. He led me over to the chair in the center on the room and I took my seat as Four walked back over to the computer. He was only there for a moment before he came back to stand next to me.

"What happened?" Four asked, a stern glare on his face.

A few deep breaths escaped my lips as I thought back to what Jeanine and Max had told me. I wanted to tell Four but I didn't have time right now. And I knew that my time was coming to a close with Eric. I wanted to be with him. Just for tonight, I needed to enjoy his company. Before it was ripped away from me.

"A lot. Four, I need to skip tonight," I said.

As expected, a glare crossed his face. "What?" he asked sharply.

"There's something that I need to take care of. I just... it's stupid really," I trailed off when I realized how childish it sounded that I wanted to spend the night with Eric. "But I feel like I need to enjoy the last few weeks that I have before things change and..."

I wasn't very sure how I should have spit it out. Thankfully Four saved me from the awful explanation that I was trying to get out. "Alex I get it," Four said.

His features had softened slightly. I knew that he felt for me. He didn't want to like Eric but he wanted me to be happy. "Really?" I asked dumbly.

"You don't have to tell me about it right now. Enjoy the night. Spend it with your friends. Or Eric. Whoever. Enjoy the last normal day you might have for a long time," he said.

He was right. Things were changing and five weeks could go by quickly. "Thank you," I said softly.
"Just know that we talk about this tomorrow. You tell me everything. Everything that you've been hiding from me. Got it?"

It was not a question. I knew that the way that he was saying it was a demand. "Tomorrow. I got it," I said.

And I meant it honestly. Four needed to hear everything. If I wanted him in my corner it meant that he had to know everything. And I needed all of the help that I could get. Even if that help only came from one person. I just needed to make sure that I could get as much help as possible, and Four was always a big help.

"I might need all of tomorrow just so that I can explain what happened," I said.

Four's eyes narrowed as he nodded. "That much?" he asked.

I couldn't help but to wonder if he was actually going to be getting any sleep tonight or if he would be up all night thinking about everything. "All of it. It's a long damned story," I explained.

Four nodded at me as he walked back to the computer and powered it up. It had been lucky that I had caught Four before he had left. "I'm holding you to that. You were gone all day, Alex. You missed lunch and no one saw you for breakfast," he said.

I had meant to miss breakfast but lunch had been a mistake. I didn't think that I had been sitting against that wall for that long. "Sorry about that. I had a lot to think about," I muttered.

"People were starting to get worried about you," Four told me softly.

Smiling at him, I shook my head and leaned back into the chair. "I'm honored, Four. You care so much about me," I teased.

As serious as I knew that this conversation was I needed to do something to make it lighter. I had still spent sixteen years in Amity. We didn't like to take things too seriously. Four rolled his eyes and I watched as he turned to grab the serum. I stared up at the ceiling and watched as he flicked the tip of the needle and placed it against my neck. I was about to thank Four but he pushed the needle into the vein without warning.

"Ow, damn it. You enjoy that way too much," I muttered.

Four smirked. "That I do," he said. I rolled my eyes. He was such a jerk sometimes. Of course I usually had it coming. "You still owe me an explanation about the meeting after the sim."

"I know, I know," I said.

Before either one of us got the chance to say anything more, he pushed the plunger on the syringe down and the icy liquid ran through my veins. I cringed at the awful feeling, waiting to slip into the darkness. Four was smiling at me and I gave him a small smile back as the world became heavy and I fell back.

My head cleared slightly and I shook my hair out of my face, looking around where I was. It was nowhere that I recognized. It didn't even look like anywhere in Chicago. It was nothing that I'd ever even figured would be around Chicago. I was standing in a small pit with sand all around me. There was no stone or paved walkways.

My heart started to pound in my chest as I frantically looked for something that I recognized. Nothing seemed to be out of place and the world was silent. It was almost too perfect. The problem
was that I was standing in this sunken pit with seemingly no way out. Nothing was wrong yet but I knew that it was about to change. My eyes were flitting back and forth through the pit before I saw it. Way back in the corner of the pit something was moving. A shadow was climbing across the back of the wall.

Checking all over my body I searched for something that I could fight with. I wasn't sure what was back there but I was absolutely positive that I did not want to find out. And I didn't want to be unarmored when I figured out what it was. But as I patted over myself I realized that I had nothing that I could use as a weapon. Damn it. I was fucked if this thing was dangerous.

There wasn't even a knife or anything of the sorts. Another shadow moved over the back of the pit and I jumped again. I wasn't sure what these things were and I didn't want to find out. I had always had pretty terrible luck with these fear sims. So I dug my heels into the sand and turned to run.

Before I could even make it a step a searing pain shot through the bottom of my ankle. Whatever it was that was on the ground had shot up and struck me through the back of the shin. And whatever it was really hurt. I fell over as the sharp pain shot up through my body. My mouth fell open as I screamed in agony, my face smacking into the sand. It didn't help that sand began to flood into my eyes and mouth.

The same strike came again at my knee and I screamed as what felt like a needle dug under my kneecap and twisted. I let out another piercing scream at the pain and fought desperately to get away. What the hell was happening to me? This was agony. I looked up and away from whatever was attacking my legs and finally saw it. Twisting bodies were coming towards me and writhing together. They were all coming towards me. But they weren't human bodies. They were snakes.

The scream that tore from my throat was louder than one that I had ever heard before. It was louder than I had even thought was possible. They were all slithering towards me in droves and the one that had already bitten me twice came to wind itself around my arm. I screamed in horror as it twisted its body around my arm, cutting off the blood flow. I hated snakes. But I hadn't thought about them in forever. Not since I had been in Amity.

A few more of the snakes came towards me and began to wrap themselves around my legs. I tried to shake them off but I was too weak. They were latched onto me. They were squeezing, the pain keeping me down on the ground. A few of the snakes struck out at my stomach and I cried out in agony again. Tears were steadily flowing down my face as I began to hyperventilate.

Making the fear even worse, a large snake came slithering out from the corner. It was one that made me want to die at the sight of it. The thing had yellow and white markings. It came towards me as the others began to move out of its way. The snake slithered over to my body and I tried to fight it off as it wrapped itself around my torso. All that earned me was a few bites to the abdomen. I shrieked in a mix of pain and horror as it constricted its body. It was so tight that I was positive that I was going to die.

More were coming upwards over my body to wrap themselves around my limbs. One squeezed its body around my ankle and I sobbed as the bone snapped. I tried to stand to shake them off of me but I immediately fell under the broken ankle. Once more the snakes began to slither over my body, completely covering me from head to toe. One slithered over my forehead as more pressed their stomachs against my ears. Some of them were even trying to slither inside.

Opening my mouth once more to scream, I was cut off. I should have never tried to scream. I wasn't even sure what good it would do me. A snake made its way into my mouth and immediately slithered down my throat, cutting off my airways. I was choking and crying as I tried to get it away from me. But I couldn't. The other snakes had me pinned down.
And that was when I remembered. It isn't real. It isn't real. It isn't real. I repeated the mantra to myself as I remembered that it was only a sim. I steadied my frantic breathing and slowly relaxed, repeating the mantra to myself. The movement on my body suddenly stopped as the cold and slimy scales of the snakes turned scratchy and still. Rope. It was only rope. I tugged the rope out of my throat and leaned over, trying not to vomit. As I weakly stood I felt the world go black once more.

"Get them off of me!" I shrieked as I jumped out of the chair and brushed myself off.

I was back in the sim room with no evidence of ever being in the snake pit around me. I settled down slightly and let a few breaths out as I leaned over the edge of the chair. It was just a sim. I was fine. There were no snakes near me and none were anywhere in Dauntless. Four was standing over in the corner, stifling his laughter. Although when I looked over at him he could clearly no longer hold it in. He burst out laughing.

"Four!" I yelled at him, which only made his laughter harder. I grabbed the papers off of the computer and threw them at him. Naturally that only made him laugh harder. "Why are you laughing?"

Four leaned over and wiped his eyes as he began to pick up the papers that I had thrown at him. I scowled as he got them all back together and came to stand next to me. He finished off his last bought of laughter and shook his head at me. I was restraining myself from slapping him over the head.

"I'm sorry Alex. It's just that someone like you I see you having fears like having to kill someone you care about or being the reason that a family member dies. But I mean, you have a fear of snakes?" he asked.

"So?" I snapped, scowling once more.

"And a wonderful reaction to it, might I add."

"Says the one who's afraid of heights!" I yelled.

Four stopped laughing and gave me a little glare, to which I gave a small smirk. I knew that he didn't like that I was making fun of him for having a fear of heights. But my fear was just as funny as his. I still saw the amusement in the back of his eyes. So it turned out that we both had somewhat embarrassing fears.

"God, I haven't thought about that fear in forever," I said.

I leaned back to sit in the chair for a moment. "What happened?" Four asked.

"When I was really young, only about three or so, I was out in the Amity fields picking flowers," I said. Four snorted and I scowled. "Shut up. There was this one really pretty one with a black stem instead of a green one. When I grabbed it I realized why. It was a snake wrapped around it. It bit me. I cried for hours when I got home, panicking that it was venomous or something. My parents brought me to the doctor and everything. I didn't set foot back in the fields for months. When I finally did I never saw another snake. And being here in Dauntless I never thought about them. I didn't even realize that I was still afraid of them."

He came to stand next to me. "Sometimes we have fears that we forget about. But they're still there. Buried in the back of our minds," he said.

"Makes sense to me," I said.
After all, I hadn't known what I was afraid of before we started this. And I now knew what four of my fears were. "We're going to have to figure out how to get you through that not acting like a Divergent," Four said.

"Okay."

"Thank you for the entertainment for the night," Four said.

He was laughing again. I reached out and hit Four roughly in the arm. It did nothing to him. I was sure that he felt like it was a little butterfly knocking into him. He continued to laugh as I hit him again, but hitting him still made me feel better. At least Four wouldn't hit me back. I knew that Eric would.

"I'm glad that I amuse you so," I growled.

Four smiled at me. "Come on. Get up," Four said.

"Look, what was said at the meeting... It wasn't good. Jeanine, she knows what I am," I said.

Four pinched the bridge of his nose. This was the worst thing that I could have told him. "Damn it," Four muttered.

"As far as I know she doesn't know about you. It's too dangerous for us to talk while Jeanine is still in Dauntless," I said.

He nodded and I sighed as we walked out the door. "You're right. We can't tie you to anyone else other than your friends while she's here. I believe she's leaving either later tonight or in the morning. So hang around tonight. Try to act normal," he said.

He had no idea just how good at acting normal I really was. It was one of my specialties. "I can manage that," I said.

"Tomorrow night you're going to come back here and tell me everything that you know."

"Okay."

Four merely scowled at me. "It's not a joke, Alex. Tomorrow you tell me everything. From the very beginning. Everything that happened in the meeting and everything you know about that file," he warned.

I knew that he was serious about this. It wasn't only my life on the line here. It was hundreds of people. Four was one of them. There had to be others too. Tori had told me that her brother was one too. It was why she had protected me. I was sure that it wasn't just us either. There had to plenty of other Dauntless like us.

"I promise, Four. Tomorrow after dinner I'll come back here and tell you everything," I promised.

"I'll hold you up to that."

"We have to do something. Jeanine and Max are not going to start a war against anyone. Divergent or not," I said softly as we walked through the halls.

Four nodded as he reached out and squeezed my hand. "I'm with you, Alex," he told me and I smiled.

"Thank you."
He had no idea how much that meant to me. I knew that I had friends that were on my side but they weren't like this. They weren't risking their lives to keep me safe. I would never ask them to do that. I wouldn't even ask Four to do that. He had volunteered. He was good that way. As we walked into the dining room I smiled and let my hand slip from Four's. I was starving after not eating all day. I turned to walk into the dining room before I heard Four call back to me.

"Try not to run into any snakes when you're out there!" Four called after me.

He laughed as he headed over to Zeke and a few of his other friends. "Asshole," I growled.

I continued muttering under my breath as I headed for my friends. They were all sitting at the same table we were normally at and it was obvious that they were already done. There was a plate laid out for me and I smiled. They all turned back and I waved to them as I took my seat in between Heather and Buck.

"Hey! They were about to close the kitchen so we grabbed you this," Buck said.


"So where did you get off to today?" Buck asked as I shifted in the seat and downed my water.

Smiling at them I began to pick apart my chicken, more inhaling it than actually eating it. "Sorry about that today, guys. I had kind of a hectic morning. Max wanted to speak with me and I had to go get some paperwork together after that and I lost track of the time," I told them.

I got a few odd looks at the mention of having a meeting with Max but I was glad that no one pushed it. I didn't want to have to develop an even deeper lie. Especially not to them. I had lied to them enough. The lies were slowly driving me insane. Hopefully I would only have to carry them for another few weeks.

"When Heather found me out in the hallway I realized just how late it really was and I had to sprint to make it to Four in time to do my fear sim," I told them with a little laugh, hoping that they bought my carefree attitude.

"Good timing," Jax said.

"Sounds like quite the adventurous day you've had," Dante said.

I smiled with a little nod. "Oh, it was quite something," I said.

Everyone laughed as I finished up my dinner. There was a little pit forming in my stomach. One wrong move on my part and my friends would die. But I wouldn't let that happen. Not because of me. So I smiled as we all laughed and shoved each other around. This was all that I wanted to deal with right now. I just wished that I could be ignorant towards what was happening. But that wasn't the hand that I had been dealt. I hated having to deal with everything that I was. But I could forget about that for now. Jeanine and Max could wait.

"How about we go hang in the Pit for a while?" I asked as I realized that people were already clearing out of the dining room. Everyone agreed as we stood up and headed into the Pit. We were some of the last to leave.

"Definitely!" Heather cheered.

We headed into the Pit and I spent hours hanging around and drinking casually with my friends. Four would kill me if I was hungover when I was trying to explain a war plan to him. We were all
laughing together as I tried to push the worries into the back of my mind.

We played a few games with the Dauntless born and most of them ended in minor brawls. But they were all in good fun. I had even let Zeke shoot an apple off the top of my head with a knife. He had insisted that he was great with knives. I figured that it would be funny if I died from something like a miss with a knife. I wasn't sure if Jeanine would think that it was funny or awful. Thankfully he hadn't missed. I was currently dancing with Heather near the edge of the Pit. I saw Eric hanging over near the wall with a few of his friends and he smirked when he saw me, shooting me a small wink.

Leaning back to Heather I muttered in her ear, "I'm heading out for the night. I'll be back at the dorms later."

"Don't worry about it. Enjoy your night with Eric," Heather muttered back.

Evidently no one was looking to go back to the dorms tonight. As we got closer to the end of initiation people stopped caring about the rule of no initiates and members being together. Heather motioned to the edge of the Pit and I saw that Draven was leaving with a red-headed Dauntless girl. She the hostess at the restaurant that Damien had once taken me to. Jax was also leaving with a brunette girl that looked to be a few years older than him. At least some of them were on their way.

Heather and I leaned in to give each other a hug as we said goodnight. Heather turned from me and I waved to a few of my remaining friends. Heather went straight forward to go hunt down Cole and I smirked at her. At least they were in for a good night. I went to turn back to find where Eric had gotten to when a hand laid itself on my hip. I jumped to brush the offending hand off before realizing that it was exactly the person that I was looking for.

"Come with me," Eric whispered.

"Alright."

The two of us kept a slight distance in between us when we walked so that no one would get suspicious about where we were going or why we were going together. I walked behind him as we headed off to his apartment. Once we got to his apartment he ushered me in quickly and I headed to the bed. I stripped my jacket off and threw it over the back of his chair.

"I'll be right back," Eric said and I nodded.

He left to the room that I assumed was his office and I leaned back in his bed. I began to flip through the book that he had laying on his bedside table and smiled. It was another classic. Bram Stoker's Dracula. Eric was certainly a fan of classics. He eventually came out of his office and I watched as he headed into the bathroom. I flipped through the pages and yawned deeply as I leaned back against his pillows.

It was getting late and I was exhausted. It had been a long day and there had been far too much happening to me today. My eyes began to droop closed as something began to slide up my leg. Remembering what I had been subjected to in my fear sim I jumped back and threw my leg out. Eric caught it at the last minute, grabbing my ankle in his hands and wrenching it back down, just barely keeping me from kicking him in the face.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Eric snapped.

He looked pissed that I had nearly kicked him in the face. "My fear sim," I mumbled quietly.

Eric cocked his head to the side and I took in a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "What was it?" he asked.
"Snakes..." I mumbled under my breath.

My words certainly came as a shock to him. His face fell as he stared at me. "Snakes?" he asked for clarification.

"Yes."

"Snakes?"

"Yes."

"Like as in the animal?" he asked.

"Yes. What other kind is there?" I snapped.

There was a little scowl on my face. Eric was supposed to be an ex-Erudite. Shouldn't he know what a snake was? And I didn't think that there was another kind besides the animal. Eric leaned back his head and began to laugh loudly, just like Four had done a few hours earlier. I scowled darkly at him. What the hell was it that made both Four and Eric think that my fear was so funny?

"Oh come on!" I yelled, shoving Eric back towards the bed. It did absolutely nothing. "You and Four both think that it's funny!"

Once more Eric continued to laugh and I rolled my eyes. Reaching my limit of the two men making fun of me I grabbed Eric's shirt and shoved him backwards onto the bed. He had since changed into a tank top and a pair of dark gray pants. I assumed that they were what he normally wore to bed when I wasn't around. He was faster than me as he grabbed me when he fell. I flew on top of him and laughed as he rolled over and trapped me underneath himself.

His knees were on my arms and I struggled to move. There was a way that I could try and move out of the position that we were currently in, but he was too heavy. He had me trapped and he knew it. Eric was definitely the type to like it when I was in positions of little to no power.

"It is funny, Amity," Eric purred.

I rolled my eyes. He thought that anything I did that was mildly embarrassing was funny. "No, it isn't," I growled.

"Aren't you all supposed to be about loving nature and everything in it?" he asked.

"In case you hadn't noticed I'm not Amity anymore!" I snapped.

Eric merely laughed and leaned slightly off of me. "You still look pretty Amity to me," he teased.

I shook my head at him as he leaned back to let me sit up a little bit. "And, no. A damn snake bit me when I was a little kid out playing in the Amity fields. I've hated them since then. I just haven't thought about it in forever. I didn't even remember that I was afraid of them," I said.

He laughed again. "Of course," he chuckled.

Stupid Eric had never done anything dumb when he was a little kid. "Oh, come on! Like you didn't do anything embarrassing when you were a kid?" I asked.

His face hardened as he shook his head. "No," he answered simply.

That had to be a lie. I knew that Eric was mostly stoic and didn't seem to be one to ever make
mistakes but he had to embarrass himself at least once when he was a child. Like running through the hallways if Erudite naked or something. But maybe that was just Amity kids that did that.

"I don't believe you. You had to have done at least one embarrassing thing?" I asked.

"Nope."

"Something that would make the rest of the Faction cringe if anyone could find out that you did it?" I asked again.

Maybe I would have to go see if Cameron knew anything about Eric's embarrassing childhood. "Not when I was a kid. When I was younger my parents hardly ever let me out of the house. I was always kept away so that no one could ever come to see me. My parents were trying something about not socializing their kid. The only time that I actually interacted with other people was when I went to school. They only cared about watching my behavioral patterns. If I had done something embarrassing I'm sure that they would have tossed me over the edge of the building," Eric said.

The previous amusement of my attitude had completely deflated at his words. Of course he hadn't done anything stupid when he was a kid. He had never really been treated like a kid. His parents had always thought of him as strictly an experiment. I would my fingers with Eric's and shook my head.

"You don't have to tell me that," I said softly. I wasn't sure why he was telling me this. Maybe it was because he had never known anyone else that he wanted to tell this to.

"They never cared about me. All they wanted to do was continue an experiment. They never touched me. Never hugged me or kissed me goodnight when I was an infant. They had a nanny take care of me. Cooking and cleaning. The basic necessities of life. They couldn't even do that. I hate my parents. I always will. When I learned to fight the only thing that I wanted was to go back and beat their skulls in," Eric said.

His grip on my hand became tighter at his words. "The only people that I ever had on my side were Cameron's family. They let me eat dinner in their home, they let me sleep over there after a fight with my parents, and they were the ones that went to meetings with my teachers. They were always the people that were my parents," he said and I smiled. Cameron was more than his friend. He was his brother. "My family. The people that I happen to share DNA with? They're nothing."

I leaned up and kissed the bottom of his jaw. It was tense from his previous words. "You're right," I told Eric.

He looked down at me, slightly surprised at my words. "What?" he asked.

His parents were nothing. They were less than human for treating Eric the way that they had. "They are nothing without you," I said.

It didn't reach his lips but I did notice the smile that came to his eyes. He leaned down to kiss me and I wrapped my hands into the fabric at the bottom of his tank top. Our lips moved together for a moment before he finally pulled away from me and traced his hands down the side of my neck. I twitched slightly under his touch and he laughed.

"So what does that mean since you're with me?" he asked.

My answer immediately came to mind. "I guess that it shows just how crazy I am," I said with a little laugh.

Eric laughed too and I smiled as he rolled us over once more, closer to the center of the bed. I smiled
and traced my hands up the side of his face to wind themselves in his hair. I wanted to remember every bit of him like this. I was trying to memorize him in this moment. Jeanine was right. The minute that Eric found out what I was he wasn't going to want anything to do with me. Maybe he would kill me. But that wasn't right now. So I would enjoy the way that he was acting with me for now.

Eric grabbed my arms and I laughed as he pulled me up to the top of the bed. The strain on my arms was slightly painful but I wasn't about to admit that to him. He would just tease me for being a weak Amity again. One of his favorite pastimes. I laughed as his mouth connected to my own and he grabbed the base of my tank top. I lifted my arms slightly so that he could pull it over my head. It left my body and I watched as Eric tossed it off of the side of the bed. I giggled once more as Eric knocked me back against the headboard. So he wanted to play rough tonight?

He kissed me roughly and I melted into him as he took my wrists in both hands. He raised one to the side of the headboard and I heard something click. Eric pulled away from me and backed off with a smirk. In his hand was a key and I watched him toss it to the floor. It was the key to a handcuff. That was currently around my wrist.

"What do you know? You aren't the only crazy one," Eric told me.

He was laughing loudly. "Eric! Get this off of me!" I yelled when I finally realized what had happened.

It didn't matter. Eric continued to laugh at the position that he had just put me in. I tried to yank my arm out of the handcuff but it was too tight. All that it was doing was digging into the skin on my wrists. Eric merely laughed as he stripped off his tank top and tossed it with mine. He leaned back over to me and I shook my head at him. This was so not funny.

"Where did you even get this thing?" I snarled as I yanked against it again.

"Got it just for you," Eric said.

He leaned in for another kiss and I backed away from him. "No! Get this fucking thing off of my wrist. Come on. This is so not -" I rambled until Eric leaned in to kiss me.

As hot as it was, I was not going to let him chain me up like this. I bit down on his lip and Eric pulled away with a hiss. "Damn it," Eric growled in pain.

"Let me out. Now," I ordered.

The bite didn't bother Eric as much as I had thought that it would. He merely leaned back away from me and smiled. "Well if that's the way that you're going to play it, I'll just leave you here to think about what you've done," he said.

Eric slapped my thigh and I hissed in pain, kicking out at him. "What?" I asked dumbly.

He stood from the bed and I watched as he pulled the shirt back on over his shoulders. "Bye, Amity," Eric said.

"Oh, come on. You are not going to just leave me here," I said.

As soon as I said it I wanted to smack myself. Of course he was going to leave me here. Eric loved to cause me all sorts of trouble. Plus leaving me chained to his bedpost half naked was a wonderful way to cause me trouble. Eric walked towards the door, throwing back a quick wink at me.
"Eric! Come on, I'm sorry for biting you!" I yelled.

He had clearly been banking on me saying that I was sorry. But it made no difference for him. "Don't worry about that. I'll come back to deal with you later," he said with dark eyes.

I knew that he had meant it in more than one way. But I knew that he also meant that he really was going to leave me here for at least a little while. "Eric!" I shouted.

"Enjoy your night, Amity. I'll be back soon," he said with a laugh.

I called out his name mixed with a few curses before he slipped out of the door and closed it. The deadbolt closed a moment later. Asshole. He was really going to leave me here. And I couldn't get out of the cuffs; the key was too far away. Sighing in defeat I dropped against the headboard and cuddled into the pillows the best that I could. One day I was going to get him back for this. And it was going to start with him not getting anything tonight. Of course, I was never known to have the best control. Stupid Eric.

With nothing else to do, I simply tried to shut my eyes and go to bed. Not that it worked. I was too uncomfortable. I wasn't sure how long I'd laid in his bed. Forever probably. I tried everything that I could think of to get myself out of the cuffs. I'd yanked at them until my hands were about to bleed and I'd tried to dislocate my thumb to wiggle out of them. I'd gotten desperate by that point. I'd used his knife to try to cut through the thin chain but that hadn't worked either.

I'd even tried to reach the key, which Eric had left just frustratingly out of my reach. I'd done everything that I could think of that didn't involve some type of mutilation on my part, but I still wasn't able to get out of his stupid handcuffs. At that point I knew that I was just going to have to wait for him. So once I saw that it was nearing one in the morning I closed my eyes and dozed off, not at all comfortable with my position.

It was probably an hour later that I heard the lock on his door click again. He must have been out for a while to have some fun with his friends. Just so that he could leave me here to myself, chained to his damn bed. My eyes opened and I groaned as he flicked on the lights that were underneath the cabinets in the kitchen. At least he hadn't turned the main lights on.

"Had a good evening?" he asked with a cruel smile.

"Jackass," I growled.

He merely laughed as I shook my head and turned to look away from him. The last thing that I wanted to do was give him that satisfaction of knowing that chaining me up had driven me nuts. He merely smiled at me and walked closer to the bed, falling over me. He leaned over me and I looked away, not wanting to give him what he wanted.

"Come on, Amity. I know that you can't ignore me forever," Eric teased.

"Wanna bet?" I asked.

If I could have crossed my arms over my chest I would have. Eric merely laughed as he leaned in closer to me and kissed the edge of my shoulder. It sent a little shiver through me and I shook it off. He was not getting the better of me tonight. He was not. He hummed against my skin as he moved over my collar bone and dipped a little lower, right over where my bra covered. It made me shiver slightly. He knew which buttons to push on me.

"You are not getting laid tonight," I snarled at him.
He merely laughed. It was annoying how well he knew me. He ran his hands up my thighs and I shivered as they fiddled with the buttons on my jeans. He wasn't the type to listen to me. If he wanted me tonight he was going to get me. And I was literally powerless to do anything. Stupid Eric.

"Yes I am," he told me cockily.

I merely scoffed at him and leaned back against the headboard. "You aren't," I snapped.

"Come on, Amity. You know that you want me."

Maybe that was true but I wasn't going to tell him that. Eric leaned in and kissed me roughly. I bit his lip as harshly as I could but he didn't stop. He merely reached around and unclasped the back of my bra. Eric tore the straps and I groaned when it went flying to the floor. There went another innocent garment to Eric's impatience.

"Eric!" I yelled, pulling away from the kiss. "Come on, I liked that bra. That's the second one you've destroyed this week."

What was it with him and constantly destroying my things? The other bra that he had destroyed was currently lying somewhere near the Erudite compound. Unless some Factionless person had taken it. He merely laughed and leaned in to kiss me once more. This time I didn't bite him, as I didn't really want to hurt him, but I did try to buck him off of me. He only growled deep in his throat before giving a soft nip to my lower lip.

"I'll buy you a new one," Eric said.

That time I laughed. It was his promise any time that he ruined another piece of clothing. He was going to owe me quite a bit by the time that we were able to go out in public together. He was definitely going to owe me a long shopping trip once the next five weeks were over. Eric leaned down to kiss my now bare breast and I moaned. I wanted to reach to take off his shirt but I still wanted to try and hold out. I attempted to squirm away from him but there weren't many places that I could go.

"Don't struggle. You know that you want it," Eric said.

I tried to kick him off of me but he only grabbed my ankle and forced my legs back against the bed. He worked at my zipper as his mouth kissed from the outside of my breast, to the nipple, and then over the valley and to the other one. I was still writhing back and forth, trying to keep him off of me. As much as I really wanted to have a good time together, I was still angry that he had dared to try and lock me against the bed for a few hours.

While I had been brooding, he had finally managed to pop the button on the pants and lift my hips up in the air. I tried to fight him away from my hips but he was stronger. He forced my hips down against the bed as he ripped them off, tossing them to the floor. There was no way that I would have been able to keep the jeans on anyways. His fingers slipped into the sides of my underwear and I managed to kick him in the chest to keep him away from me. Not that it did much.

"No, damn it. You are not going to chain me up and leave me here only to come back and have your way with me," I growled.

He merely laughed. "Come on, Amity. Don't tell me that you don't want this," Eric said.

Of course I wanted it but that didn't mean that I was going to willingly admit it. He laughed again as he hooked his fingers in my underwear and slid them off of my body. I tried weakly to fight him off of me but it did nothing. He merely shook his head at me and pushed my legs apart. I tried to close
them again but I was losing any will to fight. I really did want him. I knew that I did. I could feel how wet I was. It was gently rubbing against the inside of my thighs.

Eric gently pushed my ankles apart and I felt him run his fingers up the inside of my thighs. I shivered slightly, trying to close my legs again, but he didn't give me the chance. He gave me no warning before gently running a finger over my folds and then sliding the finger inside of me. I lifted my hips off of his bed and tried to wiggle again. I wasn't really sure if I was trying to get away from him or push his finger farther into me. He laughed as he curled his finger.

"See? I knew you wanted it. I can feel how wet you are," Eric snarled.

Fine. He was right. I wanted him. As insane as it was it didn't matter that he had chained me to his bed and left me here. I just wanted him inside of me. The fucked up part of me thought that him chaining me to the bed was one of the hottest things that I had ever done. It was something that I wished that he would have done more often.

"Alright, you win. Just take your damn clothes off and fuck me," I snarled at him.

That was all that it took. Eric slid his finger out of me and I shivered at the sudden loss, watching as he pulled his clothing off. His shirt and pants came off fast and I smirked when he pulled off his boxers, his hard length springing free. God I wanted him in me. He came back upwards toward me and I spread my legs, keeping my feet planted against the bed.

I expected him to push himself into me immediately but I was completely wrong. Eric moved like a lion stalking its prey as he snuck closer to me. I began to close my legs slightly, almost embarrassed by how close he was coming to my center, but he didn't give me the opportunity to keep them closed. His hands wrapped around my ankles and wrenched them apart. I groaned slightly at the stretch in my thighs and I watched as he dropped in between my legs.

My legs immediately started shaking. His tongue ran up my core and I shivered at the sudden intrusion. A cry tore from out of my throat as his tongue ran up and down my length a few times before dipping into my core. His name came from my lips a few times as he dipped his tongue in and out of my center. His thumb was rubbing against my clit and he would occasionally scratch his teeth against my clit. His name poured from my lips a few times. Juices were running down my thighs as he twisted his tongue inside of me. He knew exactly how to use his tongue.

He twisted his tongue inside of me for another few minutes, making me writhe and moan against his bed. I wanted him to press his fingers in me but he was just using his tongue. It made my entire body shake slightly. More than once I tried to lift my hips up off of the bed but his hands would press me back down. All I could do was grab the slightly cracked headboard - from another one of our nights together - and try to take out my frustration on it.

My toes were curling as his tongue ran its way up to my clit and began to twirl around it. His teeth gently grazed it once more, tugging it downwards slightly, and I yelled out louder than I meant to when he bit down on it gently. He rolled it in between his teeth as he tugged at it again.

His name mixed in with other crude curses were spilling from my lips as I opened my legs a little more. He took the hint and finally managed to drop two fingers inside of me. I shouted his name as he curled his fingers in between pumps and lifted my hips off of the bed, trying to drive his tongue and fingers farther into me. He used his free hand to drape across my stomach and push me into the bed as his fingers twisted against my nipples.

It was all too much. I knew that I was close to the edge as I cried out loudly. His fingers were rough inside of me and I panted, trying desperately to move my hips around. But he wasn't about to dare let
me move. His arm kept me pinned to the bed as his tongue flicked against my clit and his fingers pumped in roughly. He added a third and fourth a few minutes later and I gasped loudly. It was stretching me further than I was used to, but it felt so good.

To get even more friction, I was now rolling my hips as much as I could, getting Eric's tongue to rub rougher against my clit. It made a few little whines escape my lips from the sudden pleasure. It helped that he had a little bit of a shadow that was rubbing against my thighs. Eric took the hint and roughly pressed against me as his fingers quickly worked inside of me.

"Fuck. E - Eric, don't stop. Please don't stop," I begged him softly.

It was all that I could get out as the fibers began to bundle in my core. "Say my name," Eric demanded.

After everything that he had done to me today I wasn't so sure that I wanted to say his name, no matter what he did. I wasn't even sure that I could get it out. My entire body was shaking as he continued his assault on my core. My mouth fell open as I attempted to call his name. Nothing more than a pathetic moan came out.

"Say it," he growled again.

This time the demand didn't even register. I merely leaned back on the bed and shoved my hips closer to him. Eric's free hand went onto the inside of my thighs, keeping them apart as he continued to gently run his tongue over me. He retracted his fingers and his tongue and I whined at the loss of contact. I was so close.

"Beg for it," he demanded.

"No," I growled back at him.

There was no way that I was going to give him the satisfaction. He clearly didn't like that answer. He dipped back down to my center and thrust a finger inside of me. His tongue flitted over my clit and I moaned loudly, calling out his name once. It only lasted a blissful second before he retracted himself from me once more.

"What the hell are you -?"

"Beg for it. Or I can leave you like this," Eric taunted.

His eyes were glittering and I knew that he meant it. He was going to leave me like this and I couldn't even get my own fingers to help myself get off. They were bound back against the top of the bed. I knew that if there was any way that I wanted to get off tonight, it would only be by playing Eric's game. Fucking prick.

"Eric," I moaned again. Of course he didn't want to hear just that. He wanted more. He wanted me to make it a show for him. "Fuck me, Eric. I need you. I need to come. Please. I want you inside of me."

It was practically begging. I hated having to do that but I knew that he wasn't going to touch me again until I did. "Now that wasn't so hard, was it?" Eric asked with a little smirk.


He gave me no time to prepare myself as he moved forward and thrust himself inside of me. I knew that I'd wanted him to fuck me, but I really hadn't thought that he was going to do it quite as fast as
he had. I yelled his name loudly as I spread my legs farther apart. He gave me no time to adjust himself before pumping in and out of me. His head came down and his mouth attached itself to my nipple as his hand came to pinch my other nipple.

His name was pouring out of my lips as he took his free hand to grab my hair and yank it roughly to the side. It was the first time that we had been like this that I couldn't reach out and touch him. I wanted desperately to grab onto something, rake my nails down his back or anything. But I couldn't. My hands were bound to the bed and I was desperate to touch him. But I couldn't. Eric was thrusting in between my legs roughly and I wrapped them around his waist.

His thrusts were somewhere in between painful and pleasurable but I never wanted him to stop. All I wanted was to feel him deep inside of me. I yanked pathetically against the cuffs but my wrists were not moving. And Eric clearly liked that. His hands were everywhere on my body and as my moans become louder and less decipherable his mouth clamped over my own. My entire body was shoved around the bed like a rag doll as he had his way with me.

His tongue was searching through my mouth as his thrusts hit a spot that awakened something animalistic inside of me. I moaned darkly into his mouth as I began to thrust my hips up to meet his own thrusts. Eric didn't bother to stop me and instead began slamming his hips harder against mine. It was so hard that I knew that it would bruise. Our hips were hitting each other's roughly and I cried out as his thumb attached itself to my clit and he began to rub against it.

My vision was going spotty as I leaned my head back and let out a few soft growls. His thrusts were near impossible to keep up with as he grabbed the roots of my hair and pulled my head up to meet his. His teeth nipped at the back of my ear and I let out a breathy moan. God I needed this.

"Come. Now," he hissed in my ear.

That was everything that I needed. I leaned back into the bed and rested my head against his pillow, letting out moans and groans that were all mixed together. My entire body was erupting in spasms as I let out a few cries and scratched at the headboard desperately. I'd never felt so incredible as I did right now. My entire body fell a little limp as I closed my eyes.

Eric's name and some curses were mixing together from my mouth as I felt him let himself go. I felt him pour himself inside of me and I groaned as he pumped a few more times, emptying himself. He growled deep in his throat as his head came down to me to kiss me roughly. Our lips moved together and I sucked in a breath as he pulled out of me and laid on his side next to me. He brought his mouth up to kiss me once more and I smiled as he pulled away.

We were both breathing heavily as Eric kissed me once more. I smiled into the case as his hands cupped the side of my neck. Sweat was beading on our foreheads and I laughed as Eric wiped it away from my forehead. My breath was still coming in short pants as I leaned over to him, motioning to the cuffs with my eyes.

"Alright you've had your fun. Get these things off of me," I said.

Eric merely laughed and shook his head. That was what turned my stomach. That definitely wasn't a good sign. It was a sign that he wasn't going to do something that I wanted. Eric grabbed the sheets and pulled them over us as I stared at him sidelong. He was not just going to leave me in these stupid things. Was he?

"I don't know Amity, I'm starting to like you like that," he purred.

My jaw dropped and I watched him closely before he leaned back over into the bed and settled under
the sheets. He pulled me down so that I was lying next to him. But my hands were still bound to the
top of the headboard. He was not really going to do this to me. I was not sleeping like this after I'd
given in and had sex with him.

"I'll see you in the morning," Eric said with the smallest hint of a laugh in his voice.

"Eric! Get these things off of me," I hissed.

He merely smiled at me and gave me a small kiss. "Sorry, sweetheart, have a good night. I'll let you
out in the morning. Don't even know where the key is right now," he said.

How was he really going to do something like that, even after I had given him what he wanted? We
must have argued about the cuffs for at least ten minutes before he finally got me to shut up and go to
bed. I scoffed at him and rolled back and forth in the bed for at least half an hour. There was no
comfortable position in these things. How was I going to sleep like this? He really was going to just
leave me in these stupid things all night lone. Maybe I did actually deserve this. It was needless to
say that I was a pain in his ass nearly all of the time. And I knew that he was enjoying having me
with absolutely no control.

So after nearly an hour of grumbling to myself I finally rolled over as much as I could and closed my
eyes. Eric had been awake the entire time, laughing to himself. He grabbed me around the waist and
I groaned, letting my head fall against his shoulder. It was actually a little more comfortable than I
had thought that it would be. But it still wasn't the way that I wanted to be sleeping. I knew that he
was awake long after, laughing at the position that he had gotten me in. Stupid Eric.
Chapter Twenty

Another yawn escaped my mouth as I leaned back against the cold wall in the waiting room. The fear sims were going on and Jet was in the room right now. He was the last person that I had heard Four call in. With my eyes closed I started rubbing against my wrists which, after a week, were still a little tender from the cuffs that Eric had put me in.

Even though I had been so determined not to let him touch me once he came back to the apartment, I had given in. I was still a little mad at myself for caving but it was well worth it. But my wrists were still sore. Four had noticed the bruising on my wrists the morning after and I had thought that he was going to kill me when he figured out what had happened. Thankfully he saved the yelling until after my sim. I assumed that Four didn't have the same kinks that Eric and I did. Mostly because he was an ex-Abnegation.

My mind began to wander to the past week and I let out a slow breath through my nose. Eric hadn't opened up much to me since he had told me about his awful childhood and I hadn't wanted to push it. He hadn't even seemed thrilled to tell me what he had. And the last thing that I wanted to do was make him uncomfortable. I knew that it was a slow progression in our relationship.

That was particularly because we hadn't seen each other that much lately. I had stopped spending so much time with Eric and more with my friends. It wasn't necessarily because I didn't want to be with him. People all around Dauntless, including members whose names I didn't even know, were beginning to get curious where the Amity transfer spent her nights. I wasn't sure how they knew that. I probably had Jade to thank for it.

Her little sabotage had made me more careful over this past week. Max knew about Eric and I but that didn't mean we could walk around hand-in-hand. Not that Eric would. If the entire Faction knew about us I would be thrown out for sure. Although maybe it would be a little funny compared to what could be happen to me. Either way, I had managed to convince Eric that it wasn't so wise that we spent so much time around each other. The last thing that I wanted was for him to get in trouble.

Eric hadn't seemed thrilled about the idea but he had agreed. He wasn't a stupid man and he wasn't overly attached either. He seemed fine with the change in schedules. During one of our conversations that we'd had only a few days ago I had been sure to remind him that there was only four weeks of initiation left until we could actually go out in public together. We wouldn't have to worry about sneaking around.

Of course I hadn't mentioned that in four weeks he would know the entire truth of what I was and would more than likely never speak to me again. Or maybe he would kill me. Either way, it was best to leave him in the dark. I still went to visit him every other day but I had only stayed in his apartment once over the past week, as much as I would have loved to stay more often.

Tonight was the next day that we had agreed to spend our nights together. Maybe not spend the night, but I would head there after training. He had been busy most days anyways. We were both adults with better things to be doing than bothering each other during our days. I still had to focus on my training and Eric had a real job to do. Not that I knew what his job was. He just seemed to go through paperwork all of the time.

I twisted slightly in my seat and glanced over to Draven, giving him a small smile. Last night I had gone with him to get a tattoo. He had gotten the Dauntless fire all across his back. It worked well with the deeply tanned skin he had. Tori had done the tattoo and I had enjoyed getting to spend a while speaking with her again. She had seemed glad to see me too.
Last night we had all actually gone to get tattoos. Heather and I initially hadn't. We were merely going to support our male friends, who were each getting their first. I wanted to see them all get their firsts and see what they were getting done. We wanted to make sure that they weren't getting anything stupid. We both knew that they could end up doing some very stupid things that would be permanent.

Buck had gotten a large and intricate wire that wrapped down over his arm and went across the top of his chest. Razors seemed to be mixed into the wire design. It was quite impressive. I'd noticed a few girls looking at him now that he looked a little more Dauntless. Dante had gotten a smaller tribal tattoo that had gone over his upper chest and shoulder. He planned to expand it in the future, which everyone agreed with.

Jax had gotten a rather clever tattoo on his chest. It looked like the skin was tearing away from his chest and underneath the torn areas was something akin to a metal chest plate. It was seriously badass. Jet had gotten a set of dates across his left upper arm. I wasn't sure what they were and I hadn't gathered the balls to ask.

As for Heather and I, despite having not gone for tattoos, we had caved after watching the boys. Not that we hadn't known that was going to happen. Eric and Four had both once told me that tattoos were addictive. Once you got one you wanted more. It was easy to say that they were right. I had three now and Heather had two.

She had gotten a pretty vine that went up her spine. She said that it had hurt like hell. I could attest. I had been holding her hand when she'd gotten it done and I thought that she was going to break it. The vine had roses woven into it with small thorns on them. It certainly added to her Dauntless look. She had also ditched the brown tips to her hair for something a little different. The tips of her hair were now a brilliant purple. Every day she looked more and more Dauntless.

I had gone for something of a mix. It was something that I had decided that I deserved after everything that I was being forced to deal with. It was something to throw in Jeanine's face. The tattoo had gotten a loud round of applause once I had showed it off. It went completely down my back and covered almost all of the skin. I was sure that if my parents ever saw it they would throw a fit. They hated tattoos.

It was a large tree with no leaves. The trunk went down the right side of my back as the branches on the top of the tree expanded over the top of my back and onto my left shoulder. The base and roots of the tree were all across the bottom of my back, just over where the band of my pants hit. It was an edgier version of the Amity tree. Dauntless fire raged all through the tops of the branches, going up the base of my neck. It was my way of saying that I didn't have to be one or the other. I could be both. There was no shame and I wanted Jeanine Matthews to know that.

As I shifted in the chair again I hissed at the slight pain that shot up my back. I was trying to lean back against the wall but it was too ginger. So instead I turned to lay on Aaron. He didn't seem to mind as I shifted my weight onto him. We were all waiting to be dismissed to lunch. We would be able to leave in the next few minutes, which was good because I was starving.

Over the past week I had beaten the fear of snakes. It was definitely my least favorite fear. Four had taught me during our midnight sessions how to get out of it. We had figured that the best way for me to get out of the pit was to run as fast as possible to the edge of the pit. There was one wall that had holes that worked as footholds. It wasn't fun because the snakes still popped out of the side of the mountain and bit me but at least I was now able to make it out. Four was confident that my fear would change once more today. I was actually looking forward to that.

My mind shot back to what happened last week for at least the tenth time just this morning. It was a
conversation that I went over in my mind any time that I wasn't preoccupied. Last week, just as I had promised, I had gone to Four at night to tell him everything that was happening with Jeanine. We spent a long time just talking with each other and working to devise a plan. Not that we had come up with one.

But it was now what we used most of our midnight sessions for rather than actually going into a fear sim. There was more planning to be done and we had almost nothing that we could viably use. He had certainly been more than a little on edge since I had told him about what was going on. Not that I could blame him. We had nothing good coming to us.

Six Days Prior...

I was heading down the hallways, sneaking through the darkened corners. The last thing that I needed was for someone to cut me off and ask where I was going. Technically as an initiate I wasn't allowed in these parts of Dauntless. I had just left Heather and the rest of my friends in the dorms. I had lied and said that I was going for a run because I couldn't sleep. I supposed part of that was the truth. I hadn't been sleeping well lately.

Of course part of that might have been because of Eric. He didn't tend to like letting me actually get a full nights sleep. He was always keeping me awake for hours on end. Not that I typically complained until the morning after. Earlier today, just before I'd headed to training, I had told him that I would be at his apartment tonight. I just hoped that he would still be awake. It was already nearly midnight and the clock was still ticking.

Turning the final corner to the fear sim room I walked in slowly, making sure that no one other than Four was here. As expected, the room was empty. I pushed into the actual fear sim room and saw that Four was already in there. He was currently setting up another chair close to the one that I laid in for my sims. As I shut the door behind me and cleared my throat, Four turned back and smiled at me.

"Hey, Alex."

"Hi, Four."

"Take a seat," Four said, motioning to the bright orange chair.

I did as told and walked over to the chair. Not bothering to slip back all the way, I leaned forward and pressed my arms against my thighs. Four looked extremely tired as he sat in the chair in front of me, almost mirroring my expression. It looked to me like he hadn't gotten a wink of sleep. Not that I blamed him. I hadn't either.

"Alright. You ready for this?" I asked Four.

"I think so. Take your time and explain everything slowly."

"Okay."

The brief hesitation told Four enough. I had no clue where to begin. "Start slow," he advised.

"I don't even know where to start. It's all so much," I said honestly.

Four nodded and ran his fingers through his hair. I nearly smiled. Eric did that when he was stressed too. So did I. Actually, everyone that I knew did that. Maybe it was just strange to see that the great Four could be stressed about something for once in his life. Of course, he had no control over this and it put his life in danger.
"First thing's first. How did you get your hands on that file?" Four asked.

That was the one thing that I probably should have explained first. With files like that being so protected, it was actually luck that I had even managed to get my hands on that file. "When I came to get the papers for my extended stay to be with my parents when my mother gives birth, remember that? You told me to go to your office and get them?" I asked.

"I remember," Four said.

"Well I went there and as I was passing Max's office. He was in there talking with Jeanine Matthews," I told Four.

His expression immediately soured. He obviously didn't like that Max was in on this. "And you heard them?" Four guessed.

"Yes. I stopped and listened to them. She was trying to get him to join her in this hunt for Divergent's. She was talking about how dangerous they were. She mentioned this file that was in Erudite. She was saying that she would bring it to him so that he could see all of her plans. I knew that I had to get it before she could get it to him," I explained.

Four probably thought that I had stumbled upon the file on accident. It actually was kind of an accident. "Because you knew that you were Divergent and in danger," he reasoned.

"Yes."

"Okay, keep going. How did you get to Erudite?" Four asked.

I had known that he was going to ask me that. "Well -" I started, before being spoken over.

"And how did you get there without another member?"

That time he narrowed his eyes at me. Without having to explain he was already starting to catch on. A little ghost of a smile came to my lips. Despite the fact that that night was the one where Damien and Colt had nearly killed me, it was also the night that Eric and I had gotten together. It was full of mostly fond memories. And it had changed me for the better.

"Mostly luck," I told him honestly.

"Luck?" Four asked.

"I snuck a look at the train schedule. Saw that there was a train heading to Erudite a few days later. It was on the last day of Phase One of initiation," I said.

It was hard to imagine that I had known about the file for two months. "You've known about it that long?" Four asked.

"Yes. I darted from the training room and made it to the train in the nick of time. Unfortunately Eric was there," I said.

Four's eyes widened. "Eric was there?" Four asked, sounding surprised and irritated.

"He was asking why I was there in the first place. I told him that it was because I needed to get my mother's medical records. I know that he didn't believe me but he hasn't brought it up since," I told him.

"He hasn't asked anything else about it?" Four clarified.
"I think that he's still a little suspicious about why I was really there that night but he hasn't said anything more about it. I don't think that he wants to think about it," I admitted.

"Good. Keep going."

"Anyways, we got there and thankfully he had a meeting to go to so I was free to look at the file."

He held up a hand and said, "Stop." I snapped my mouth shut. "Let me stop you for a minute. Is that file still there?"

Slowly I shook my head. I wished that the file was still in its place. It was proof as to what she was doing about the upcoming war. But Jeanine wasn't stupid. If she hadn't moved it before she had moved it after I had told her that I knew about the file. Maybe she would have kept it where it was had I not said anything. It was my own fault for opening my mouth.

"I doubt it. Jeanine knows that I saw the file. I told her," I admitted.

"Brilliant," Four sneered.

"Shut up. I couldn't help myself. She took it out of Erudite to show Max not long after I saw it."

Four nodded at me. He looked pissed. "Okay. We'll figure something out. I was really hoping that we could get our hands on that file. It would have been solid proof. Exactly why she moved it," Four said, echoing my thoughts.

"I somehow doubt that she's leaving it where someone else can pick it up now. She probably has it under lock and key," I said.

There was a chance that even Max could have it. All I knew was that it was somewhere that no one would be able to grab it. It took a few moments for Four to say anything else. Obviously we were at the point that we would only be relying on my memory of it. But that was good. I remembered everything that I had seen. I had repeated it to myself enough times.

"Alright, continue. What was in the file?" Four finally asked.

I let out a deep breath. There was no good way that I could start this. There was absolutely nothing good that I had seen in that file. I wasn't even sure where I could start. There was so much in the file and nothing was better than anything else. It was all horrific. My head had been spinning by the time that I had finished reading it.

"Everything. Her entire plan. Four, it's bad," I said, feeling a little desperate.

"Start simple," he said.

I nearly laughed. "Trust me when I say that no part of the plan is simple," I said.

A little hint of a smile came across his face. "I believe you. Just tell me in pieces. The people," Four said.

"What?"

"You mentioned that she knows about you because of what happened in Amity a few months ago. Who else does she know about?" Four asked.

It was easy to see that he was asking me in a subtle way whether or not she knew about him. "I don't know," I said honestly.
"You don't know any of them?" Four asked.

"I don't think so. None of the names had looked familiar to me."

"You're sure?"

"Yes. Now that I think about it I should have taken down the names or something of everyone that she had in the file," I muttered.

"Don't worry about it. There's nothing that we can do now. Just keep going."

"There were a lot of people. Probably near a hundred. There was a note on the paper with my name. 'Hold until after Phase Three of initiation.' I didn't know what it meant at the time. I still don't really but she gave me a hint in the meeting yesterday," I said.

Four's eyebrows raised upwards. "What did she say?" he asked.

"I'll get to that later. She doesn't know about you. Your name wasn't in the file," I told him.

That didn't seem to be the answer that he wanted. Four leaned into me slightly and grabbed my hand. Sighing softly, I tightened my hold on him. At least I wasn't alone. That was the best part of the entire thing. No matter what happened with Eric or Jeanine, at least I had Four. He was the only person that knew what I was right now and the only one that could help.

"I'd rather her know about me than you," Four said.

I shook my head at him. "Not me. It's a good thing that she doesn't know about you. It makes you our secret weapon. She doesn't know that you're one too. Trust me when I say that I'm glad that it's me," I muttered.

"No. It should be me," Four said determinedly.

Glancing up at him I sighed. "You're a good man, Four," I said sweetly.

He looked over at me and smiled. "Thank you. Hey, don't worry. We're going to take care of this. I promise you that we are," he told me.

"I know."

But that wasn't the truth. I didn't really believe him but there was no need for him to know that. "Okay, keep going. What else is she planning?" Four asked.

Shaking my head softly at Four, I let go of his hand and leaned back in the chair slightly. "It was so much. There was everything in the file. What Divergent's were, why she thought that they were a danger to the Faction system, and how she was planning to eradicate them all," I said and Four grimaced.

It wasn't only us. There were hundreds of Divergent's in Chicago. "Okay... Keep going," Four said. It was obvious that he was trying to keep the hint of fear out of his voice.

"That wasn't even the worst part. The worst part is that she's planning an attack. On all of the Factions," I told him.

That caught Four's attention. His eyes bulged almost comically. "An attack?" he repeated.

"Even without the hunt for Divergent's, she's dangerous. She wants to be at the top of the food
chain.

My heart rate was picking up slightly as I remembered everything that was in the file. The new weapons, the attack on the Factions, and everything in between. There was no way in hell that two people were going to be able to stop this. Four clearly understood that I was in a moment of panic.

"Slow down, Alex. Take it slow," he consoled.

"Okay," I muttered, taking a few deep breaths.

"You were saying that she plans on attacking and using all of the Factions," he half-stated and half-questioned.

"Yes," I drawled slowly.

"Take it slow. Tell me about each Faction separately. Start with Dauntless. What is she planning here?" Four asked.

It wasn't a shock that he wanted to know about the one Faction that we could act directly in right now. I should have known he would want to hear about Dauntless first. But this was at least one good thing about this whole issue. It didn't seem that Jeanine Matthews was ready to do anything right now. She needed time before she was actually ready.

"Nothing right now," I said quickly.

I noticed that Four looked a little relieved at my words. "Okay. That's a good thing," he said.

"It looks like the plan that she needs for Dauntless won't be taking place for at least another year. Maybe two. She seems to need some type of compliance serum. Evidently what it does is it works like the fear sim serum. It works on normal people but Divergent's won't feel any effect. It's a way for her to find people like us," I explained.

It seemed that a little hint of recognition flooded through Four's eyes. "You said compliance serum?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Damn it. I voted yes on that. I didn't think that was what they were putting it through for," Four muttered. I raised my eyebrows at him. He was half-muttering it to himself and it probably wasn't really aware that I was listening to him.

But did Four know something about this? "What are you talking about, Four?" I asked.

"They disguised it under use for prisoners. They said that Candor would get full control of the serum. I should have known that if Jeanine Matthews had something to do with it than it was dangerous," Four growled more to himself than me.

Finally getting sick of it I smacked Four on the leg again to make him look at me. He glanced over at me, almost shocked that I was here. He really had forgotten that I was here. He stopped muttering to himself, which was quite a long string of profanities, and glanced up at me.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, feeling like his stupid initiate again for the first time in a long time.

Four shifted uncomfortably for a moment. "A few weeks ago some very important people were here
discussing new ideas for Chicago. One of the people here was Jack Kang. The representative of Candor," Four explained.

"I know who Jack Kang is," I snapped. That was when I remembered the day that Jack Kang was here. They were all standing up in the Wolf's Den. Had that been what they were talking about? "Was that the day that you were all up on the perch?"

"Yeah. Did you hear us?"

"No, but I saw you."

"He was talking about this serum that Erudite was helping them develop. It was a compliance serum. They said that it was going to be used for prisoners to get them to comply and tell the truth of what they'd done. It comes from this machine that Candor has. They hook people up to it and the serum pumps into their veins. It gets them to tell the truth. It works on everyone. This is just an altered version of that," Four explained.

My head dropped into my knees as I brushed my hair off of my forehead. I nodded slowly, knowing that he was right. But this wasn't as dangerous as the serum that we had right now. This compliance serum would make Dauntless soldiers mindless killing machines. And it would reveal every Divergent in Dauntless that was still alive. Eventually it would be able to reveal every Divergent that was in Chicago. We had to stop this.

"This is good though. It isn't ready yet. We have to strike at her before she can mass produce this thing," I told Four.

He nodded, clearly in agreement. "You're right about that," Four said.

"It'll actually make someone follow orders?" I asked to clarify.

When Four nodded at me, I let out a long breath and shook my head, pinching the bridge of my nose. That wasn't good. If she could make Dauntless follow orders we were literally f**ked. This was a time sensitive matter. We had to get to her before she could put this plan into motion.

"That's the idea. Right now I don't think it's always successful. That's probably why Jeanine has given herself a two year buffer to get these things in mass production," Four reasoned.

"That's good, right?"

"It gives us time. But that doesn't mean that she won't be doing little things with it in the meantime. This is still a time sensitive matter. The sooner that we can stop this, the better," Four said.

"And I only have a month before Jeanine will reveal what I am," I muttered under my breath. Four took my hand tightly. "A month is plenty of time for us to figure out what we want to do," he said, giving me a reassuring smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

"I get it now," I said suddenly.

Four looked up from his lap to look at me. "What do you get?" he asked.

"Jeanine also had planned out an attack on Candor," I told Four, whose eyes widened.

"Candor?" Four asked.

"A small one, not noticeable by anyone. And by the time that they can come forward and admit what
happened it will be too late. Candor is going to have control of this serum. Jeanine wants it to find the Divergent's. That's why she must have pushed this through. She's influenced Jack Kang," I said softly.

Four nodded blankly at me as I spoke and explained the plan that Jeanine was making, and had already started. The more that I spoke about this matter the more that I realized just how deep this plan went. She must have been planning this since she was a child. A plan like this took years of careful planning. I couldn't believe that she had actually managed to do all of this with only minimal help from others.

"She's good like that. Everyone knows that Jeanine is cold and manipulative but very few doubt that she doesn't have the best interest for Chicago at heart," Four said.

I snorted loudly. "She does not have Chicago's best interest at heart," I snarled.

"We know that she doesn't. But they don't. There has to be a way that we can show them," Four said, more to himself than me.

"There is," I answered quickly.

Four glanced up at me as if expecting me to have a grand and marvelous plan. And I had anything but a marvelous plan. "What are you thinking?" Four asked.

"If we go with what I'm thinking it means that at least one of us has to be ready to show the world what we are. I'm ready to do that. Are you?" I asked Four, already knowing what his answer would be.

"Of course," Four said, without hesitation.

I smiled gratefully at him. "There was one other thing that I saw on the file," I told Four.

"Go on," he said, nodding at me to continue.

"She's planning to use the serum on the Dauntless soldiers. All of us. It will unveil who the Divergent are. The rest are going to go and attack Abnegation."

As expected, Four's eyes became a mix of nerves and anger. "To do what?" he asked.

"Abnegation controls the government. They wouldn't stand for the slaughter of innocents. Even if they were Divergent. With them out of the way Jeanine takes over Chicago," I answered.

Honestly that was more of something that I was taking a guess with. It wasn't like the attack on Abnegation and Candor had been explicitly in the file, but I was no moron. I knew that that was what Jeanine was hoping for. And it was what she was going to get soon enough if we did nothing.

"And the Dauntless soldiers take the fall for it," Four muttered.

"Exactly," I said.

That was exactly what I had been thinking. "Jeanine gets what she wants when she steps in to end the fight. She becomes the leader of the government, Dauntless are out of her way when they get locked up, and the Divergent's become eradicated," he mumbled.

"Exactly," I repeated softly.

The more that we talked about this the worse off that we sounded. Every time I thought about how
deep this plan ran I realized just how pathetically outnumbered and outwitted I was. Unsurprisingly, Four dropped his head into his hands and I leaned back in the chair, letting him mull over the information I'd just fed him. It was a lot to take in at one time.

"You're right, Alex. This isn't good. None of this is good," Four said and I nodded.

I didn't need Four to tell me that. I had known that this wasn't good since the moment that Tori told me that my test results were inconclusive. "I know," I mumbled.

"We can't wait until this is ready to go. The best thing that we can do is strike now," Four said.

I nodded in agreement. He was right. We needed to take care of this now. "And how do we do that?" I asked.

"I'm not sure yet. We take a few weeks to figure this out. While Jeanine's plan is still in the development phase and she is still vulnerable we can attack. She won't see it coming," Four explained.

And he was right. We both knew that this was something that we needed to get done before Jeanine could make anymore progress in her attack. If we could strike sooner rather than later she wouldn't be expecting a retaliation. Especially since she believed that I was alone without any help.

"No, she won't. And she thinks that I'm alone. I know that there's only two of us but two heads is better than one. And we're strong. Together, with planning, we can win this thing. We can stop her," I said softly.

I wasn't really sure if I was saying it for Four's sake or my own but I knew that we both appreciated it. "Absolutely. I'm with you, Alex. No matter what I'm with you," Four promised.

I smiled and squeezed his hand quickly. "Thank you, Four," I said happily.

No matter what I would at least have one person in my corner. And I needed everyone that I could get. "Now tell me, what was said at the meeting yesterday?" Four asked.

There was next to nothing that was actually said other than threatening me. "Mostly a whole lot of nothing. Nothing really important anyways. Mostly just threatening me and telling me that they knew who I was. But there was one thing that they told me that threw me. They want me in Erudite. Right after the final Fear Landscape at eight o'clock that night," I said.

Four raised his eyebrows. This was the one part of his plan that I didn't understand. "What do they want?" Four asked.

"I don't really know. If I don't go they kill everyone that I care about. You included. Jeanine said that she needed me to see something. That I was the key," I muttered softly.

Four's eyebrows knitted to turn his face into a scowl as he thought about what Jeanine could want me to see. I understood. I had no damn clue what it was that Jeanine needed me for. She hated the Divergent. She thought that we were dangerous. So why not just kill me? What was it that she so desperately needed me to see?

"You have no idea what this thing was that she was talking about?" Four asked.

"No clue," I said, dropping back into the chair. Four sighed at me. Whatever it was that she wanted from me it certainly wasn't good.
The look on Four's face told me that he was completely beside himself about this entire thing. Not that I blamed him. He had been hoping that I would know whatever it was that Jeanine wanted me to see. I was sure that I wanted to know just as bad as he did. Probably more so.

"Something that she apparently needs me for. She said that she doesn't want me dead right now. She needs me for whatever this thing is," I told Four.

His brows furrowed once more and I rubbed the palms of my hands into my eyes. It was times like this that made me wish that I was just like my friends; happy and unaware of what was going on around me. It would have been nice to be ignorant to the problems of the world for a day or two. But this was also a good thing. I could put a stop to the war before it began.

"That's a good thing. It means that we can keep you safe for at least another month while we figure this thing out. Alex, you're not going there alone," Four said.

My heart gave a little skip. "Absolutely not. You are not going out there to die for me. We can -"

Four cut over me before I could argue my point anymore with him. "I don't give a damn what Jeanine Matthews said. You're more than my initiate. You are my friend," Four said.

I couldn't help but to smile. "You're my friend, too," I said softly.

"I'm not going to sit by and watch you potentially walk to your slaughter. Give me a few weeks. We come up with a plan and we keep you safe," he promised.

"Thank you, Four," I said softly.

I leaned up to the edge of my chair and grabbed Four's shoulders, bringing him in for a hug. His arms were tight around me and I gently pushed my face down into his shoulder. This wasn't just a hug from a friend or a hug from a lover. It was a hug from someone that would lay down their life to protect mine. We stayed wrapped together for a few minutes.

I was absolutely positive that Four could feel my heart pounding in my chest. I didn't want to admit it - to him or myself - but I was afraid. I was scared beyond belief of what was to come. I was afraid to lose myself to this plan. I was even more afraid to lose myself to Jeanine. I was not a cruel person. I didn't want to be a cruel person. There was a difference between cruelty and bravery. But I had to push that out of my mind and figure out a way to end this.

"Do you really think that we can do this alone?" I asked Four as I pulled away from him.

He was silent for a long moment and I knew that he was debating on whether or not he should bring anyone with us. It would be best to keep this between ourselves but it would be easier with another person. I knew that it was better that we did this alone. I didn't want to risk anyone else's life for this. Four's life was bad enough.

"We're going to have to," Four said.

"Yeah. I figured that much."

"I know of other members that are Divergent. I've found a few. But the more people that we keep out of this the better off that they are. Jeanine needs to know about as few people as possible."

"Okay," I said.

I wanted to ask who it was that he had found but I knew that it was better not to ask. The less of
them that I knew the better. "Is there anyone that you would even trust to help?" Four asked.

There were plenty of people that I had a feeling that we would be able to trust. Some were Dauntless and some were from other Factions. I thought back on everyone that I knew. None of the people that I could ask would make sense to get involved. I wasn't willing to risk their lives. I wasn't even sure if some of them would believe me.

"Maybe... Zeke, Tori, Cameron, any of the initiates," I said softly. Four looked unconvinced. "But I won't risk their lives. The leaders, they all must be in on it. We can't ask them. People in the other Factions would be stupid. They either won't believe us or we risk Jeanine finding out what we're planning to do."

We had the element of surprise right now. It wasn't something that we could risk losing. "You're right about that," Four said.

"It might be harder but... it's gotta just be us, Four," I said softly.

It meant that there was a damn good chance that one or both of us would die. Two people against a plan that had been in the making for years. Two people that had only known about it in its entirety for only a few minutes. We were so royally fucked. But I knew that, at this point, we were both already willing to risk our lives for this.

"You're right. This doesn't go past us," Four said. It was a minute before Four spoke up again, looking extremely guilty. "Alex... Eric -"

I cut Four off before he could say anything more. I didn't want to know what Four had to say where Eric was concerned. "I know, Four. Trust me, I know. I've been through this a million times with myself. I already know that Eric is working with her. I still trust that he's a good man. I trust that he doesn't truly understand what he's gotten into. But I also know that he's going to be there that night. I know that the minute that he finds out what I am everything that we've built between the two of us will break. I'm not a fool to think that Eric will change because of me," I explained.

Four looked pained at my words. He treated me like a sibling and I assumed that whenever he saw me hurting, it hurt him as well. Even if it was over Eric, someone that he had never liked before. I was a little pained to say it too. I really did like Eric and I didn't want our thing to end. I didn't want it to end, but I knew that it would.

"I need you to do something for me," I said.

"Okay."

"Just never think that Eric is truly evil. I've seen more to him than maybe anyone but Cameron. He's not the monster that you think he is," I said softly.

The conversation had taken a turn that I wasn't expecting, but now that it had I wanted to run with it. I wanted to know that Eric was more than the man that shot me in the stomach with a sim dart. He was more than the man that had accidentally thrown me off of the Chasm. Maybe I sounded insane, but I genuinely believed that he was a good man.

"I know he's not, Alex. I know that he isn't," Four said.

"You're sure about that?"

"Yes. You aren't an idiot. You wouldn't be with someone genuinely bad. Eric might be able to change. I don't believe that it's too late for him."
If I had been drinking something it would have gone all over Four's face. Had he really just told me that he didn't believe that it was too late for Eric? I would have thought that Four would never trust the leader. He seemed to always hate Eric and everything about him. I shook my head free of those thoughts. I would rather run with what Eric had said.

"It doesn't matter. None of that matters. All that matters right now is we figure out a plan for the two of us. Someone's gotta stop Jeanine. And even if it means that I die, it doesn't matter. As long as I stop her," I snarled, meaning every word.

Four clearly didn't like what I'd said. His eyes narrowed and he looked like might smack me. "You are not going to die. Not as long as I have my eye on you," he explained.

I smiled and grabbed him in a hug once more. "Thank you," I whispered.

We may have started out on a rocky road, but we were in this together now. "Just don't do anything stupid. Tell me what you're planning. We can both get out of this. We just have to work together," he said.

"Of course," I said, nodding at him.

"Go, you've had a long night. Get some rest. Try not to think about this for right now. We're gonna figure this out, Alex," Four said.

"Trust me when I say that I know we will," I said sharply.

The two of us smiled at each other as I gave him another hug, one that we stayed in for a while. Four helped me up from the chair and I walked over towards the door to the fear sim room, turning to leave, praying silently that he was right. As the door closed behind me I turned to the Dauntless member halls and headed towards the one person that might have been more dangerous to me than Jeanine Matthews.

Present Day...

"Alright initiates, head to lunch," Four called.

I was startled out of my reverie by Four's voice. It had to have been the fifth or sixth time I'd thought about that conversation just since I had woken up this morning. Most of the times my mind was preoccupied with training or something of the likes but when I sat here with nothing to do but wait, it was the only think that I could think about.

"We'll start with Greg when you get back," Four told us.

We all nodded and stood to head to lunch. I walked out with Greg, Jax, Michael, Dante, Jackson, Draven, and Aaron. I almost smiled as I realized that I was the only girl this high up in the rankings. Heather was the only other girl in the top ten. It would still keep her safe from Fence duty, which made me happy. If I did manage to live through all of this, I wanted her to be around to hang out with me. As we left the sim room I let out a little breath.

Unfortunately Four and I really hadn't made any progress at all in a plan. That was even an exaggeration. We had made absolutely no headway in making a plan. Every time that one of us came up with something akin to a plan the other one would say that it didn't make any sense. Neither one of us were willing to risk the others life and each plan very well meant that one of us was going to die. We hadn't come up with a happy medium yet.

The closest thing that we had come up with was an ambush. But I wasn't really sure that two people...
rather than one could be considered an ambush. We weren't sure how many guards Jeanine was going to have with her. If she had twenty guards we would barely be able to take down one of them before being caught and killed ourselves. Four had once offered to come with me at eight o'clock, but I had shot that down quickly.

There was no way that I was going to risk Jeanine knowing that Four was a Divergent as well. We had even thought about things as insane as assassination. But all that would do was get us thrown in prison or killed ourselves. We needed actual proof that Jeanine was doing something. And blackmail could backfire on us easily. I was glad that the final fear landscape was still a month away. We needed that time to get a real plan together. Right now we were hopelessly lost.

I walked into the kitchen with my friends and grabbed myself a piece of steak. It was rare that they actually had it and the sight of the meat made my mouth water. I couldn't believed that I had lasted as long as I did as a vegetarian back in Amity. Meat was so good. As I walked back out to the table I saw that both Eric and Cameron were speaking with another leader.

They looked to be incredibly bored. I flashed both men a wink, the other leader not noticing anything awry. Cameron grinned back at me and flashed me a cheesy wink back. The leader was focused on a paper in his hands. Eric remained stony-faced but I knew that he was amused. I saw the corners of his mouth quirk up. It made my heart flutter a bit, knowing that I could do little things like that and still amuse him. I grabbed my tray with a smile and walked over to the table.

"Hey, girl," Heather greeted as I took a seat next to her.

"Hey, Heather."

She leaned in to whisper to me and I leaned a little closer. "You going to spend the night with your man again or come with us?" she asked.

Grinning at her, I cut off a piece of steak and popped it into my mouth. Heather was drinking a blue liquid that had a strange smell to it. It reminded me of the liquid that we drank for the sims. "Since I've only spent the night with him once this week I think that I might spend the night with him tonight," I told her honestly, hoping that she didn't want to do something.

It turned out that she definitely didn't want to do anything with me tonight. She grinned in what I assumed was relief and placed down the cup that she had been nervously fidgeting with. "Oh, good," Heather sighed.

Smiling at her I adopted a teasing note to my voice. "Oh I'm so glad to see that you enjoy my company, Heather," I told her with a raised brow.

Her eyes widened as she shook her head at me. "Oh, that wasn't what I meant!" Heather shouted. I smiled at her. I knew that wasn't what she'd meant. "I'm just teasing you," I said.

"Asshole."

"Need the place to yourself?" I asked.

"I've been spending lunch so far trying to get everyone to go elsewhere tonight. It's Cole's birthday and I wanted to get to spend it with just him," she said.

"That's sweet of you," I said happily.

They made such a cute couple. I didn't even know when Eric's birthday was. "So far everyone's
been really good," she said.

Grinning at her, I held up my hands in a defensive position. "Then you have my word that I won't come back to the dorms tonight," I promised.

She smiled gratefully at me. I was pretty sure that no one would want to come and interrupt their evening together. It was also absolutely perfect timing. I could spend the night with Eric without anyone asking me any questions and Heather would get to have a night alone with Cole. It was a win-win for both of us.

"You're sure that no one else is going to be making a surprise appearance?" I asked.

Heather nodded. "Some of the boys are just going to stay with the Dauntless born, but I'm sure. No one is coming back to the dorms tonight," she said. I wasn't sure how she managed it with Jade but good for her.

"Nice planning. I didn't know that today was Cole's birthday. What are you gonna do for him?" I asked.

A small blush flooded her cheeks and I tilted my head to the side. Was she embarrassed about what she was doing for him? Maybe I shouldn't have asked her. But curiosity tended to get the best of me and I really did want to know what she was doing. I would have never known what to do for Eric.

"Honestly, Alex, I feel so stupid. I have no idea what Cole likes," she admitted.

I smiled at her. So that was her problem. She felt bad that she didn't know what Cole would like. Honestly I was the same way with Eric. I knew that it was a good thing that we didn't celebrate each other's birthdays. I had no idea what he would want if it were his birthday. Probably sex. Lots of it and however he wanted.

"I feel like I should try to make this birthday special," Heather said.

"You're going to make it something special. As long as it's coming from you, it'll be special," I comforted her.

It's his first birthday in the Faction that he really feels like he belongs in and I want to try to plan something but he's been around all day. I can't get away for a second to try and plan something nice," she complained.

And that was when I understood her problem. She needed Cole away from her for a few hours. I had an idea. "Here's a hint sweetie. Cole likes you! It doesn't matter what you do or get him for his birthday. As long as you're there that's all that matters," I told her.

She smiled weakly at me. "I suppose that you're right," she said.

"I know that I am. Just spend the night with him. Talk about how different this past year has made the two of you. Enjoy the time that you have together. If that's not enough there's a restaurant buried in the back of the Pit called Defying. It's good," I explained, remembering the meal that I'd had there.

Just because it was Damien that had taken me there didn't mean that I had to knock the place. It had actually had really good food. And the atmosphere was pretty. I was sure that Heather and Cole would appreciate a romantic evening together. Maybe one day Eric would get around to taking me there. Yeah, right.

"Thanks, Alex. Now I just need to get him out of the dorms for a little while so I can make it look a
"little more festive," she said.

Laughing under my breath, I smiled at her. The gray stone walls of the dorms were anything but festive. "There's got to be something that you can find in the stores," I said.

"Not that I don't appreciate everything that Dauntless has done for us but these dorms are something awful. I need to do something about them. I'd ask for your help but I know that you still have to do your fear sim," she said.

Maybe I couldn't directly help but I knew some things that I could do to make things a little easier on her. "Leave it to me. I've got help lined up for you," I told Heather.

Heather raised an eyebrow as I turned back to the table where the Dauntless born were sitting. They were chatting loudly with each other and laughing hysterically. Even though we were all friends now we still usually sat away from each other. It was just how we had all gotten comfortable.

"What are you doing?" Heather asked.

"Hush. Serena, Lisa!" I called.

Both girls glanced up and came over when I motioned to them. "Hey, Alex," Lisa greeted happily.

"What's up?" Serena asked.

I leaned in slightly. The boys were glancing over at us and I didn't want them to hear. "Okay, listen. It's Heather's boyfriend's birthday today and we're trying to do something nice. We need him out of the dorms all day. I got that covered. But I need you guys to help her get the dorms a little nicer. I mean, they're hideous," I said.

Serena nodded and gave me a bright smile. I couldn't help but to smile back at her. Serena and I still bickered from time to time but we were getting along much better these days. Thankfully both girls seemed like they were willing to help. That was what I had been banking on.


"Of course," she said.

"We can get some decorations. Living in Dauntless for so long means that we have tons of built up points. We can get you guys some stuff to make the dorms look nicer," Lisa offered.

Heather smiled brightly as I turned to the boys. "Thank you, thank you, thank you," I could hear Heather thanking Lisa and Serena.

In the meantime, the boys had gone back to their own conversations. "Perfect. I'll handle getting Cole out of the dorms," I told Heather.

"What are you -?" she started before I cut her off, turning back to our male friends.

"Hey, Cole!" I yelled.

He turned back to me and smiled. "What's up, Alex?" he asked.

"I didn't know that it was your birthday," I said loudly.

Suddenly all of our friends, including the Dauntless born, were on top of Cole, punching him and asking why he hadn't told them that it was his birthday. That had been exactly what I was hoping for.
Lisa, Serena, and Heather all started laughing at their reactions. I grinned and winked at Heather.

"Go and take him to do something! You only turn seventeen once!" I yelled to the boys.

It was only a moment later that they had practically lifted him from the bench to bring him to do something that would probably end up getting him kicked out of Dauntless. I really hoped that they weren't going to make him dye his hair red or something. At least I had gotten Cole out of the way for them.

"Thanks for that," Heather told me.

"No problem," I said, leaning in to give her a hug.

"You ladies ready?" Heather asked, turning to the two Dauntless born girls.

"Absolutely!" Lisa chirped.

"Let's do it," Serena said brightly.

"You gonna be alright?" Heather asked, turning back to me. "I feel bad just leaving you here."

The others had already stalked off. If they left it would leave me alone at the table. Not that I really minded. I could use some time for peace and quiet. I shook my head at Heather and finished off the last piece of my steak. It was almost time for me to get back to training anyways.

"No worries. I'm gonna go head back to the fear sim room and wait for Four. Not like I really have anything else to do," I told her.

"You're sure?" Heather asked.

"Of course. You enjoy the night with your man and I'll enjoy the night with mine. I'll see you tomorrow. I'm gonna have dinner out. I don't really think any of us are going to be in the dining room anyways," I said.

Of course that meant that I was going to steal something from Eric's refrigerator. Unfortunately the food in his apartment was pretty limited. For all of the things that Eric was good at, cooking was not one of them. He wasn't awful, but he certainly wasn't my mother. I would figure something out.

Heather nodded at me and smiled, knowing what I meant.

"Wait a second. Who's your man?" Serena asked, before they could leave.

I smiled at her. She looked more curious than anything and I couldn't help but to laugh. I wondered how insane she would think that I was if I told her that it was Eric. Even Heather seemed to think from time to time that I was crazy. I noticed that it had even captured Lisa's attention. Everyone was dying to know who it was that I had been seeing.

"I could tell you but then I'd have to kill you," I told her.

Serena and Lisa both laughed and shook their heads. Heather smirked to herself. She knew that I was almost telling the truth. No one could ever know about Eric and I. By the time that I would actually be allowed to tell people about us, he would hate me. I stood from the table at the same times as my friends and headed straight back to the fear sim room. Only Greg and Michael were already there. I dropped into the seat closest to the door as Four walked in.

He seemed a little surprised to see me but he said nothing about it. Not that he could. We were
supposed to be nothing more than an initiate and a trainer. But we were so much more. I leaned back against the seat just like I had earlier and closed my eyes, thinking about what exactly it was that I could be facing in my next fear.

I had a feeling that Jeanine was going to be involved in another one after everything that I had discovered lately. I found myself no longer nervous about people seeing in my fears that I had to kill Jeanine. I didn't give a damn that Jeanine knew that I was Divergent. All I cared about was stopping Jeanine's plans in their tracks. She was not going to kill one more of us. I wasn't sure how I could do it without Four or I dying, but I was going to figure it out. Sacrifice was not in my plans.

No matter what happened I was not going to let Four sacrifice himself. Not for me and not for this stupid plan. He was not going to die. Not even for this cause. Not after everything that he had done for me. I would have been dead long ago if not for him. He was going to get the chance to live a full life. I wished that he realized that he didn't have to do this with me. But I knew that he would. No matter what the sacrifice, I knew that Four was going to do this with me.

He cared about this cause as much as I did. Maybe even more. I knew that he watched closely for Divergent's. They had been a part of his life for at least four years, since he had found out that he was one during his own initiation. Like me, we both knew that we had to protect the rest of our kind. Especially since no one else was going to do it.

It wasn't the first time in the past week that I found myself wondering what I could do to keep the Divergent's safe. The answer was almost nothing. I didn't even know who most of them were. In fact, other than Four and I, I didn't know who any of them were. Not really. Apparently Four knew some of them but he didn't want to drag them into the fight.

There were a few plans that I could think of, but like with the plan to attack Jeanine, all of my plans ended terribly. My mind kept jumping to the question of whether or not Eric would really be there that night. I wondered if the moment that he saw me he would take it upon himself to kill me. He certainly might. He hated the Divergent's. But did that mean that he could also hate me? It was a question that I might not get an answer to for some time.

I wanted to know what it was that Jeanine wanted me to see. It had to be something powerful or else she wouldn't have seemed so concerned at the meeting. I wanted to think that I would be able to tell Eric what I was. I wanted to think that he would either save or protect me. But he wouldn't. I knew that. I just hoped that one day, no matter what happened to me, he would be able to make the right choice. He was a good man. I knew that he was.

The door opened to the sim room and I smiled at Aaron as he left. "Alex?" Four called.

I glanced around and saw that no one else was in the room. I was a little surprised. I hadn't been thinking that he would be anywhere near ready for me. Of course when I started thinking about everything with Jeanine time seemed to fly by. My month of normalcy remaining was slipping by fast.

"Oh. Time already?" I asked.

"Come on," Four said, when he realized that I wasn't moving.

"Okay," I muttered, standing from the seat.

I walked into the sim room and took my normal seat next to the computer monitor. "You alright?" Four asked.
I glanced over at him. "Why?" I asked.

"I noticed that you were here early."

For once I hadn't come early because there was a problem with something. The only reason that I was early was because I had nothing better to do. I smiled and nodded at him, slipping the jacket off of my shoulders. I was getting a little warm with the anticipation of the next fear sim.

"Yeah. Heather wanted to do something for Cole's birthday so I sent her on her way with some Dauntless born girls. Got the boys to take Cole and keep him out of the dorms for the night. Figured that I had nothing better to do so I might as well come back here and wait. Someone should be having fun. Even if that someone isn't me," I said.

The last part had been a little more bitter than I had meant for it to come out. Four smiled, knowing that I wished that sometimes I was a normal initiate. It would certainly make things easier. But it might make things more boring too. And I liked a bit of excitement in my life. Even if that made it a little more dangerous.

"You do a lot for your friends for someone that has a million other things to worry about," Four said.

I smiled again. He was right and I knew that. But that that was exactly the reason that I did it. "I know. I just feel like I should act normal for as long as I possibly can. The time is coming soon that everyone is going to be able to see me for what I am," I muttered.

Four nodded at me, getting the serum filled into the vial. "You're right about that," he said.

It only reminded me that somewhere out there was a compliance serum in its early phases of production under a guise that was nothing close to what it would really be used for. It made me a little sick to know that I was just sitting here when I could have been doing something much more important with my time.

"I guess I want to make these last few weeks be the ones that they remember. I don't want them to think that I was just a Divergent. I want them to remember their friend," I said softly.

Four came to stand in front of me. He had his arms crossed over his chest. "And Eric?" Four asked.

The smile faded from my face and I shook my head. He knew that any conversation about Eric was a sore spot with me. Especially since I didn't know how he was going to react. It made me want to shut down, mostly because I didn't really want to deal with Eric knowing that I was a Divergent.

"Nothing. I don't know," I moaned with a little sigh.

"Come on, Alex," Four goaded gently.

"Part of me wants to think that after he realizes what I am he'll remember me the way that I am now. But I know that once he knows what I am he's going to treat me the same way that Jeanine does. Cold. Like I'm just the means to an end," I said honestly.

"Alex -" Four started before I cut him off. I didn't want to be patronized.

"It's fine, Four. I know that it's coming. I'm just enjoying it for now," I said.

Shaking his head at me, Four sealed the vile and I watched as he flicked at the tip of the needle a few times. I shivered and pulled my hair back off of my neck. I hated this part. Maybe one day my fears would actually involve needles. They weren't the worst things in the world, but I definitely didn't like
"I don't think you have to Alex," Four said.

I raised my eyebrow at him. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"I think that you might be underestimating the man that Eric really is," Four said.

My eyebrows shot to my head at Four's words. Once, not too long ago, Four had warned me to stay far away from Eric. And I had almost wanted to try and avoid Eric. I had known that he was as dangerous as Four told me. Now he was telling me that I might be thinking that Eric was a worse person than he really was. So which version of Four could I listen to?

"Weren't you once telling me that you thought that Eric might be more dangerous than I gave him credit for?" I asked Four.

He merely smiled at me. "I did, once upon a time," Four said.

"I could have sworn that not too long ago you were telling me that Eric wasn't one to be trusted," I told him in a half-serious and half-teasing voice.

Four merely grinned and shook his head as he walked over to me with the needle. "People can change. So can minds," he said.

"I'm glad to hear that," I whispered.

The two of us exchanged a small smile as I shook my head. I wasn't sure whether or not Four was telling the truth but I appreciated it nonetheless. He grabbed the syringe in his hand and brought it over to me. I leaned back in the chair and felt the familiar sharp pang of the needle piercing my skin. At least a tattoo gave you something fun afterwards. This was pretty much a nightmare the entire time.

"Alright. Don't worry about it. Get in and out of there as fast as you can. We still have to hide what you are at the end. Don't forget. Jeanine and Max know what you are but the others don't," Four said.

"Got it."

He pushed down the plunger and I fell. When I woke up I was in a strange white room. I was certain that I had never been here before. At least my snake fear seemed to be over. But this didn't seem to be anything good. With the blink of an eye I saw that the room that I was standing in was suddenly flooded by the faces of people that I knew and loved.

All of the transfers. The Dauntless born. My family. Zeke. Cameron. Tori. Eric. Iris. Florian. Even Damien was there. Skylar and Raven, who were now Factionless, were here. Jade, Hunter, and Colt were here. The only person that wasn't here was Four. They were all standing around me in a circle and I sucked in a breath. This wasn't good. What the hell were they all doing here? It made it even worse that none of them looked happy to see me. They were all standing with blank looks on their faces.

My breath had caught in my throat as I stared at them all. I tried to call out to them but it was like my voice wasn't even working anymore. The more that I tried to scream to them the tighter that my throat became. The stony looks on their faces had turned taunting as I spun around, waiting for one of them to speak.
"Alex," Heather finally called out.

I turned to her in relief. "Heather. What's -?"

"What are you even doing here?" she interrupted.

There was another tightening in my throat. This time I knew that I wouldn't be able to speak. I put a hand to my throat but nothing came out. I was powerless to say anything. I wanted to scream at her but my voice still wasn't working. It seemed that I was just going to be a prisoner to listen to them. No matter how hard I fought, my voice was frozen in my throat. I had no idea what I was doing here. I couldn't really even remember how I had gotten here.

"She doesn't mean in this room," Tori said. I turned to look at her. She was standing next to Jade. The two looked cruel and cold. "She means in Dauntless."

How could Tori say something like that? Not long ago she had told me that she thought that I had what it took to make it here in Dauntless. Now she was telling me that I didn't belong here. That was a damn lie. I knew it was. I belonged in Dauntless. It was the only place that I belonged. I opened my mouth to argue with her, but I still couldn't find my voice.

"You aren't one of us," Draven called. I spun to the other side of the room to look at him. He was giving me his signature smile. It had never looked so menacing. "No matter how hard you try to be."

The others in the room joined in on the laughter and I felt my heart lodge in my throat. These were my friends. The people that I counted as my family. "They're right," Mom said. I turned to stare at her with teary eyes. Her stomach was slightly swollen with my baby sister. "You're never going to be one of them. Not really. Not while you keep the secret of who you really are."

She didn't know my secret. Not in reality. But it seemed that everyone else did. They all laughed again as the tears began to build in my eyes. But I was not going to let them fall. This was a fear sim. It wasn't real. But it seemed so real. They seemed so real. I tried to speak once more but my words still stuck in my throat. How did I get out of this?

"Tell us, are you ashamed yet?" Buck asked.

I turned to face him. This wasn't Buck. My Buck would never say something like that. He was my friend. My sometimes serious and completely foolish friend. This wasn't any of them. But it felt real. Their insults certainly felt like real knives were stabbing me. Because they knew that these were the things that cut the deepest for me. And they were using them against me.

"Do you feel like a fool yet?" Cameron asked.

He sent me a sly wink, just like the one that I had sent him a few hours ago. All it did was add insult to injury. The moment the next voice spoke I nearly closed my eyes. The last thing that I wanted to do was to hear him speak. To hear him tell me how cowardly I was. But I turned towards him anyways.

"Because the poor, pathetic little Amity got in over her head?" Eric asked. I cringed slightly. "You're in the big leagues now. And look at you. All alone. Not even your little friends are here to help. You're gonna die. Alone. With no friends. No one that even cares that you're gone."

Maybe he was right. Maybe no one would care. "He's right, Alex," Dad called. I turned back and shook my head at him. This wasn't him. He would never say something like that. He had one arm wrapped around Mom and they were looking at me like I was nothing more than the speck of dirt on the bottom of their shoes. "None of us really care about you. Your mother and I, we have a new
child coming. And they're going to be better than you. It isn't a hard feat."

I could feel my heart shatter. I was more than this. No one argued with him. They all just continued to smile. "Your own best friend doesn't even want to be around you right now," Cole said. I spun once more to face him. My head was spinning from the barrage of insults and any second now I felt like I might vomit. "She cares about me now. Not you."

It was easy enough to see Heather nod her agreement. That wasn't true. It couldn't be true. They were both my friends. They both still cared about me. I knew that it was the truth. But right now I was having a hard time trying to convince myself that this wasn't real. That it was just a sim. It just felt like so much more.

"And it's somewhere between cute and pathetic that you think that we still care about you," Iris said. I swung around to face her and immediately paled. She had always had a know-it-all look about her but it had never bothered me. Not until now. Florian was standing at her side and he threw an arm over her shoulder. They were together now. They didn't need me anymore.

"Do you want to know when the last time was that we thought about our little Amity friend?" Florian asked. The same Florian that had once shared my bed. "Never. Not since we've left Amity. You're hanging on to the past. When the past has long forgotten about you."

The jeer felt even worse coming from people that I had loved for all of my life. People that I had always counted as family. Even now, when we only saw each other one day out of the year. The next voice piped up and it made me wish that I had a gun on me. There was absolutely nothing that I could use to defend myself with. Not that they were attacking me. Not physically anyways.

"Do you feel weak yet, Amity?" Jade asked. Never once had I felt weak in her presence. Not until right now.

My voice was still constricted tightly. "Do you wish that I'd killed you that night?" Colt asked. Standing next to his brother was the man that I would have been more than happy to never have to see again. "Do you regret ever giving me a second chance?" Damien asked. Of course I did. The only good that came from it was Eric. "Do you regret coming to my room the night after he threw you over the Chasm? You didn't at the time." He was right. I had sought physical comfort. And it was stupid. I had never thought that he would betray me the way that he did. "Do you remember what a fool you felt like that night? You had real feelings for me. It was cute. But it was even more pathetic."

Unfortunately he was right. It was pathetic. I had fallen for his sweet words and pretty eyes. "Do you remember losing to me?" a deeper voice called. I turned to Hunter and paled. "Do you remember feeling your bones break underneath me? Do you want to feel that again?"

No. My head was spinning with a mix of the harsh words and twisting motions and for a moment I wished that Four would pull me from the sim. At any moment I was sure that I was going to collapse to the ground. I wasn't sure what I could do to end it. I was having a problem continuing to tell myself that it wasn't real.

"Look around you, Alex. No one here wants you. Not them," Raven said, motioning to the Dauntless born.

"She would have been better off here;" Jet said.

There was a little stab of guilt at the memory of Raven leaving and standing in Jet's arms for as long
as possible. It wasn't just me. There were others that had pushed her down the rankings board. He
had been one of them. I hadn't wanted her to leave. Those were just the rules of Dauntless. That
wasn't my fault.

"But she had to leave. She would be better in your spot. Anyone would, actually," Jet continued.

Maybe that was the truth. Maybe someone else should have been in my spot. But there had to be a
reason that I was still here. His words sent another shock of hurt through my stomach. I had fought
hard and earned my spot in Dauntless. Be damned what anyone else thought. Of course, I cared
what they thought. They were still my friends.

"Even me," Skylar added to Jet's last thought.

"Look at us, Alex," Aaron called, the first Dauntless born to speak. "You'll never be like us. You'll
never be like any of them. Because you aren't." The worst part was that they were all eerily calm. He
was right. I was different from every person surrounding me. And Jeanine Matthews was going to be
sure that I never forgot that. "That first place spot that you have. Why do you think that you have it?
Not because you've earned it."

Maybe I hadn't earned it. Maybe the only reason that I was so high ranked was because of the
Divergence. "You haven't. And you know it," Jackson said, like he was able to read my mind.
"You're an Amity hiding in Dauntless clothing. Look at that new tattoo on your back." The laughter
in the room roared once more. Tori seemed to find it the most amusing. "Even when you're here, so
close to the end, to being a true Dauntless, you're still loyal to them."

That didn't mean that I was loyal to them. I could be loyal to every Faction. That didn't make me the
villain. But that was exactly why I was Divergent. Because I could think like that and not think that I
was doing something terrible.

"It's pathetic really. I've never seen someone with so much potential fall so fast. Look at you. You
tell yourself that you're so brave. But what keep you up at night? Fear that you're going to die," Lisa
added flippantly.

It wasn't fear that I was going to die. It was fear that I was going to fail. Fear that Four was going to
die. But never that I was going to die. The only reason I hadn't settled on a suicide mission was
because Four hadn't allowed it. "Do you remember that night, after Capture the Flag, when you went
to the zip line?" Serena asked. Seeing that I was still mute I merely nodded at her. "I told you to be
careful and not splatter yourself across the wall at the end. I wish you had. I bet you do too."

I wanted to fix what was wrong with the Faction system. "Are you ready to die?" the remaining
Dauntless born asked me in unison. If it was going to happen, I was ready for it. "It's coming."

"Do you feel stupid yet?" Dante asked, changing the mood in the room once more.

His voice carried its normal teasing lilt to it and his eyes were bright with mischief. Dante, who had
once kicked me in the head during a sparring match and had apologized for hours, was now looking
at me like I was his next meal. Another voice called out to me and I spun once more. It seemed like
in the past few minutes the people in the room had all come a few steps closer to me. Everything was
closing in on me.

"You should," Jax snarled.

I tried to call out to them once more but my throat was still closed. It felt like someone had poured a
bottle of liquid glue down my throat and it had hardened. A friendly laugh came from the other side
of the circle and I turned back. It was Zeke. He was giving me a small smile and I wanted to fall to
the ground at the sight of him. Zeke had always been so supportive of me. And now here he was,
tearing me down.

"Look at you. Thinking for a second that you can save yourself. It's too late," he said.

And just like that the air shifted in the room once more. All of the people in my life silenced
themselves. Their laughing faces had turned stone cold and the air seemed to frost over. It made me
feel even more nervous than I was before. I felt my heart pounding in my chest.

"Number one ranked initiate," a far too familiar voice spoke softly. I turned to see none other than
Jeanine Matthews in the center of the circle. "Just like you always wanted to be. You're the strongest
of them. The best. But it's all because of a lie. And now they know. They know the truth that you've
fought so desperately to hide. It was never worth it, Amarantha. You were always going to be
different. They were never going to love you. And the one person you thought was in your corner?"

Four. I realized it a moment too late. She motioned with the wave of her hand and I covered my
mouth as Iris and Florian stepped apart. Four's corpse fell to the ground, a bleeding bullet wound
against his forehead. The blood was seeping onto the white floor and I could already feel it soaking
through my shoes. Not Four.

"Alone once more. So which one goes first? Perhaps your dear Eric," she purred.

For the first time in what felt like an hour it felt like my throat had opened up completely. "You're
wrong. I'm not alone. I'll never be alone. Not really," I finally managed to speak. This was just a sim,
but it felt like this was the last time that I would ever really speak to her. "I'm not the last one of me.
There will always be another to take my place. Go ahead."

Taking a deep breath, I motioned towards Eric. Jeanine smirked and Eric scowled as she raised a gun
to shoot him. Just before she could pull the trigger I stepped in front of the barrel of the gun. The
boiling metal had just breached the skin of my forehead before I shot up in the fear sim chair.

My breathing was ragged as I gasped for air. That was the way that it always was once I managed to
wake myself up from a sim. Four was already at my side and I clenched onto his jacket. Thankfully it
really was a sim. He was alright and I wasn't dead. We were okay for now.

"It's alright, it's okay. You're fine. Just a sim. Although I guess you knew that," Four said.

"Yeah," I muttered weakly, dropping my head into my hands.

Sweat was at my hairline and I was shaking slightly. "Alex, that would never happen. Your friends,
they're on your side. Even if they knew they wouldn't just leave you. They love you. Your parents
love you too," Four said.

Maybe he was right. I wanted to think that he was right, but I couldn't be sure. I wasn't sure that I
wanted to be right. Even if they didn't mean to their opinions of me would change once they
discovered what I was. It was the way that the system worked. Divergent's were dangerous. A threat.
They knew that. It's what they were taught.

"It was just a fear sim. It was the worst thing that you can imagine happening. It isn't real," Four
consoled softly.

Pulling my hair down from the hold that it was in, I brushed it back off of my forehead and dropped
my head in my hands. I didn't mean for it to happen but it felt like something in me had just snapped.
For once I couldn't keep myself together. Maybe it was the thought that this was not going to be the
last time that I faced this fear.

"That's the worst thing about my fears, Four!" I yelled.

He had clearly seen it coming. He didn't even flinch. "Alex -"

"It's that they could damn well become real. Some of them will become real. And there's next to nothing that I can do to stop it. I just have to face it. Reality. I get it," I told him.

As much as I hated it all, I did get it. Maybe some of them would stay by my side. There was a chance that they wouldn't all leave me. But they wouldn't ever look at me the same. Even once I found out what I was. I was never just Dauntless. I was Divergent. It was a label that went on you for the rest of your life. However short or long that might be.

"Yeah. But sometimes we don't need to face reality," Four said.

I raised my eyebrows. Was he really just telling me to forget about my troubles? "What do you mean?" I asked.

Four was always the type to get things done first and relax later. "Sometimes it's better to forget about the worries in our heads and pretend like everything is alright in the world. You were in and out of there in just under five minutes. You've earned it," he reasoned.

He was right. But that didn't mean that I was going to recognize it. "I haven't earned anything. Not yet," I said honestly.

The minute that Jeanine's plans to eradicate the Divergent's was destroyed was the minute that I would feel like I had earned something. "You've earned it," Four repeated.

"As long as Jeanine is still out there and working on this plan I haven't earned anything." Four glared at me so harshly that I thought it would burn a hole through my skull. He certainly had the broody look down pat. "But you're right. This is on my mind all the time these days. I need to get out there and do something that isn't going to end in a suicide run," I told him.

Of course any trip to Eric's apartment could be dangerous. Actually, every trip that I made to Eric's apartment was putting me in some type of danger. It seemed that my answer was good enough for Four. He nodded at me and smiled. He looked so much better when he smiled. I wished that he would do it more. Maybe I'd ask him to smile for an entire day before my time was up.

"Good plan. Head out there. Go enjoy your night or whatever you're doing," Four said.

In all honesty I knew that it was because he didn't want to think about what Eric and I did at night. That was what made me laugh. He would never want to know about our nights together. I smiled and stood up to leave the room. Four was cleaning up behind me. I walked over to the door and stopped when he called my name.

"Alex?"

"What's up?"

"I mean what I'm saying. You've earned a few days to not have to think about this," Four said.

"Thank you, Four."

Without anything else to say I headed out of the room and turned towards the Dauntless member
halls. Even as I walked through the Chasm I could hear the noise coming from the Pit. Needless to say it was always the loudest place in the Faction. As I headed into the overflowing area I saw a few familiar faces milling around.

Max was standing near the Wolf's Den, as Eric had called it. It was a large overhang that jutted out over the dance floor. It was where all of the higher up Dauntless members were allowed to hang around. No one underneath surveillance title was allowed up there. Not wanting to see him for a minute longer I rushed by and smirked when I saw Zeke speaking with a girl I had never seen before. He was joking around with her and she seemed to be in between laughing and hitting him.

I smiled and brushed by the pair, not wanting to interrupt them. Uriah was hanging not far from him with a few Dauntless born kids. He gave me a quick wave and I smiled, passing by them. Kids were running back and forth and I had to do a few clumsy stumbles to avoid trampling them. It was earlier than I was normally out here. That meant that parents weren't telling their children to get back home and go to bed. It was complete chaos. But I had always found that there was order in chaos.

As I neared the edge of the Pit I saw Cameron trying to impress a blue-haired girl. She didn't seem to be buying his act. My friends were visible up in the walkways with the shops. It was obvious that they were trying to egg Cole into getting a piercing or something, and he was trying in vain to get them away from him. I'd have to ask Heather later if he actually got one.

For a moment I debated going to hang out with my friends but I decided against it. They seemed to be having a good boy's day. And I wasn't sure that I wanted to interrupt that. They were always good about leaving Heather and I alone on our girls days so I decided that I should return the favor. I passed through the edge of the Pit and headed into the back halls, heading straight to the upper levels.

I remembered once thinking that I would never learn the way around Dauntless. It seemed second nature now. I walked up to Eric's door and headed in. He had told me a few weeks ago to not bother knocking. It was better to come straight in than risk someone seeing me as I waited. It made me feel like he might be coming around to letting me into his life a little bit more. Eric was currently pouring over a few papers on the kitchen counter.

"You're early," he commented dryly.

Whatever it was that he was reading was irritating him. I could tell by his tone. And he hadn't even bothered to look up at me. "Hello to you too," I teased.

The corners of his lips turned upwards. "Not hanging around your friends?" he asked.

"Would it be so shocking that I wanted to come and see you?"

"They're busy then?"

His question made me smile. "Everyone seemed to have something to do so I decided that I'd come and see what you were up too," I admitted.

"I thought so," Eric said, still not looking away from his papers.

It made me think that I probably shouldn't be here. "I'll leave if you're working," I said softly.

The last thing that I wanted to do was annoy him while he was trying to get some work done. I knew what it was like to have someone hanging around while you were trying to work. It was annoying. Eric was only in his sweats and his chest was bare. His hair looked like he had been running his fingers through it recently. He must have been annoyed about something. He shook his head at me
and I bit back a smile.

"Don't worry about it. I might be a little while. You can hang around," he said.

"Thanks."

He had no idea how glad I was to hear that. The only other thing I could have done was hang around in the Pit by myself. I nodded and headed over to his kitchen, intent on getting myself something to eat. His fridge had nothing in it other than some milk and a carton of eggs. I snorted and walked over to his pantry instead. He had a box of cereal and a few microwaveable soups. Thankfully we had the dining room.

"I'm almost overwhelmed at your incredible palate," I teased Eric.

The corner of his lips just barely turned up in a smirk. Although I saw his eyes flit over a line on his papers and his mouth fell back into a frustrated line. I was almost curious to check what it was that he was reading but I was sure that he wouldn't appreciate it. He liked keeping his things to himself.

"Nothing is expired. That counts for something," he said.

"That counts for absolutely nothing," I said, laughing loudly and shaking my head.

The soup and cereal didn't expire. They probably did, but it wouldn't be for a long time. At least he was right about the milk and eggs not having gone bad yet. So I supposed that did count for something. I grabbed one of the microwavable soups and popped it into the microwave, glancing over at Eric.

"What are you doing?" I asked Eric.

"Working."

"Are you really?" I asked teasingly.

Eric glanced up at me and pushed his paperwork back slightly. He watched as I walked over to him, standing in between his open legs. "You can distract me," he purred.

Placing my lips beside his ears, I dropped my voice to a whisper. "Finish your work," I snapped.

"Prude," Eric snapped, shoving me backwards.

"Finish your work and I'll show you how much of a prude I'm not," I shot back.

Eric gave me an annoyed smirk and I laughed before heading to his bookshelf. If he was going to be working I didn't want to constantly talk and bother him. I really wanted to have fun with him later and that meant that I would have to leave him alone for now. So I walked over to the shelf and began to run my fingers over the spines. Eric was incredibly organized with his books. There were all organized into genres and I scanned for the fiction books.

Honestly I liked his classics but I was in the mood for imagining another world. Escaping my own. I settled on a book that I recognized from Amity. J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit. I smiled and pulled it from its spot. I had read this book a few times as a child. It was one of the few that hadn't been banned in Amity. I slipped off my shoes to leave by his door and grabbed a blanket off of the back of the couch, heading back over to Eric's bed with my soup in hand.

Curling up on the side of the bed that I knew Eric didn't sleep on, I folded myself into the blanket
that Eric usually left out for me and began to flip through the pages and shift to a more comfortable spot. It was strange being in Eric's bed without having him try to mess with me. There was also the problem that the shirt that I was wearing dipped low in the back, revealing the new tattoo, and it was rubbing against the headboard. Eric was still yet to notice the addition.

In the meantime I began to read through the story and I found myself in love with it again. I had forgotten about how much I adored Bilbo in his little Hobbit hole. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat. Instead it was the kind of Hobbit hole that I would have loved to live in. I smiled and continued to read as Eric mumbled to himself in the kitchen.

I had long forgotten about the wonderful characters in the story. Gandalf still reminded me of a crazy old uncle. Not that I'd ever had one to compare him to. My parents were both only children. Of course he was still one of, if not the most, intelligent characters. Much more so than the brash dwarves that he was with. But they were just as good hearted.

The brothers, Fili and Kili, whose stories were tragic. Boys who had only wanted to get back to their mother and prove themselves in their world. I could understand that. It was how I'd felt after first coming to Dauntless. I had forgotten about Bombur, with his stomach of steel. Ori, the sweetest little dwarf. And of course Dwalin, the toughest of them all. Except for the brave Thorin Oakenshield. And every one in between. They were all Dauntless to the core.

Without even noticing it I had begun to hum a tune that I had heard years ago. Had I not been hyper aware of where I was right now I would have thought that I was still in Amity. There were no words to the song, at least not ones that I had ever heard. Only a tune that I'd overheard being whistled. Sweet and somber.

"What are you doing?" Eric asked, speaking for the first time in nearly three hours.

I stopped abruptly as I looked up at him. My jaws snapped shut as I realized that I had been whistling a little bit louder than I had thought that I was. He was staring at me with his familiar piercing gaze. I couldn't tell if he looked angry or somewhat amused. I snapped the book shut and placed it on the side table. I knew where I was. They were in Beorn's home. It was one of my favorite parts of the entire novel.

Honestly I hadn't even realized that my humming had been that loud. But evidently it had and I definitely felt a little bit bad. I could only imagine how irritated Eric had been with me. He was trying to eat in silence and I was making a lot of noise and relaxing over on the bed. The song had just fit the mood. I hadn't meant to disturb him. Of course it was past nine o'clock. He shouldn't have been working anyways. The day was basically over.

"Sorry. Didn't even realize that I was doing it. I'll stop," I said softly and somewhat awkwardly.

I leaned over to pick up the book again when Eric stopped me. "No. Where did you hear it?" he asked.

I watched as he hopped off of the stools and headed over to me. He took a seat on the edge of the bed and I curled my legs up into myself, giving him room to sit. "How did you know that I didn't write it myself?" I asked.

"You're not that smart," Eric said.

"You're an ass," I shot back.
"Where'd you hear it?"

"Oh - uh - it was a few years ago," I admitted, feeling a little foolish.

The story was kind of stupid. "Tell me," Eric goaded.

"I was out in the Amity fields behind the Fence. It was a little creepy actually. I was getting nervous," I told him.


"Shut up. I heard this pretty song. Someone was whistling. I followed it a little closer to the Fence. Actually, really close to the Fence. I knew that I was in Dauntless territory and I would get in a ton of trouble if they found me. But I wanted to hear more. So I followed this guard and listened to him whistle the entire song. I'm sure that there are lyrics to it. I didn't hear them. I always just thought that the tune was pretty. I didn't see his face. Too bad. I'd ask him what it was," I muttered.

It was true. I had hummed the song frequently and had even asked my parents if they knew it. Of course they hadn't but had encouraged me to make up my own words. I had never done it though. It would feel wrong. They had asked where I had heard it and I had lied, saying I heard a kid at school whistling it. That meant that no one would ask me questions.

"Come on, initiate, I won't bite. You can ask me," Eric said with a smirk.

For a moment a wave of stupidity hit me. Did he know the song? Was it something that Dauntless kids learned when they were growing up. But the moment of ignorance went as fast as it had come and the realization hit me. The Dauntless guard that I had followed had been Eric. I'd actually known him for years.

"You? It was you that was whistling that tune?" I asked to be sure.

Eric nodded, giving me a little smile. "It was me," he admitted.

"Wow. You had more hair back then," I said.

He laughed at my stupid comment. When I had seen him - granted that it had only been his back - his hair hadn't been shaved at all. It had been a little bit longer and had even been slightly curly. It must have been right after his initiation. He hadn't had the leadership tattoos yet.

"You saw the picture of me in the file in Erudite," Eric said.

"You're right. I should have figured that it was you. I used to imagine you when I thought of Dauntless. I would imagine what the front of you looked like. Strong and powerful. It made me want to be Dauntless from a young age. I never imagined that in a few years I would end up in bed with that guard," I said honestly.

I had thought that my honesty might have creeped Eric out but he merely laughed. "I thought I felt someone following me," he said.

I gave a small smile and chuckle. "That was me," I said.

"I used to walk by Amity and roll my eyes at them all. All I could hear was the singing and laughing. They looked so happy and so weak. You know I saw you once," Eric admitted.

My jaw nearly dropped. "You mean at the Aptitude Test?" I asked, remembering us locking eyes
that day.

"Before that," Eric said.

"When?"

"You were out in the fields with your friends. The two that were in your pictures," Eric said. I noticed him scowl at the thought of Florian. "The three of you were talking and laughing. Those two were fighting with each other. You were laughing and leaning back in the grass. I remember you shouting at them, letting out a stream of curses because they were driving you insane with all of that fighting. I remember thinking that I'd never heard an Amity say something like that."

I remembered that day well. I had no idea that someone had been listening. That was the first day that I'd thought that there was a chance that I might be a Dauntless at heart. "So I made an impression?" I asked haughtily.

Eric laughed and shoved me back into the bed. "You caught my eye. That's why I looked at you that day. The Aptitude Test. I remembered you. I was curious if you would look nervous or confident," Eric said.

"I was terrified," I said.

"You want to know what I thought?"

"Not really," I said honestly. Eric laughed at me. "Which time?"

"Both of them," Eric clarified.

"Ah, well then I really don't want to know," I told him.

Once more Eric laughed. We both laughed that time. "You were interesting. You looked like an Amity. But you didn't act like one. Even when I saw you at the Aptitude Test. Your eyes were darting around but they kept landing on the Dauntless section. I almost wanted you to come to Dauntless, just so I could see you in action.

Deciding to take matters into my own hands, I gently pushed Eric back onto the bed and moved over him. "And are you still glad that I came?" I asked softly.

"I am."

I was almost surprised that he had admitted it. "What were you doing out in the Amity fields? The day that I heard you whistling," I clarified, feeling a blush rise to my cheeks.

"Max sent me out there to do a census of the people that we had out on the Fence. He wanted to make sure that it wasn't just the weak we have out there. In the event of an issue or catastrophe we need people that can hold their own," he explained.

"What do you really think is out there?" I asked, hoping that he wouldn't tell me monsters. That had been his answer during the Fence trip. It seemed like another life.

This time there was nothing joking about his answer. He looked serious. "Nothing," he said.

A little piece of me felt disappointed at his answer. I wanted to believe that we weren't the only people left in the world. It was such a large place. How were we the only ones that had survived? Answer: We couldn't be. There had to be someone else out there. The world was huge. We weren't
"I think all life out there is gone. I've been to the top of the Fence and looked out beyond before. There's nothing. Some trees and plants. Amity fields. Beyond that there's nothing. All radiation poisoning. A slow death for anything caught out there. But we keep guards out there. Just in case I'm wrong," Eric said.

At least Dauntless understood that there was a possibility that something else was out there. Not that we had ever seen anything other than a few animals that had survived the radiation poisoning. But they were expecting it to be something dangerous. What if it was something good?

"Very doom and gloom," I teased. Eric gave me a sideways grin. "So where did you actually learn a song? I can't imagine Eric learning to sing songs or something like the Amity kids do."

He snorted and shook his head. "It's a traditional lullaby in Erudite. It's called Kothbiro. The Bird Sings," he explained.

I had never heard of it. "Your parents taught you a lullaby?" I asked, wondering immediately if I had said too much.

"Most kids know it. My parents never sang it," he said and I scowled. His parents seemed worse every time I heard more about them. "Cameron's parents would babysit when I was younger. They would keep me overnight when my parents would be in the lab. They used to sing it while they worked. We would sit and listen to them after wrestling with each other. My parents would always yell at me and tell me that it wasn't becoming of an Erudite. Cameron's parents would always laugh and sing, trying to calm us down."

The images that came to mind were more like I was watching a movie. I imagined Cameron and Eric rolling around in a wrestling match, Eric presumably winning, before being separated by laughing parents. They would sit on the ground together and watch as Cameron's parents worked and poured over papers, singing in low voices. It almost seemed unreal.

"That's nice. How does it go?" I asked.

"Aaaah haye haye
Haye haye
Haye haye

"Oooh mam' uwinja
Koth biro
Keluru dhok e dala

"Oooh mam' uwinja
Koth biro
Keluru dhok e dala

"Yaye nyithindogi
un koro un utimoru nade?

"Koth biro
Keluru dhok e dala."

Eric didn't sing the song, he spoke it. Not that I had been expecting him to sing it. It still sounded pretty. It was almost haunting the way that he said it. He adopted somewhat of an accent when he spoke it. It wasn't in English but it was still pretty to listen to. I couldn't help but wonder if Eric knew
the translation.

"That's pretty. I would have never imagined that those were the words to the tune," I joked.

Eric smiled and nodded at me. "It's not English," he said.

"I know that. What language is it?" I asked.

Normally I wouldn't have bothered asking but if anyone would know what language it was, it would be him. "It's in an African dialect called Dholou." We hadn't gone over languages much in school but I remembered going over them. I had always thought that the African languages sounded more like someone singing than speaking. "Spoken by about six million people before the war," he said.

"That's so many people. I can't even imagine six million people in one place," I said.

The last that I had heard there were about one hundred thousand people that lived in Chicago.
"World used to be a lot bigger. Africa was one of seven continents before the war," Eric explained.

I wanted to smack him. "I know what Africa is," I snapped.

"You are an Amity. How could I be sure?" Eric asked.

"Shut up. What does the song mean? In English?" I asked.

Eric looked a little surprised that I had asked that but he answered anyways. "Kothbiro. Rain is coming," he answered. That wasn't what I had expected. I had thought that it would be about a bird. That was brainless Amity thinking for you. "Auma do you hear what I say? The rain is on its way. Return our cattle home. Yay the children. What is it that you think you do? The rain is on its way. Return our cattle home."

Once more he spoke it. The song sounded less pretty when spoken in English. I could see why it wasn't an English song. "It sounds like a song that someone from Amity should sing," I said.

They were two things that screamed Amity. Eric snorted at me and shook his head. "Why do you think that I was whistling it and not singing?" he asked.

The way that he was looking at me made me smile. I moved to the side as Eric came to join me at the top of the bed. He fell onto his side and I moved closer onto the other side. He grabbed my arms and pulled me in for a kiss. I smiled and let my eyes flutter closed as my heart pumped against my chest.

One strong arm came to wrap around my waist as the other tilted my head back. His lips stilled against mine and after a moment I pulled away, thinking that something was wrong.

"What's that?" Eric asked.

I realized that his eyes were on my neck and I smirked. He must have seen the edge of the tattoo. "A surprise," I teased.

Pushing Eric off of me slightly, I pulled off my shirt and turned so that my back was facing him. He grabbed my hair in my hands and moved it over my chest so that he could see the entire thing. Even without looking at him I knew that he was smirking. His hand went to the edge of my hip and I felt him trace the lines of the tree. It made goosebumps erupt over my arms.

"The boys all went to get their first tattoos yesterday. When we were there I saw the tree design. I couldn't resist. You were right. Tattoos are addictive," I told him.
"That they are," he said absentmindedly.

He was a little preoccupied with the new tattoo. I felt his hand run up the base of my neck and I shivered. Goosebumps broke out over my arms and legs and I rolled my eyes at myself. These were the simple things that gave Eric the most pleasure. The knowledge that even touching me in the littlest ways would get reactions out of me like that.

"This is extraordinarily Amity," Eric said and I laughed.

He was right. But I had done it for a reason. "But it's pretty," I shot back.

"I suppose. You have no right to ever complain about me calling you Amity."

As if it was second nature, I rolled my eyes at Eric. It actually had become second nature. "I haven't ever complained about you calling me that," I told him.

Not that I wanted to say it but his nickname of my old Faction had actually grown on me. I liked it. Everyone called me Alex. But no one other than Eric called me Amity. Not anymore. No one called me Amity or Softie anymore. They were names that were strictly reserved for Eric, and I found myself liking them a lot more these days. I turned back to face Eric.

"I recall you complaining about it quite a bit," Eric said.

"In the beginning. And I know that it looks Amity. That's the whole point," I said, and he raised his pierced brow at me.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I spent sixteen years there. Amity will always be a part of me. I used to think that there was something wrong with that. I used to think that being Amity made me weak. Now I see that it isn't the case. Being Amity only helped me. It didn't make me weak. It made me strong," I told him proudly.

He scoffed and shook his head at me. "Whatever you say," he growled.

Honestly I couldn't have been shocked. I shook my head and let out a slow breath. Eric was not a Divergent. He would never really understand what I meant. His arms snaked over my back and I smiled. That was until he grabbed the clasp of my bra and popped it open. He was far too good at that. I glared at him as the bra fell from my body. I wasn't going to stop him and grab it back. He knew that it was going to end up off at some point anyways. But that didn't stop him from getting a chastising glare.

"What?" he asked innocently. "I need to see the whole thing."

I laughed as he launched himself at me and knocked me back against the bed. He leaned down and I smiled as his mouth met mine and our bare chests hit each other. It was times like these that genuinely made me happy being around him. The times where he was just carefree Eric.

His hands were tight in my hair and I arched my back off of the bed to press against him. He merely ground me back against the bed. At least he no longer had the handcuffs. After he had finally let me out of them the next morning I had made sure that they had taken a one-way trip down the Chasm.

He hadn't looked happy with me but I hadn't cared. No part of me believed that Eric having a pair of handcuffs was a good idea. Eric was a major pain in the ass. But he was my pain in the ass. At least for now.
My back was digging into the sheets and I hissed in discomfort. The tattoo was sticking against the sheets and with every movement I felt myself getting stuck. "What's the problem?" Eric snapped, as I twisted against the sheets again.

He clearly didn't want anything interrupting this moment. I glared at him before shifting so that I was leaning up on my forearms. "My tattoo keeps sticking to your fucking sheets," I snapped back.


"Asshole."

He was smirking at me happily. Obviously Eric loved the moments that he had me underneath him. Of course, I liked those moments too. But I also liked the moments that I was on top of him. The moment that he let his arms fall down besides me I struck. I grabbed his forearms and flipped myself over him. He looked a little surprised and I knew that he could have thrown me off easily, but he let me stay on top of him.

"See? Now I like this much better," I said.

Eric smirked at me and laughed, letting his hand wind up my stomach to come at a rest on my breasts. I sighed as he tightened his grip on them and let out a little gasp as his thumb gently brushed over my nipple, making it harden almost immediately. The breath left my throat as I ground my hips against his. One of his hands dropped down my hip and squeezed. It almost hurt but I didn't want him to stop.

"You're right. I like this better," Eric growled.

I laughed and leaned down so that our bare chests were pressed together again so that I could kiss him. He used one hand to wrap around my hair as the other worked at the waistband on my pants. Whatever he had been working on today had really been bothering him. I knew that he was frustrated whenever he was impatient at trying to get my clothes off. His hands were working furiously and I laughed as he became overly-irritated at getting them off.

What he didn't know was that there was a string on the inside of the pants that were keeping them tight around my waist. I needed to do that. They were too big without it. As he tugged I heard a tearing of the material and I pulled away from his mouth to scowl at him. He was not about to ruin another pair of my pants because he was too damn impatient.

"Don't rip them!"

"How the fuck do you get these things off?" he asked.

"Aren't you supposed to be from Erudite?" I asked.

Eric scowled at me. "I didn't fuck girls from Erudite or Amity," he growled, obviously blaming my pants on my Faction of origin.

There were moments like these - the ones when he said what was really on his mind - that made my face burn. I tried to brush it off by rolling my eyes and sitting up, dipping my hands down to untie the string. Eric watched closely as I untied them and tugged at the waistband. He lost all patience with me and I yelped as he grabbed my pants and yanked them down. I laughed and leaned up so that I could get them off of my legs. He barely let them fall off of ankles before pulling me back down to him.
It made me laugh at him. I leaned back to kiss him as I pulled down his sweats. They fell much more easily than mine did. It was almost funny. I liked him wearing his sweatpants much more than I liked him wearing his jeans. He lifted me up for a moment so that he could kick them off and I nearly laughed. He could move me around like a rag doll. I was almost nothing to him. That was why our fights together always ended up with me losing.

Eric's hands grasped at me possessively as I leaned back down against him and ground my hips into his. He met my movement and I smirked as he pushed his mouth against mine. Our tongues danced in each other's mouths as his fingers felt their way around my thighs. I felt him move my underwear off to the side and without warning, he dipped two in between my folds. A gasp fell out of my mouth as I ground my hips down against his finger.

He was so cocky to think that I would already be wet for him. But he wasn't wrong. He knew that I would already want him. His thumb rubbed around my clit and I threw my head back. He was sure not to touch the one spot that I wanted him the most. It made my breathing come out in moans that echoed across the walls. I moved back to sit so that my torso was straight up. I was giving Eric a full view of everything but I couldn't care less. He had seen me in every way possible. His eyes shot straight to my chest as his fingers slowly slipped around my clit, very gently pressing it down.

A sharp cry escaped my mouth and he retracted his hand. His free hand came up to grab my breast and I let out a breathy moan. My hips were rolling as he curled his finger inside of me, adding to the wave of pleasure. His finger dipped out of me for a moment and I whined at the loss before he plunged another in my tight core. I could feel myself soaking through the edges of the underwear that I still wore and running down Eric's waist and thighs. It probably felt like a compliment to him. It was.

We moved together for a few more minutes and I felt the bundling of nerves building tightly. It would only take me another minute. My breaths turned into pants as Eric pulled his finger out of me and moved down to kiss my core. He sent his tongue up my center and I shivered as he bit at my hips. But that was all that he did. A moment later he moved back away from me and I whined softly. Damn him. I was so close. And he knew it.

"You want more? Come and get it," Eric growled.

He was smirking at me and I knew that he was using it as a challenge. One that I was going to meet. I lifted my hips up so that I could pull off my underwear to give him full access and I forced his underwear off of his hips. He didn't move at all to make it easier for me. I tore the underwear from his hips and laughed as the fabric gave a little tear. I supposed that it was to make up for all of my undergarments that he had torn. He didn't seem to mind as I threw them from the bed.

He sprang free of the confines of his underwear and I shifted so that I was back on top of him. My legs were spread over each side of his hips and I was hovering directly over him. His hands came to latch onto my hips as I slowly sank down onto him. His tip was barely inside of me and I saw his eyes roll back in his head slightly. I took my nails and gently ran them down his chest before taking it upon myself to surprise him.

He always liked to surprise me with sudden movements, so I decided that I was going to do the exact same thing to him for once. I dropped down onto his length suddenly until he was completely sheathed inside of me. His eyes sprang open as his head dug back into the bed. I knew that he hadn't been expecting it. He let out a long groan as his eyes briefly shut.

The sudden intrusion made a shiver shoot through my core and a pang of pleasure hit me in the deepest spot. Using my knees to lift myself up, I nearly completely pulled myself off of him before sinking back once more. His eyes were completely black as I continued to ride him. His hands were
digging into my hips, helping lift me and adding to the power to push me back onto him. My core was throbbing and my breasts were aching from how tightly he was grabbing them. But I wanted more. I wanted all of him.

Stopping the slow motion I had been teasing him with I began to adopt a more frantic pace. I fell back onto the balls of my feet and began to bounce quickly. The strokes weren't complete but it didn't seem to be bothering him in the slightest. One of his fingers came to rub and pinch my clit as I began to twitch under his touch. I wasn't sure how many times I thrust myself against him but I knew that it was a while. I was trying to hold out. Eric lasted longer than my previous partners and I thrived with it.

My previous partners had all eventually bored me to death in bed. I could be with Eric every single night for hours on end and he would never bother me. I leaned down slightly to kiss him and his tongue thrust itself into my mouth, following the bounces of my hips. My thighs began to tighten around him a little as I knew that my end was coming fast.

And he knew that too. Eric sat straight up so that our torsos were pressing against each other. He grabbed my hips and pushed me upwards as my arms wound their way around his neck. Our lips met in a frenzied kiss and I moaned into his mouth as my orgasm began to flood through me. I needed him to touch me. To do everything to me. He knew that I wanted it too. As my body began to spasm and I found myself nearly useless his arms tightened around me as he began to thrust into me.

He had lifted my body off of his lap slightly so that he could force his hips up into me. As my orgasm hit full force I cried out his name. He cut me off as he pressed his lips to mine in a searing kiss. His hands were tugging down on my hair to keep me pressed directly against him. It made my orgasm rock through me a little bit harder. I loved how rough that we could be together. Everyone else would have complained about it.

Eric's thrusts were desperate as he reached his end and I found our kiss becoming sloppier and our movements becoming jerkier. I could feel him pour into me and his thrusts becoming more like jerks, so I took it upon myself to ride him a few more times. He seemed appreciative as he pulled me in for another kiss. This one was much steadier. His forehead leaned against mine as I stopped moving against him and let myself just sit in his lap.

We stayed together like that for a moment as he leaned back slightly. I let out a soft cry of surprise as he fell backwards onto his back and pulled me with him. We went sprawling against the sheets as Eric rolled us two times so that we had ended up on the side of the bed that he normally slept on. Sensing that he might have been ready to go to bed, I moved myself off of him and shivered as he fell out of me.

It felt like something off a loss. I really did love being with him. And it made me feel strange to think about the fact that I loved anything about Eric. I couldn't love anything about Eric. Because he had the capability to actually break my heart. I knew that he did. Eric pulled the sheets up so that they covered us and I smiled as he grabbed me, pulling me towards him. I had been trying to roll onto the other side of the bed.

He pulled me up to his body and I laughed under my breath. One of my legs was thrown over his and he was laying straight on his back. He was staring up at the ceiling and I could hear him fighting to regain control of his breath. We were both out of breath from our actions a moment beforehand. As much as I wanted to go back to what we were doing, I also liked the sound of our panting breaths falling together.

But it wasn't long before his fingers began to spin their way down my back and I shivered as they
traced over my hips. They only rested there for a minute before they moved down my thighs and
separated my legs once more. He stroked against my folds where our fluids still slicked together. He
was just about to slip a finger back inside of me when I moved away from him. I had never seen
someone look so offended. I smirked and my head dipped down in between his legs as I took him
inside of my mouth. If he wanted round two, he was damn well going to get it.

"Alex," Eric groaned.

It sent a spike of pleasure through me. I loved hearing him call my name. I took him into my mouth
and pushed him all the way against the back of my throat, groaning and sending the vibrations up
through his legs. He groaned loudly as I looked directly into his eyes. I loved the way that they rolled
back in his head. Eric was groaning at me as I slowly slid my tongue up and down his length,
sucking gently on his head.

It wasn't long before Eric ripped me off of him and dropped me into his lap. He looked like he was
about to throw me underneath him, but I was still rather fond of having him underneath me. So I
dropped over his lap and sank down onto him. Any protests he'd had from a moment before had died
in his mouth. I bounced on his lap for a moment before leaning backwards, pressing my hands
against the mattress for support.

Eric groaned at the sight of me fully exposed. I could imagine that someone else would be mortified
to show so much of themselves to their partner, but I appreciated what Eric thought of me. A string
of crude profanities - both loud and harsh - escaped his mouth as I stopped bouncing on him and
rather rocked our hips together, panting loudly at the feeling of my clit and his pelvic bone rubbing
together. His finger came down to my clit and started furiously rubbing at it as I threw my head back
and cried out his name.

My entire back was starting to sweat as Eric finally became fed up with being the man on bottom,
even if I could see that his eyes were mostly glazed over and rolling into the back of his head. He
threw me off of him before pulling me off of the bed from his ankles. I shrieked softly as he grabbed
me and pushed me back against the edge of the bed. He stood in between my legs as I was pushing
back against the bed, spreading my legs for him. Eric grabbed my hair at the roots and tugged my
head into his shoulder.

Groaning under my breath, I felt Eric press his hands against my shoulder. I cried out in ecstasy as
Eric bit down on my shoulder and pulled our hips together. It wasn't long before Eric flipped me
over and started pressing into me from behind. I cried out loudly when his hand met my backside. He
used each thrust as an excuse to slap me again. My breaths were coming out in hard pants as I
shouted softly, hearing the neighbors start to bang on the wall, shouting for us to be quiet.

Not that it mattered to either one of us. I was going to get what I wanted as I wasn't going to stop
until I had it. I was sure that Eric hadn't even heard them. My nails went back to his thighs and dug
in slightly. It only made his thrusts harder and sharper. Eric pushed me down into the bed, giving me
no room to make any sort of movement. I was completely at his mercy as he pounded into me almost
painfully. My head leaned backwards against his shoulder as he bit down roughly at the junction of
my neck and shoulder.

As Eric pumped into me he leaned his front against my back, pressing kisses down my spine. I
shuddered under his touch as he wrapped his arms around my hips, keeping us together. When he
finally released himself, my name spilled from his lips. We both panted and moaned as he dropped
over me, his weight almost pushing me down into the bed. I could feel him twitch against me for a
bit before he pulled himself out of me. I found myself immediately missing his touch.

Eric leaned back against the wall as I sat on the bed for a few moments. On shaky knees I finally got
up to get some water. As I poured myself a glass, I felt Eric come up behind me. His hands slowly started tracing their way up my bare thighs and latched onto my hips. As I started to drain the glass, his lips came to gently run up my throat. I had to place the water glass down to ensure that I didn't accidentally spill it all over his floor or myself.

"Can I help you?" I asked.

"You know, I don't think I've ever properly broken in my kitchen," he pointed out.

"No?"

"No."

"And you just think -" Eric cut me off by grabbing me underneath the thighs and picking me up to shove me back against the refrigerator, standing in between my open thighs. "I don't think. I know," Eric said, shoving himself into me.

It was needless to say that we got no sleep that night, and neither did Eric's neighbors. I was sure that they were losing their minds, shouting themselves hoarse for the two of us to stop. But I couldn't really bring myself to care, and I didn't think that Eric did either. Although I did certainly have a tough time explaining to Four why I wasn't quite walking straight the next morning, and why I had fallen asleep waiting for my fear sim. It was all because of the things that Eric did to me.
Chapter Twenty-One

I shot up in bed with a searing pain in my backside. My head had been thrust into the pillow and I had been sound asleep. Of course sleeping at Eric's apartment usually came with consequences. I shot up and groaned at the pain that was radiating through my lower half. I hadn't even meant to fall asleep here last night. I had been supposed to come back to the dorms.

Unfortunately Eric and I had spent a little too much time in his bed. I really had meant to be back to the dorms by eleven last night but it had been well past two in the morning by the time that we had finally fallen into bed. And by that time I had decided that I was not walking back to the dorms. It helped that Eric wasn't one to argue with me as long as it meant that he could get in one more round. He really was a pain in the ass.

And now it was literal as well. As I sat up in the bed the sheets pooled around my bare waist. No clothes were anywhere near me. I had a feeling that they were scattered all throughout the apartment and I knew that it was going to take forever to find them this morning. It always took me forever to find them. Mostly because we didn't really pay attention at night when we started throwing our clothes everywhere. At least he had his clean stuff in the drawers.

I really needed to leave a spare pair of clothes in the drawer or something. But I wasn't sure how Eric would feel about me leaving even one little thing in his apartment. I shook my head and my hair out around me and gave a soft groan. Eric was leaning at the edge of the bed and giving me a small smirk. He was such a dick. He smacked me in the ass as hard as possible to wake me up. I knew that I needed to leave before he decided to do it again.

"Get going, initiate," he snarled.

There was a teasing note in his voice and I rolled my eyes. He was such an ass about everything. I was already sore from last night and now he had made it a little worse. If it wasn't so much to smack me in the ass to wake me up, he also had to call me initiate and pretend that he hadn't done anything.

"Almost time for training," he continued.

"You're such an asshole," I groaned, rubbed my hands over my sore, and now rather pink, ass.

"I just wanted to wake you up," Eric explained.

"Oh, thanks for that."

There was a clear mark of Eric's hand and I scoffed. That damned mark would be there for a number of days. Now I realized that he had hit me a little harder than I'd actually thought that he did. He was laughing softly at me and I watched as he came to stand. He was wearing his work pants and his hair seemed to be done and ready for the day. How much longer had he been awake than me? Evidently long enough to get bored.

The only thing that he was lacking was a shirt. Of course. He liked to flaunt himself in front of me. He was such a woman sometimes. I rolled over in the bed and yawned. We were up far too late for me to be up this early to get to training. I just wanted to go back to bed. But I perked up slightly as I remembered that Eric had mentioned something about it getting close to being time for training. Was he being serious or was it a joke?

"What time is it?" I asked him slowly.
It was almost like I hadn't said anything. Eric ignored me for a good minute or two and I sighed, sitting upright in the bed and wrapping myself in the sheets. Eric walked around the room before grabbing a cup of coffee off of the counter and holding it to his mouth. He leaned back against the counter and smiled at me.

"Seven forty-eight," Eric answered.

His tone was extremely blasé and he acted like I was almost boring him. Asshole! He knew that it was because I was late. I had to be down to training at eight and I had been planning to run by the dorms to get some new clothes. I should have figured that he wouldn't wake me up. He enjoyed watching me being late. More like he enjoyed watching me struggle. He enjoyed watching me being frantic, and this was a frantic moment.

I shot up at his words and launched myself out of the bed. He was smirking at me over his cup of coffee. I knew that he was absolutely thrilled with himself. But damn him, I had to be at training down in the fear landscape room at eight o'clock without exceptions, as Four had told me more than once. I had twelve minutes left to be down there. This was the first time that we were going to be practicing the fear landscape and I was set to be late. Four was going to kill me.

"Why the hell didn't you wake me up earlier?" I snapped.

"I thought that you knew what time it was."

"How would I know what time it was? I was asleep!"

"Relax, Amity. I'm a leader. I'll just tell Four that you were busy."

"Doing what?" I sneered.

"Me."

Despite my panic and irritation towards Eric, I glanced up and snorted. "That'll go over well. Telling Four that I'm in a relationship that's explicitly against Dauntless rules and that's why I'm late. I had sex with him last night and fell asleep and he didn't wake me up this morning so I'm late to training," I groaned.

Eric glanced over at me. "Relationship?" he asked.

My heart lodged itself in my throat. Why the hell had I said that? "Uh..."

"Nice to see that you finally said it," Eric said, walking over to me.

He leaned over me and I felt my heart thumping in my chest. Had he really just been waiting to hear me say it? "You were just waiting for me to say it?" I asked dumbly.

Eric grinned and pressed a small kiss against my lips. "And you did it," he teased.

He walked away from me and my jaw dropped. "You - I growled before cutting myself off. A soft blush fell over my face. He might have done it in an unconventional way, but he'd finally told me that we were in a relationship.

"You only have ten minutes left," Eric said blankly.

Eric was thumbing through his tablet as I jumped out of bed, flaunting everything. Even though he appeared to be in the middle of reading something riveting I knew that he was getting a kick out of
watching me run around. I was trying to grab my clothes but they all seemed to be hidden from me. My cheeks were still flaming slightly from what Eric had just told me... Or I had told him. I really did like knowing that we were in a relationship together. It was something that I never thought that I would get from him.

Apparently he was waiting for this the entire time. The corners of his lips were turned up in a smirk. I had already found my underwear and bra, which was a miracle as usually they were the last things that I could find, but my shirt and pants were nowhere to be found. I awkwardly climbed into my bra and underwear as I dashed through the apartment. I finally found my shirt and tossed it on over my head. I was pretty sure that it was inside-out.

"Where the hell are my pants?" I muttered to myself.

Why was always either my underwear or pants that I could never find? Eric's apartment seemed to eat all of my clothes. "Here. I found these the other day," Eric said.

I turned to him to see that he was holding a pair of black shorts, clearly mine. He was enjoying himself too. He was holding my pants with one finger caught in the belt loop. I thanked him softly as he tossed them to me and caught them. Like the rest of my clothes I awkwardly climbed into them and tripped a few times.

"Or you could go without them," he said.

For once he wasn't pretending to be engrossed in something else. He was standing against his counter, staring at me. His eyes were following every curve on my body and he was giving me a suggestive smile. Of course that was what he would be thinking about. He wasn't going to get raked over the coals if he was late to something. I knew that if I was late Four would let me have it later. Especially because he would know exactly the reason that I was late.

"Yeah, you'd like that, wouldn't you?" I snarled.

He walked over to me and I groaned, knowing exactly what it was that he wanted. "I would," Eric growled against my throat.

"Eric -" I whined.

"That'll only make it worse."

He was right about that. He had always liked hearing me say his name. He pinned me against the wall and I groaned, knowing that I needed to leave. Four was going to kill me if I was late. I had been late to training a few times before and I knew that he hated me being late. Especially because it was Eric that always made me late.

"Eric, I have to go. I'm going to be late," I told him softly.

"I don't care."

"I do. I need to be there for the fear landscape!"

My words didn't mean a thing to him. Instead he walked up closer to me and gave me a deep kiss. I groaned against him and let him wrap his arms around my waist. Our hips moved together and I wanted nothing more than to drag him back to bed. But I had shit to do. And I was sure that he did too.

"Since when did you care about being late?" he asked against my lips.
He had a point. I had been blatantly late to training a few times because I'd wanted one more round with him. "Since I had that nice shiny number one spot," I said.

"You'll still have it."

Would I? I wasn't so sure about that. Eric leaned over to kiss me again and I let him shove me back against the wall. I sighed as he placed his mouth against mine and kissed me roughly. I wanted him more than anything but I knew that it was time to leave. As much as it pained me to have to walk away.

Shoving Eric back away from me I pulled my mouth away from his. He looked upset that I had bothered to break the kiss but he knew that I had to leave. That didn't mean that he wanted me to leave. As I turned to walk away from him he tried to grab me back. For once I was able to pull away from him. I ripped my arm away and headed over to the door. He was following me and I felt his arms swinging, each time brushing against my thighs softly. I only had another three minutes until training started. At least the fear landscape room was close.

"I gotta go, Eric. I'll come back later tonight, alright?" I offered.

He stared at me for a moment before scoffing and shoving me away from him. "Fine. Go to your stupid training," he growled.

I stumbled for a moment before straightening back up. "You're so sweet," I said under my breath.

I turned back for a moment to see that Eric was giving me a sideways grin. "Try not to go too slow during your fear landscape," Eric warned.

I knew that they were still evaluating us with times. There was still the slightest chance that I could be knocked from the number one spot. "I won't," I said.

"You're only going to be doing it once, alright?" he informed me, coming to stand at my side.

That was news to me. We were only doing the fear landscape once as practice. As far as I had been led to believe it was just like the fear sims. We practiced them every day until we made it to the end of Phase Three. No one had bothered to tell us that we would only be getting to try them only once. That would make the final fear landscape much more difficult. We might have already seen our fears but we wouldn't get the same practice that we had gotten for Phase Two.

"What? What do you mean that I'm only going to be doing it once?" I asked.

Naturally Eric wasn't going to tell me anything. He liked to watch me panic. "Four and Lauren will explain. Out," he said.

I rolled my eyes but stopped short as I realized that he had said Lauren. I wasn't aware that we were going to be working with Lauren. In fact I hadn't seen her since the first day in Dauntless. And I was pretty sure that I'd only heard her speak the once to tell everyone to go with her.

Eric walked up to me once more and I smiled as he gave me a deep kiss. A little sigh escaped my lips as his hands trailed up my waist and caught around the edge of my shirt. He pushed me back against the doorway and I smiled into the kiss. He was trying to get me to stay. As much as I wanted to I knew that I had to leave. There was no way that I was going to get away with being late to training again. So I pulled away from him and gave him a gentle nudge backwards. He smirked at me.

"Two minutes. Run fast," Eric said with a bright grin.
He gave me a quick wink and I rolled my eyes at him. What was it with him and constantly trying to make me look like a fool? "I hate you," I snapped.

Eric was grinning from ear to ear when I leaned in and kissed him once more. "No you don't," he said against my lips.

"You're right. Later!" I shouted before turning and dashing from the apartment.

It gave him no chance to say anything back to me. I was headed straight out of the hall when I saw Cameron. He was headed straight for me but I had no time to stop. Besides he was probably only here to head to Eric's apartment. He opened his mouth to speak to me but I yelled over him.

"Late to training. Have a good day, Cameron!" I yelled as I brushed by him.

"Good luck!" he shouted back, through a laugh.

As I dashed through the halls of the Dauntless compound a few members jumped out of my way, all smiling at me. I had become a fan favorite among the Dauntless members and they all seemed to know that I was notorious for being late. I wondered if any of them knew the reason why.

My mind flashed back to the past few days and everything that had been going on. It seemed that I was stuck with six fears. It was rather odd considering that everyone else seemed to have at least eight. But Four was still under the assumption that if I did have more fears they would reveal themselves during the fear landscape. Something that I would evidently only be allowed to practice once.

I wished that Eric or Four would have told me more about what to expect from the fear landscape. But I knew that they couldn't. They still had to be impartial. No matter what they both felt for me. Even though I was with Eric and like a sister to Four they still had to treat me the same as the other initiates. All that they had told me was that it was pretty terrifying. They had both told me that it was intimidating to have to face all of your fears back-to-back without having a break.

Some people took apparently close to half an hour. I had even heard of it bordering on an hour. I knew that it was going to take a long time for me to get out of the fear landscape, especially since I would have to be concerned with people watching other than Four. Even though Jeanine and Max knew what I was, I still had to keep it a secret.

It had been two weeks since I had seen my last fear. The fear of Eric trying to kill me. It was not a fear that I enjoyed dealing with. It still bothered me to have to go in there and have him beat the hell out of me but I was able to beat him every time. Other than being able to complete my final fear sim nothing much else had happened over the past two weeks.

I'd faced a few of my fears over again and Four had told me more than once that I might really only have six fears. He was impressed with me either way. I was impressed with myself. It seemed that most of my friends had around ten fears. A few nights over the past two weeks I had spent the night with Eric as well. I spent a lot of time around him these days. I enjoyed spending time with him even though he annoyed me more than anything else.

More than once when I had been with him I wondered just how close I was to the end of my relationship with Eric. There were only two weeks left until the end of initiation and that meant that I was going to have to deal with it. There was a chance that I could deal with it before then but I wasn't sure what I could possibly say to Eric. I wasn't sure how to go about it. And I especially wasn't sure that I wanted to know what he was going to do once he found out the secret that I'd kept from him for months.
Despite all of my thoughts about what was going on with Eric I was still ensuring that I kept up my times in training. I still had to make sure that I sat at the top of the leader board. I wasn't sure if my rank dropping would make things even worse with Jeanine than they already were. I knew that unless I started seriously fucking up during training no one would be able to take over the number one spot.

A few months ago I would have been thrilled to see that I was totally safe in the number one spot only two weeks out from the end of training. It meant that I was going to be eligible for leadership. But right now the only thing that I could think about was what was going to happen with Jeanine in two weeks. It was the one of the few things on my mind these days. It was the day that I would have to see what it was that Jeanine wanted. It might be the last day of my life.

Over the past two weeks Four and I had been trying to plan something to stop Jeanine. We had to do something to stop her and her plan to destroy the Divergent's. It wasn't just Four and I. I didn't know any others but there were plenty. It hadn't been going well for us so far. The only plans that we were coming up with were ones that were going to end with one of us dying. The only thing that I knew right now was that I had to go to Candor with Four before the end of training. We would be going the night before the final fear landscape. If Candor worked out the way that I wanted it to I might be able to stop Jeanine.

Once more my mind flitted back to what I wanted to tell Eric as I turned back from a wrong turn to the fear landscape room. Eric had shown me it once but I didn't remember the route very well. All of the halls looked the same. But that wasn't what was on my mind. I wanted to tell Eric that I was a Divergent before that night. I wanted everything to be less of a shock to him. I had done enough to nearly give him a heart attack over the past few months. I could spare him on this one. But I wasn't sure how to do it.

Honestly I was afraid that he was going to break my heart. I knew that he would in some way or another. I thought that maybe it would be a better idea to tell him the truth; in fact I was sure that it was a better idea, but I was afraid. I didn't know what to do. I had no clue how to start that conversation.

But this was the wrong time for me to be thinking about something like that. I had better things to be thinking about. I might be able to get around to tell him before my two weeks were up but I also might not. Either way, I was eventually going to have to reveal my secret to Eric. I sprinted through the last hallway that looked a little familiar before running through the door. Thankfully Eric had already shown me the room or else I could only imagine how late I would have been.

I walked into the room awkwardly to see all of my friends turning and staring at me. I looked around the room and saw that it looked just like the fear sim room but larger. It could easily hold at least twenty people. Or at least whoever would come to watch our fear landscapes. My heart lodged itself in my throat as I remembered that Jeanine would be one of those people.

All heads in the room turned around to look at me and I let a small blush cover my face. I knew that I was already a little red from the running and it didn't help that it was clear that everyone in the room knew that I had been coming from somewhere not so decent. I took a deep breath and shook my head, trying desperately to avoid Heather's smirk. I was panting slightly as I looked over everyone else in the room and leaned over.

Four was glaring at me and I smiled bashfully at him. All of my friends were trying desperately not to laugh. I knew that I looked a little frazzled and my hair was ruffled on top of my head. Damn Eric, he should have woken me up earlier. Lauren was there too and she smiled at me. I gave her a weak one back. I glanced up at the clock and smirked. I was two seconds late. That meant that Four
couldn't yell at me.

"Still made it on time," I muttered to Heather.

She turned to me and laughed softly under her breath. She looked extremely proud of herself. She was never late. Cole was sure to keep himself respectable around Heather. I was sure that Eric didn't even know what the word respectable meant. All of my friends were snickering at me as I took a spot next to Heather and turned to look at Four and Lauren. They were speaking softly with each other.

"Barely," she laughed.

"Still counts."

"Eric didn't want you to leave?"

I nodded, still trying to pretend like I was interested in what Lauren and Four had to say. "He didn't wake me up," I said.

"Did he forget about training?" she asked.

"No. He probably wanted to watch me scramble. He thinks it's funny to mess with me. You know?"

"Sounds like an Eric thing to do," she said.

We both leaned back against the boys and smiled at each other. I glanced over at Lauren once more to get a good look at her. I had only seen her on the first day and a few times since then. I had really never gotten a good look at her. She had long hair that was extremely dark. She seemed to be one of the few people that didn't have dyed hair. She had piercings in her eyebrow, lower lip, and all throughout her ears. Despite her hard-ass look she was smiling sweetly at us. She seemed much happier than Four, who was still glaring at me.

Lauren shifted for a few moment before shouting over us. "Alright! Listen up!" Lauren yelled.

"That's the first time I've heard her talk," Buck said, surprised.

The rest of us nodded at him. We all silenced ourselves and those who were facing away from the pair turned to look at them. Even I glanced back to see what they wanted to talk about. They were standing on the raised platform that held the chair that we would sit in for our fear landscape.

"For some of you, you haven't seen me since the first day here in Dauntless. The transfers. Glad to see that you've all made it. Welcome to Phase Three of initiation. This is the fear landscape room. You'll be getting familiar with it over the next two weeks. Now, you're going to be alternating days. Phase Three goes in the reverse of Phase Two. The highest ranked transfers go first. Today those of you in the number one spot up until the tenth spot, you will be going today," she explained.

I groaned softly, well aware that it meant that I was going to be the first one to have to deal with the fear landscape. At least it meant that I would be able to get it done with first. But that also meant that no one else was going before me. It meant that no one else was going to be able to tell me what to expect.

"Those of you in the eleventh spot and lower, you'll be going to the training room. We are still the warrior Faction and you all have to keep up your physical strength. We will alternate it. Tomorrow, those of you ranked number one through ten will be in the training room," Four explained. That meant that I was going to be in the training room tomorrow. "We will alternate every day."
I gave a soft yawn but snapped my jaws shut when I saw the glare that Four was giving me. He had no sympathy that I hadn't slept. Especially not because Eric was the only reason that I hadn't been sleeping. My jaws tightened as I gave Four a guilty smile. He looked like he would rather kick my head off of my shoulders.

"You won't be watching the others go. Like the fear sims you're going to sit outside and wait for it to be your turn. Once you're done you'll be going to the training room," Lauren said. I would be spending the majority of the day in the training room. "Let's talk about the fear landscape. You won't be seeing your own until the fear landscape in two weeks. You'll be seeing mine."

All eyes in the room shot over to her as jaws nearly dropped to the floor. They were all thinking the same things that I had been thinking earlier. We had all thought that we would be practicing our own fear landscapes like we had in Phase Two. We would be practicing, but not our own fear landscapes. At least we were allowed to practice something.

"What?" Jade sneered from behind me.

"What?" Lauren parroted.

"Why aren't we seeing our own fear landscape? That's not fair! We should be able to practice."

Just like when we had asked about the people on the bottom of the ranking boards having to leave Dauntless, Four looked pissed. "Do you think that in the real world you're going to get a chance to practice? It's like the fights. You won't get to fight someone that's fair. You could get someone larger, smarter, and stronger," Four snarled. Colt and Hunter had been larger than me. "You might not always know what you're afraid of. You won't be prepared to confront a fear when you're out in the real world. Sometimes things just happen."

Lauren was nodding along with him but I could see a little hint of concern in the back of her eyes. She had no idea what he meant. I did. The chill that fled over my spine proved it. I knew that he was partially referring to what was happening with us. The room had gone silent as we all stared awkwardly at the ground. Lauren shook her head and cleared her throat, drawing the attention away from himself and Jade.

"Four is right. This is fair. We let you practice seeing your fears. That's fair enough. We aren't going to let you practice your own fear landscape," she said definitively. It was fair enough. It just sucked. "You're practicing mine from two years ago. That's how it's going to work. Now, the fear landscape is different from the fear sims. In the landscape you're aware that you are in a sim. It will feel different. But the rules are no different. Get in and out of there as fast as possible. We're still timing you. And we're still ranking you."

"Seems so weird," Heather muttered to me.

"It might not be too bad," I whispered back.

There wasn't much of a chance that anyone else could rise to the number one spot. "A little advice. The final fear landscape will be your last chance to dramatically raise your ranking," Lauren continued.

The final fear landscape was the only chance that I had to drop out of the number one ranking. But there was no way that they were going to take over my spot. "Now we're going to get this started. Alex, you'll be up first," Four said, motioning to me with an even face.

"Okay," I called back, shifting forward.
"Aaron, you'll be following her. Lauren and I will be watching you guys go. Alex, Aaron, Draven, Dante, Michael, Jax, Greg, Buck, and Heather. You'll all be going today. The rest of you will go tomorrow. Head to the training room. The rest of you, outside in the waiting area," Four snapped.

"See you guys later," I called to everyone that was leaving.

Everyone ran to their respective waiting areas as I stood and waited for my instructions. They didn't take long. "Alex, come here," Four motioned.

"Good luck girl. You got it," Heather said.

"Thanks."

She was lingering behind the rest of our friends. Cole was waiting for her at the edge of the doors. I turned back and smiled, walking over to her and grabbing her in a hug. "Out, Heather," Four barked. Startled slightly, she turned to sprint away from me. The doors slammed shut behind her and I was left with Lauren and Four. I turned back and headed into the center of the room. This room was about twenty times as creepy as the sim room. I took a seat in the chair that Lauren was motioning me towards. It was just like the one in the fear sim room.

Lauren headed back to the computer behind the chair and I leaned back. "Remember you can be aware that you're in the sim this time. But still get out of it like a Dauntless. Try not to die, okay?" Four asked.

Four was close to my ear and whispering as Lauren typed something into the computer. She was muttering softly to herself. "Got it," I whispered back.

"Good luck. This isn't as bad as it seems. And Lauren's fears aren't too bad."

"That's a relief," I said.

I was sure that they couldn't be worse than mine. "I had to do hers when I was an initiate too," Four explained.

"As long as she isn't afraid of heights," I teased.

Four's hand tightened almost painfully on my shoulder and I groaned. That was a little harder than was completely necessary. He let up on my shoulder slightly as Lauren came to stand with us. Four backed away from me slightly as Lauren walked over to stand next to my head.

"Just treat it like you're in a fear sim and you'll be fine. This isn't about slowing your heart rate down. Keep that in mind. The only thing that you need to do is conquer my fears," Lauren explained.

The only reason we had done the fear sims was to practice how to conquer a fear. "Okay," I said.

"Here's hoping that we don't share any of them," she said as she held the needle to my neck.

I smiled and nodded, leaning back completely into the chair. "I hope not," I laughed.

"Take a deep breath," she said.

I nodded again. She brushed my hair off of my neck and I cringed as the needle sank into my neck and the world began to spin. It was faster than the beat of a drum that I came back to. I wasn't in the fear landscape room anymore. It seemed like I was actually in the same pit where I had my fear of snakes. A lump formed in my throat as I waited for her first fear to reveal itself to me. I was down in
a dark cave and my heart was pumping quickly. This didn't look like a good thing.

There was a soft scuttling in the corner of the cave and I turned back to see a large creature come out. I knew what this thing was. It seemed like nearly half of the people that I knew were afraid of this. Spiders. I turned back to run but the spider was faster. It was larger than normal ones were. Much larger.

The damn thing looked like it was at least six feet tall and each of the legs were at least three feet long. Its eyes were black and beady and its fangs were dripping in what I assumed was venom. The spider pounced on top of me and I yelled out, thrashing around. I swung myself out from underneath the spider that was trying to catch me again. More were crawling out of the caves and I knew that if I didn't kill this spider soon I was going to have to fight off the rest. The spider lunged at me again and I reached for something. I only had a pocket knife.

Eric had one that I borrowed from time to time and I recognized that the one that I had on me was actually his. I flicked it open and gulped when I realized that the spider wasn't going to die from just one stab. So I dashed underneath the spider as it tried to swipe out at me again. It narrowly missed and I watched as it tripped over its own legs.

It let out an awkward growl and I cried out again when I grabbed the knife in my hand and jammed it into the eye of the spider. It let out a horrible scream and I fell back from it. All of the other spiders began to advance on me quickly and I took in a breath, knowing that there was nothing else that I could do. I had lost my one weapon.

But before I could do anything else or run, the scene changed. My heart was pounding in my chest as I glanced around at my new surroundings. I wasn't afraid of spiders but I certainly didn't want to meet one that large in real life. I was now out of the strange cave and instead standing in a room. A room that I was well aware of. I was in the Chasm. Was Lauren afraid of the Chasm? I had seen her out by it before and she hadn't looked the least bit concerned about it. Maybe it was something else.

I hung back by the railings and turned slightly, gasping loudly when I saw that there was a man standing behind me. I couldn't see who it was as he had a black mask over his face and wore long clothes over his body. He seemed weaponless but that didn't change the fact that he made me nervous.

The man gave no indication that he was going to do anything before darting towards me and knocking me onto my back. I gasped at the sudden weight before kicking him in the stomach. He let out a loud roar that almost sounded like something animalistic. He hit me across the cheek and I gasped at the sudden pain. He wrapped a hand around my neck and I screamed as the other wrapped around the other half of my neck.

The man was angry with me for no reason and now he was going to choke me to death. Lauren was afraid of suffocating. Not that I blamed her. I had almost been suffocated before - more than once - and I knew how terrifying it was. His hands were tight around my throat as I thrashed and kicked out at him. Bile was rising in my throat that was coming close to being completely closed off. I twisted again and kicked out roughly into his stomach. He roared again and I gasped as his grip loosened slightly. I threw out my fist and watched as the man fell from me. He was panting heavily as I jammed my booted foot up into his throat.

He coughed a few times as I leaned over to get my breath back. I felt him grab my back again before kicking out at him, once, twice, and a third time. He growled at me again before I kicked out to his head and he smashed his head on the railing. He fell to the ground and I noticed a pool of blood forming around him, dripping into the churning Chasm waters.
I attempted to stand up but I had almost no time to actually get my wits together. The scene changed once more and I glanced around at myself. The room was nothing that I had seen before. It seemed like I was down in the furnace of Dauntless. The one where we had been forced to burn the clothes of our old Factions. But this was odd. There was trash all around me and the room was extremely narrow. There was only about ten feet of space between two extraordinarily tall walls.

There was a small crawl space at the tops of the walls and I stared at them. It was at least thirty feet up and the walls were too far apart to scale. Was there a chance that Lauren was afraid of being trapped in small spaces? No. That couldn't be it. Why was the room shaped like this if the fear was enclosed spaces?

There was a horrible screeching noise that came from behind the walls and I took in a deep breath. That wasn't good. I noticed that the trash that I was standing on was raising slightly and I let out a little yell. What the hell was happening? I looked over and saw that the walls were closing in slowly. They'd already closed a few inches and I knew that with every passing second they were closing in a little more. It wasn't going to be long before I was crushed to death in between the walls. Not good.

"Lauren, damn it! Crushed to death by closing walls? Come on!" I yelled to myself and Lauren.

This was insane. I'd rather be in my own fear landscape. The walls were closing in fast and I knew that I was running out of time. There was only about another nine feet to go before I was crushed to death. I tried searching through the trash for a way out of the bottom of the trash but there was nothing on either end of the walls. No matter how hard I tried to push against them they wouldn't stop. They were too heavy. No matter how fast I ran back and forth there was nothing I could do to get out. The only thing I could do was try and make it to the crawl space at the top of the wall and fast. I only had about five feet of wiggle room.

I placed one foot on each side of the wall and used my hands to help me walk up them. It was hard and my thighs were burning with the strain. I was in a hell of a lot of pain as I made it about halfway up the wall. The walls were only about three feet apart and I was at least fifteen feet from the top. I began to move faster, practically dying with anticipation. I was going to make it.

But it was hard and the walls weren't stopping, no matter how close I got to the top. I was about ten feet away from the top and barely able to wiggle through the closing walls. There was only about two feet separating the walls from each other and me. I dashed upwards until I was only three feet from the crawl space and the walls were a foot apart. It was squeezing my thighs against my chest and my arms were burning with pain as I struggled back over the tops of the wall.

My entire body to my torso was out of the tops of the walls and I was able to pull one leg completely out of the quickly closing walls. My left foot was caught in the walls and I screamed out loudly. My ankle was throbbing as I ripped it from between the walls and fell to the tops of the walls that had finally closed. Thankfully I'd made it.

The scene changed quickly and I was back to standing, my chest still heaving with the exertion from the previous scene. My heart was pounding in my chest as I glanced around at my surroundings. I was inside Dauntless again. At least I recognized this place. And at this point anything was better than being back with the closing walls. That was the worst one that I had seen in Lauren's fear landscape so far. The halls were bustling with people and I watched as some headed straight towards me. Among them were Max, Eric, and the other Dauntless leaders. Four was with them too.

I let out a little yell as Max wrapped his arms around me. His hands were tight on my arms as he dragged me out of the hall that we were in. He dragged me out of the compound despite my protests and I kicked out at him as he shoved me outdoors. The sun was bright as I turned back to see that Max was standing with his arms folded, watching me with beady eyes. They all were.
"You've been removed from Dauntless on accounts of rule-breaking and weakness. Cowardliness. Best of luck in the Factionless district," Max said with a little smirk.

Lauren was afraid of being kicked out? She was one of the best female fighters that Dauntless had. They weren't going to throw her out. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"There is one way for you to earn your way back. Fight me."

Fight Max? Okay... Nodding at him, I leaned down to get into a fighting stance. Max followed and I realized that he was going to fight with a much stronger stance than Eric and Four. It was probably because he had been here longer. He was older. He would be slower and his vision wasn't as good. He was faster than I had thought that he was going to be. He ran at me and I dodged a punch just barely in time. He threw another one out quickly and I ducked from that one too.

He threw another fist out at me and I dashed backwards once more before raising my fist and throwing it out at him. He managed to dodge my first punch but the second one connected with his nose. He stumbled back and I raised my foot to kick him directly in the stomach. He coughed loudly and I kicked out again, this one hitting his head. I risked a quick glance over to see that Four and Eric, along with the rest of the leaders, were all nodding at me. I would do it.

Trying to finish the fight I flipped over myself to kick him in the nose once more. But the moment that I flipped over myself I hit the ground. No one was here. Not Max and not the rest of them. I was alone again. I hit the ground roughly and rolled over, coughing a few times, trying to get the air back into my lungs. That hurt. My chest was throbbing as I rolled over again.

"Damn it," I groaned. I was sure that Four was laughing his ass off right now. He enjoyed watching when I hurt myself. Not that I blamed him. I enjoyed watching when Four hurt himself. "Shut up, Four. I know you're laughing."

I stood up to look around myself and noticed that I had changed rooms again. It seemed that I was in Dauntless still but I wasn't sure what the room was. It looked like I was in an empty version of the dorms. I turned a few times but nothing looked familiar or dangerous. It sure as hell felt dangerous. I had only been standing for a few seconds when a searing pain shot through my back. I gasped and leaned down onto my knees. What the hell was happening to me?

I reached around to my spine where the pain was and brought my hand back at the sticky feel that came with it. My eyes bulged when I saw that it was blood. And lots of it. It was slicking down my back and pooling onto the floor. I turned desperately to try and search out the culprit behind the attack but no one else was in the room.

There were no doors or windows in the room and I knew that it meant that there was nothing that I could do. Lauren had to be afraid of bleeding to death. Another searing pain shot through my arm as I saw a large split shoot down my right arm. The one on my left followed a moment later and two more on my legs appeared within the next thirty seconds. My heart was pounding as another pain shot through my stomach and more blood began to seep out. I was going to die. What the hell could I do?

I got up weakly and limped over to the cabinets that lined the back wall. I had to find something. Material. Anything that I could use to cover the wounds. I was barely able to stand as I grabbed the drawers and ripped them out of the chests. There was a small band of gauze in the furthest one and I grabbed my shirt and pants, ripping them off of my body.

The bleeding hadn't stopped as it flooded the floor around me. My face was an ashen and I was weakly limping as I grabbed the gauze and began to wrap it around my torso. My hands were
shaking and I was barely able to keep myself standing. I tied off the gauze before tying it around my arms. My hands were shaking pathetically as I began to work on my thighs. I was barely able to see straight as I tied the gauze off and turned to look at myself. The wraps were already bleeding through but I knew that I had done all that I could, even though I was drenched in blood and the bleeding still hadn't stopped.

It seemed that the sim agreed with me. The sim changed again and I saw that I was still in Dauntless. It was strange seeing so many fears that were in Dauntless. A vast majority of mine took place in Erudite. It was something that I was hoping would go past Jeanine when she saw my fears. Not that it mattered. She already knew what I was. I saw a man that looked to be about thirty walking over near a Factionless man who was tied up and I raised my eyebrow at him.

He was speaking to the Factionless man and I saw that Lauren was standing in the background. She looked much younger. She was staring at her father as he stared at the Factionless man. He was speaking but I couldn't hear any of the words that he was saying. I wondered if this was a memory that she couldn't completely remember. She clearly remembered it well enough.

I watched closely and my heart jumped into my throat as I stared at him. He was speaking with an even tone. He looked pissed but it seemed that his voice was strong and steady. I was impressed with him. But it changed before I could realize it. I saw it just out of the corner of my eye. The Factionless man was holding a butter knife and it glinted in the sun for a moment. He was going to kill her father. This was her next fear. Her father's death. She had lost her father to a Factionless man.

I was not going to let that happen in my version of her fear. The man leaped over to her father with knife in hand but I was faster. I launched myself after the man and knocked him off of his feet. The knife sliced through my arm but went clattering to the floor. The pain in my arm was searing but at least I had saved her father.

The screams echoed for a moment before they were cut off and the pain faded from my arm. I was still down on my knees from tackling the man but I was no longer in Dauntless. I was pretty sure that this was the same place where I had my fear of losing my sister. It was in the plaza right in between Erudite and Candor. What was it that she was afraid of out here? It didn't take me long to find out.

The breeze blew softly and I shivered under it. How was I that cold? I glanced up and saw that a crowd was drawn around me. There were Erudite, Candor, Abnegation, Amity, and many Dauntless scattered around, all laughing at me. I saw Eric, Four, Max, the leaders, and a few others whose names I didn't know. I recognized them as her friends.

It only took me a moment to realize what her fear was. It was absolutely mortifying. Lauren had some of the strangest fears I'd ever seen. I was standing in the middle of the plaza buck ass naked with most of the residents of Chicago standing around and laughing at me. Damn it. Stupid fucking Lauren. My face went bright red as the others in the plaza all laughed and pointed at me. For once I was thrilled that I had the tattoos. I knew that it was drawing some of the attention away from my other extremities.

There was no way out of here other than swallowing my pride and dealing with it. I stood up completely straight and blushed softly as I headed over to the people that were watching me. I grabbed a jacket from a man that was standing near me and throwing it over my form, zipping it up. He was smirking at me but one hit to the eye and his smile had faded. I pulled the jacket down my thighs a little ways and headed out of the plaza with my head held high.

It was odd hearing Eric laugh and jeer at me. But this was Lauren's fear, not mine. And Eric wasn't attracted to her, he was attracted to me. I knew that if it was my fear he would have been pissed that everyone else was looking at me. As I strode away from the plaza I found myself back in the
Once more I was back in my training clothes and in the back halls of Dauntless. There was no one else around me as I began to walk back and forth down the hall. Something had to be back here waiting for me. I was striding slowly when a hand clapped itself over my mouth and I fought to let out a piercing scream. I kicked out but another figure caught me by my legs. One was holding one of my legs and one was holding the other, with another wrapped around my torso. The people that were holding me had no faces and I screamed again. One figure covered my face to make sure that no one could hear it.

The figure that was standing behind me wrapped an arm around my torso before dragging me away from the hall. I screamed and cried out as the others kept me from moving. I thrashed out again and felt my boot connect with the face of one of my kidnappers. The one that had been holding my left foot dropped to the ground and I used the propulsion I got from my feet on the ground to push myself back up and throw my foot into the eye of the man that was holding my other leg.

He too dropped me and I tried to thrash away from the two men that were still holding me. The one that was around my torso dropped me and threw a punch to my face, which I was unable to avoid. But I still had the upper hand in the fight. My vision was blurry as I pushed my legs to swing up and roundhouse kick the man against the skull, twice. He groaned and dropped to the ground as I stomped down on his face.

He gave a soft groan and I turned to face my last attacker. His hand was still over my mouth and I bit down on his fingers. He screamed in pain and I spit out the blood that filled my mouth. I punched him in the face before he got a chance to regain himself and swung his fist across my nose. It crunched under the weight of my fist and I kicked him in the stomach.

He hit the ground roughly and I stepped down on his ribs. I heard them crack under my booted feet as I kicked him in the stomach again. He cried out and rolled over as I leaned down, hitting him in the face again. He got a few good hits in on my face but it was nothing compared to the damage that I was doing to him.

I leaned back once more to regain my breath but it was all that the sim needed to push me out. After nine fears of Lauren's I was pushed back into the fear landscape room and I shot up in the chair. My breathing was coming in heavy gasps as I sat bolt upright in the chair and dropped my head into my hands.

Most of her fears weren't too bad but the last one about being kidnapped was completely awful. My throat was rattling softly as I leaned back and nodded at Lauren and Four, both of whom were watching me normally. I wasn't afraid of any of the things that Lauren was but that didn't mean that I enjoyed having to face them. I could only imagine what it was going to be like when I had to do this with my own fears.

"Lauren, you have the weirdest fears," I told her softly.

Lauren gave a soft laugh as she nodded. "Sorry about that," she chirped.

"It's okay."

Four was standing behind her and typing something into the computer. I noticed that he wore a smirk on his face. He was probably still enjoying my fall. Lauren gave me her hand and I took it to let her help me out of the chair. It was a little further back than the chair that was in the fear sim room was.

"I've had people tell me that I have pretty crazy fears before. But everyone has at least one they're
embarrassed of. You did well though," she said.

I perked up. "Thank you. How long did I take?" I asked. It felt like I had been in there forever.

"Ten minutes and twenty-three seconds. That's one of the best time I've ever seen. Even better than Four the first time that he did it."

"Thanks," I said happily.

"You earned it."

A smile graced my face. I was glad to hear just how fast I had managed to get the fear sim done. I had heard that the average times were about twenty minutes. I was taking about half of the time. Four moved to stand at the side of my chair as Lauren turned and headed into the waiting area. I was sure that she was going to get Aaron to bring him in. I hoped that he would do well in the fear landscape. I knew that he wanted to stay in the second spot if he couldn't take over the number one spot.

"Thanks, Lauren," Four said as she walked away.

She smiled and moved to open the door. "Not a problem. Aaron! You're up," she called.

"Alright, you did well. If you can do that in your fear landscape and remember to not give anyone a chance to say what you are you'll do well in the end," Four told me.

"I'll definitely work on it," I said.

"Get to the training room," he snapped.

Clearly something was wrong with him this morning. He seemed more distracted and he looked a little less happy than he normally was. I couldn't help but to wonder if he was thinking about what was coming in two weeks. I knew that it was as big of a deal for him as it was for me. It could very well be the end of both of our lives. He was helping me out of the kindness of his heart. He didn't have to. Jeanine didn't know who he was.

"Thanks Four. Don't worry. I won't tell anyone about the timing thing," I teased.

"Get out," Four snapped.

We smiled at each other as I hopped out of the chair, giving him a quick hug before parting ways and heading towards the door. "I'll see you later," I yelled back to him.

"Bye, Alex."

I turned to leave and brushed past the door. Lauren was standing and moved out of the way for me. I said hello to a few of my friends and patted Aaron on the back before heading straight for the training room. My friends all called to me once the door was closed and Lauren had disappeared once more, asking me what it was like to do the fear landscape. I was honest in telling them that it wasn't nearly as bad as having to deal with the fear sims.

As long as someone didn't share any fears with her. They were all going to be aware that it wasn't real and that was a positive for them. Although I knew a few of my friends were afraid of spiders. At least it was the first fear that they would see. They could get it over with first. It would only get better from there.

It was only a few minute until I got to the training room and walked straight in. There was no one in
the training room other than a few members and I smiled to myself. I had never been in here without Eric, Four, or the other initiates. I headed straight to the punching bag and hit the thing as hard as I could, over and over again. I was there for nearly half an hour. The only other person that had since joined me was Aaron, and he was lifting weights.

My hands and knees were both bleeding from the heavy impacts. I was taking out all of my stress on the bag. It was killing my hands as I continued to rain hits down onto the bag but I ignored the pain. I wanted to be angry about everything. The war. Jeanine Matthews. Eric. Having to drag Four into this. Divergence. Everything that I could think of.

A hand wrapped around the back of the back and I jumped. As far as I had been concerned, no one was around me. I thought that everyone else was around the weight lifting areas. I ignored the hand and threw another hit at the bag but it didn't do anything. It stayed completely still. All it did was make me retract my hand and hiss in pain. I looked around to see that Eric was standing behind the bag. I was glad that everyone else was nowhere near me.


"Your hits aren't going to the center of mass. It's throwing you off," he said.

Wiping off a bead of sweat, I nodded. He was right about that. I wasn't throwing my hits carefully, I was just hitting to release pent-up anger. I shook my head at him and threw out another punch. It wasn't as hard as the others considering I really didn't want to hurt my hand again.

"Thanks, but I've got stuff on my mind. I wasn't exactly thinking about where to hit with the center of mass or whatever the hell you're on about. I just want to take some anger out," I said.

Eric nodded at me before letting go of the bag. He turned back and walked to stand behind me. I wanted to reach out and hit the bag again but decided against it. Eric placed his hands on my arms and I sucked in a deep breath. There were people around. Part of me wanted to tell him that but I wasn't sure that I was going to be able to open my mouth and admit it to him. For whatever reason my mouth seemed to have completely sealed itself and I was at his mercy.

"I taught you better than that," Eric growled.

"Like I said, I'm not going on what I learned."

"What do you have to be stressed about, initiate?" Eric asked, his mouth pressed against the side of my ear.

"Lots... You," I growled, trying to ignore him.

His breath fanned over my neck and I shivered. I rolled my eyes at myself and his actions before punching the bag again. Eric's hands slipped down my arms to come and land on my hips. They were soft on me and I felt his hands tense as he shoved my hips to the side. I knew that he was roughly correcting my stance. I had never been very good about keeping the correct stance.

"Ouch. Watch your damn hands," I snapped.

"You never complained before."

"Since there's not a bed anywhere in sight, I don't exactly want you to be rough with me," I moaned.

Eric rolled his eyes, probably thinking that I was being a baby. "Turn and face me," Eric said in my ear darkly.
I turned and took a step back. He was being way too risky. Someone could see us. We were already tempting fate here. "There are people in here, Eric," I sneered.

He seemed to be unconcerned. "So?" he asked.

I couldn't believe that he was being so open and standing so close to me. I hated that we had to keep this a secret but I knew that we had to continue keeping this a secret. We had done a good job so far. And we only had to do it for another two weeks. Only two more weeks and I knew that we would no longer have a secret relationship to keep.

"So, there are people watching," I said.

"What?" Eric asked.

"People are watching. Leave."

He had a teasing lilt to his voice and I had to push to keep the blush on my face down. I had a feeling that nothing good was going to come. Not when he was looking at me the way that he was. It said that I was asking for it and I was going to get it later. Eric moved closer to me to put his mouth over my ear.

"Do you think that I'm going to bend you over?" he asked.


"Or maybe throw you down against the ground? Be as rough as possible. I thought that was how you liked it. Push your legs apart? Lean in between and slip my -" he prattled before I cut him off.

"Eric!" I snarled.

He was smirking at me as I slapped a hand over his mouth. I wanted to back away from him but I didn't believe that he was going to not keep talking if I took my hand off of his mouth. A few people turned back to us and I awkwardly shifted behind the bag so that no one else could see us.

"Shut up! Please. People will hear you," I told him desperately.

He smiled and backed away from me. I was hesitant to take my hand off of his mouth but I let him go slowly. Thankfully no one was looking our way. They all seemed to be so caught up in their own thoughts and training. I assumed that everyone else was thinking about their jobs or something else that made them angry. I wondered what it would be like to be able to only think about something like that. Not a damned war that I was only fighting with one other person.

Finally Eric decided to let the conversation go as a smirk faded back onto his face and he leaned against the bag. The chain that was holding it creaked and I reached out to kick it gently. I was practicing my stance, knowing that Eric would throw me off balance if it wasn't correct. As he replaced my foot properly on the bag, his fingers gently trailed up my leg, making me shiver slightly.

"How did you like Lauren's fear landscape?" Eric asked.

"Loved it," I teased.

"It's ridiculous, isn't it?"

"Just a little bit. Well, a lot. I didn't know Lauren was older than you," I commented.

"Just a year," Eric said.
We stood together for a moment as Eric readjusted my stance. "So you had to do it, too?" I asked.

Eric nodded blankly. "Yeah. She was bigger in the training process during my initiation. She's still afraid of spiders and the walls closing in, right?" he asked.

"She is. I hated the walls closing in."

He nodded, probably remembering going through it himself. "My favorite was the public humiliation. How was that?" he asked.

A blush rose on my face and I dropped my head to the ground as I kicked out, missing the bag. Eric laughed as I grabbed his arm to steady myself. Aaron glanced over to us and I let go of him quickly, putting a stern glare on my face. Aaron nodded at me before turning away and I turned back to Eric, placing an awkward smile on my face.

"Please tell me that yours was about having to be naked out in the center of the square? Or right in front of the Hub?" I asked.

Eric was smirking at me. "No," he said.

"Something like that?" I asked desperately.

Eric was still shaking his head. "No. Mine was not about being naked," he said.

There was something on his face that told me that he would have loved to watch me go through that fear. The whole thing was especially awkward if I would ever have to do that fear landscape in front of someone else. Doing it in front of Four and Lauren was bad enough.

"I do look forward to watching your fear landscape and seeing you like that," he told me, hissing it in my ear.

He leaned into me and I blushed as his front rubbed against mine. "Shut up," I mumbled.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," he said.

I blushed again and shook my head, trying to push him away from me. "Thanks," I said softly.

"Come on, spar with me. I won't throw you around the training room this time. Or at least I won't try," he said.

I laughed softly as I shook my head. "Really?" I asked, surprised.

"Come on, Amity," he goaded.

I wasn't so sure that I wanted to spar with Eric. We were together but that didn't mean that he ever took it easy on me. In fact I was sure that it made him go harder on me. I knew that he meant that he was going to try me even harder to throw me off of the mats. We walked over to the mats and I stood in front of Eric, well aware that everyone was staring at me. They were all curious what was going to happen. The last time that we had fought together Eric had nearly killed me.

It turned out that we managed to spar together for hours on end and I was well aware that we had missed lunch because we had been so into the fight. I knew that we were drawing a large crowd. Everyone was curious to watch the ruthless Dauntless leader and the number one ranked Amity transfer. Although they looked shocked that Eric wasn't actually trying to kill me.

Throughout the entire fight I knew that Eric wasn't taking it easy on me. It meant that I was fighting...
him as hard as I possibly could. The fight was brutal but I liked it. He was leaving lots of bruises on me and I knew that I had a split in my lip from a hit at the beginning of the fight. It hurt like hell but I'd gotten him back. He had one ugly bruise on the side of his neck from a kick from me. It was the only mark that I had put there. It was more of an accident than anything else but at least I'd done something.

It was getting close to dinner and Eric and I were still fighting. I was dead tired since we had only taken a few breaks for water and breathers. We both looked awful, drenched in sweat and ready to keel over and die. Eric was still stronger than me. But I knew that he was ready to end this. I was too. We both wanted to get to dinner.

It only took him a moment to completely disable me. It wasn't a problem either. I knew that he could beat me without trying. He was only taking it easy on me because he wanted to continue fighting me. He could have hospitalized me in a few minutes. I wondered if he would once he found out what I was. It was a serious possibility. I wouldn't be shocked either.

He grabbed me in a bone crushing hold and I felt my shoulder pop a few times. It was shooting pain through my entire shoulder and I cried out softly. But I didn't want to tap out. I hated having to lose to him. I heard another trainer yelling at us to quit it and get to dinner but Eric silenced them with a glare. Eric was not going to let me go until I tapped out. I tried to roll away from him but his grip was way too tight on me. My shoulder was killing me and I knew that he was going to dislocate it if I kept it up.

So I finally raised my hand to his knee and tapped it a few times. I also made sure to send my shoulder back weakly into his groin when I stood up. He groaned and yanked on my hair roughly as he stood. I knew that he was pissed about the elbow to the groin. But I was pissed about the shoulder.

We both popped up and faced each other. We both sighed a few times before moving a little closer to each other. We were exhausted. Eric was breathing a little heavier than normal but nothing else. On the other hand I looked half-dead. My hair was everywhere, sweat was beading over me, and I was panting heavily. It looked like I had been run over by a truck. I felt like I had been run over by a truck. Eric was smirking at me and I rolled my eyes. I was exhausted. I wanted to go to dinner. I was starving.

"Nice try, initiate. I don't think so. You'll never beat me," he snarled.

"Damn you."

I rolled my eyes and turned away from him. I had to fight to keep the smile off of my face. A few of my friends were watching me out of the corner of their eyes and I had to keep up the pretense that I hated him. Smirking at him, I moved forward and took a few steps off of the mat away from him.

"You're still weak," Eric growled lowly.

I turned back and gave him a long smirk. "And I know how to make you weak," I said, brushing by Eric.

He watched curiously as I walked close to him and gently let my hand brush across his lower half. He tensed slightly and fought to keep a straight face. "Let go, or the rules will be damned," Eric hissed.

The two of us grinned at each other as I released him and stepped back. "See you tonight, asshole," I told Eric under my breath.
No one needed to know that I was going back to visit Eric later tonight. Eric chuckled under his breath as he brushed past me. He slammed into my shoulder and I laughed, fighting to keep an angry glare on my face. I followed him at a safe distance as we headed into the dining room. I was about ten feet behind him and avoiding looking anywhere near him.

As we walked into the dining room Eric walked away without saying anything to me. Not that I had been expecting him to say anything. I knew that he would catch my eye when he was ready to go and I would leave a few minutes after him so to not raise suspicion. I walked into the food area and grabbed myself a burger before heading out to sit with my friends. Everyone was in the same spot as normal and most of them were laughing.

"Hey, guys," I called as I walked over.

Heather and Buck sprung apart slightly to make room for me to sit next to them. "There you are," Heather chirped.

Dante was sitting across from me and I grabbed a fry off of his plate. He smirked and stabbed at me with his fork to get me away from his plate. "Hey. How'd the fear landscape go for you?" he asked.

For once I wasn't bothered. Only one of Lauren's fears had bothered me. The kidnapping one. "Fantastic as always," I teased.

Everyone laughed. "You were out of there faster than anyone else. It took me over twenty minutes to get out of there," Dante said.

"Really?" I asked, surprised.

He was normally really fast. "Yeah. Lauren has some weird fucking fears," Dante said.

We all laughed. Dante was right. Lauren had some of the strangest fears that I had ever seen. The walls closing in on her was completely odd. I wasn't sure where a fear like that came from. "It was creepy but thankfully we don't share any of the same fears. I hate the kidnapping fear," I said.

Dante nodded at me. "That one freaked me out," Dante admitted.

The ones that hadn't been through Lauren's fear landscape yet all looked a little startled. "I don't really blame her for being afraid of it. I wonder if someone tried to kidnap her or something like that?" I asked more myself than anyone else.

"Do you think that really happened?" Heather asked.

"Maybe. That's the only reason that I could think that something like that would happen," I continued.

"She's afraid of being kidnapped?" Jet asked.

Everyone that had been in the fear landscape nodded. Draven, Dante, Jax, Buck, and Heather had all been through it already of the transfers. The only ones that hadn't seen it were Cole and Jet. A few of them were laughing and I shook my head. I knew that Lauren's fear landscape was a little silly to them but it wasn't just that. Our fears seemed silly to others but that didn't mean that their fears weren't scary to themselves. Our fears were our own and we had our own reasons for being afraid of them.

"What else is she afraid of?" Jet asked, breaking me from my thoughts.
A scoff came from the other side of the table and I turned to see Draven digging the tip of his knife into the wood of the table. I smiled at him, knowing that it was a habit. He did it when he was nervous. I had figured that out months ago. He looked annoyed at something and I couldn't help but to wonder why.

"How is it fair that we had to go in blind and now we're going to tell you what happened?" Draven asked.

Everyone turned to him and gave a dark glare so that he would admit what they should be expecting. "We would do the same thing for you," I pointed out.

He rolled his eyes and let a deep yawn out. I loved Draven. It was funny how he was so blasé about everything. "She's afraid of spiders, suffocation, being crushed between walls that are slowly closing in, being thrown out of Dauntless, uncontrollable bleeding, her father's death, public humiliation, and being kidnapped by faceless men," Draven admitted.

Both Cole and Jet looked completely thrown by his admission of her fears. "That's quite the menagerie of fears she has," Cole said.


He grinned at me. He was right. She had a wide variation of fears. "Is it bad?" Cole asked.

"Not really. Some of them are scary but you have to wonder how she got the other fears," I said.

"I hate to think about the spiders. I hate spiders. They're in my fear sim," Cole admitted.

Sighing softly, I frowned at him. I was pretty sure at least five of the initiates were afraid of spiders. I knew that Lisa and Serena were. I was pretty sure that they had both had to face them in their fear sims. It was his girlfriend to the rescue and I smiled at her. Heather wrapped her arm around Cole and leaned into him. We were all staring at them and some of us, myself included, were making vomiting faces.

"Hey, at least you know that someone else is afraid of them too," Heather said.

"Lots of people are afraid of them," I said.

"Cole, sweetheart, Alex is right."

I smiled at her again. I liked watching the way that she consoled her boyfriend. I knew that he hated lots of animals. Cole was from Erudite. They were an extremely clean and sterile Faction. They tended not to like animals. They thought that they were dirty. Very few of them had pets. Only some, like the blind and deaf, had service dogs and cats trained to care for their owners.

"The spiders weren't the worst ones," Jax interrupted.

Of course not. I had never known Jax to get freaked out about any kind of animal. He hated things like enclosed spaces and family deaths. "Walls closing in?" I asked.

"That was bad too. No, I thought that the kidnapping was the worst," he said.

"Me too," I said.

That was probably the worst. Especially considering that they shrieked like banshees and didn't have faces. "It was like once you got rid of one of them another ten would take their place. It was the
worst thing," Jax said.

I shifted slightly and raised my eyebrows. I didn't have them replace each other once they were taken down. "You had more take their place?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Me too," Buck said.

"I didn't either," Heather agreed with me.

There must have just been lots of differences in the fear sims. I thought about mentioning the public humiliation but decided to pass on it. "Well everyone that hasn't gone yet, you certainly have something to look forward to now," Jax said.

We all laughed at him. The topic of the fear landscapes were dropped and we all went to speaking about typical things. Of course everyone was throwing food within minutes and trying to wrestle on top of the table. It was a disaster, just the way that I liked it. I glanced up to see that Eric was standing in the Wolf's Den with Cameron and a few of his other friends. All of my friends were distracted with each other. He turned to me for a moment and gave me a quick wink.

It was the first time that I'd seen him amused since coming into the dining room. I blushed before turning back to my abandoned food. My time with Eric was coming to an end soon enough. My time with everyone was coming to an end. My time being normal was coming to an end. Everything was coming to an end. But for now I was going to enjoy it.

Eric's P.O.V.

Eric was up in the Wolf's Den leaning against the railing that was overlooking the rest of the dining room. His eyes were slipping closed and he was certain that he had never been so bored in his entire life. Cameron and his other friends had to go finish some paperwork that Eric had no part of so he was stuck up here by himself. Everyone was busy with work right now. But Cameron would be done with work soon enough and they would be able to hang out for a while until he decided to pull his Amity away.

Right now he was supposed to be going over plans for new additions to the Hub. He had no clue why this was his job. He never overlooked construction. He had no idea why he was doing this but Max had seemed rather out there lately. Eric had a feeling that it had to do with the Divergent's. It meant that he had been forced to pick up Max's slack.

The work could wait for another day. He was currently leaning over the edge of the railing listening to the conversations below him. It was a habit that he had always had. Not that the conversations were anything to be heard. They were almost always boring. He was about twenty feet higher than the people at the tables below him but he could hear them perfectly.

He was trying to listen to all sorts of conversations but nothing was worthwhile to hear. Some were talking about work, others about hooking up, and even more about heading to the Pit. Nothing worth investing time into. He had recently switched over to listening to the conversation that his Amity was in. They were talking about the Aptitude Test. It seemed that they were all wondering if they had done the same thing to get the same results.

Eric shook his head as he dropped his head back and tilted back a small sip of his beer. He was on his third but he wasn't concerned. Beer had never affected him. It was just something to drink as they passed the time. He just knew as well as anyone else that there weren't many things that someone
could do to get Dauntless. Taking the knife was one of the easiest ways. So was killing the dog. If a person didn't kill the dog that usually took out Dauntless and instead would go through Candor or Erudite, depending on how the person acted when the little girl came out.

Eric yawned and leaned back against the bars again as he began to flip through the file on the Hub. Built and finished ninety-one years ago and all sorts of other technical things that he could have cared less about. Damn Max. This was his job. Eric just wished that he was doing anything else.

"Well I didn't kill the dog, actually," Heather said.

Eric raised a pierced eyebrow as he turned to listen to the conversation. He still kept his body facing mostly away from the initiates. Finally something that could catch his attention. He had been bored all night. But one comment from her best friend, the ex-Candor, had piqued his interest. She hadn't killed the dog?

"You didn't?" Cole asked.

"No."

"So how did you get Dauntless?"

"I didn't actually score Dauntless on my Aptitude Test. I got Candor," she said.

He wondered what had made her leave. Either way, it was a good choice. Being in the top ten was a good ranking for someone that hadn't even scored Dauntless on their Aptitude Test. "Why did you leave?" Buck asked.

"I couldn't stay. I had to get out of there. So I picked the Faction that I thought was the closest. Anyways, when the dog came out I pet it. I'd heard that dogs weren't violent if you could make yourself seem smaller than them," she said.

The Erudite part of Eric's brain had him nodding along with her. The smaller you made yourself the less threatening that an animal assumed that you were. And the dog really wasn't going to attack. Eric had attacked the dog before it had come anywhere towards him. But he knew that he had to be Dauntless. There had been no other choice for himself.

"I'm shocked that you didn't get Erudite then," Cole teased her.

Eric rolled his eyes. She wasn't smart enough. "Well considering I asked what was going on at least twenty times I'm sure that they didn't want to put me in Erudite," she said.

He knew that plenty of people taking the Aptitude Test asked what was going on when they went in. He hadn't been one of them. "You didn't want to be there anyways," Cole said.

"Trust me, I didn't act very smart, just rationally. That's the way that a Candor thinks. I figured that if I was brave enough to grab the knife I would be brave enough to make it in Dauntless. I was right," she stated proudly.

Eric snorted and shook his head. It seemed that the ex-Candor and his Amity shared a fair amount of personality traits, like being proud. But he was rather intrigued to see that someone who had not scored Dauntless on their Aptitude Test had actually done rather well. Tenth place wasn't great, but it wasn't terrible either. It would be good enough for patrols or weaponry. She would have to prove herself if that was what she wanted to be. It didn't matter. He had always felt like someone should go where the Aptitude Test told them to go. Although if it had told him to go to Erudite he still would have gone to Dauntless.
"I felt awful when I killed the dog. I love dogs," Eric heard Buck say.

His face turned sour. He had never liked the ex-Candor. He was always too close to his Amity. "No one did," Jax said.

"Hell, we had a few dogs," Buck continued.

It seemed that everyone at the table was nodding their heads and Eric turned towards them. They were the only ones having a halfway decent conversation. Even though Eric didn't like the cowardice that they were showing over the dog he did understand. He was rather fond of animals. He hadn't enjoyed killing the dog either. But if it was his life or the dog's he would chose his own every time.

"Well it made us Dauntless, right?" Jax asked the table.

They all nodded again and Eric found himself nodding with them. It wasn't always fun to be brave, but the point of Dauntless was that you always had to be brave. Eric found himself a little curious as to why he hadn't heard his Amity speak up yet. She was rarely this silent. But he did know that her story never seemed to fall in line. She claimed to him that she had scored Amity. But her parents had told him that she hadn't taken the test because the serum had made her sick. Eric scowled. Someone was lying. If they got her to talk it would be the one chance that he had to hear the truth.

"Alex?" Draven spoke up.

He gave a quick turn to the table and saw her perk up slightly. Her eyebrows were knitted. "Yeah?" she asked.

Eric himself perked up a little and he glanced down to see if he could hear what she had to say for herself. It was killing him that he didn't know the entire truth. He always knew the truth about everything. Except for this one matter. She looked like she had been rather out of it for this conversation.

"Didn't you say once before that you scored Amity on the test?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said, nodding.

Her head was moving slowly and her eyes seemed a little glazed over. Eric didn't miss the funny way that she was acting. "So you didn't kill the dog?" Draven asked.

This time Eric turned completely around. He didn't care that it wasn't a good thing to eavesdrop on someone. He wanted to know the truth about what was going on. He deserved to know the truth. He was a little glad that she hadn't noticed that he was now blatantly staring at her.

"Uh, no. No I - I didn't kill the dog. When the knife and meat came out I actually didn't take either," she admitted.

So she had taken the test. All of her friends were laughing but Eric knitted his eyebrows as he tried to put the pieces together. He had never heard of someone doing something like that before. When given a choice it was better to grab something rather than stand with nothing.

"You didn't?" Heather asked.

"No. I don't really know why I didn't. When the dog came out I just let it sniff me. It was adorable," she said softly.
Eric snorted at her. Of course she thought that it was adorable. Maybe that was why she had scored Amity. Maybe she had really taken the test. Maybe she'd just told that lie to her parents so that she didn't have to tell them that she had scored Amity but was still leaving. Either way Eric had a feeling that the whole story still wasn't being told. She hadn't done anything that would prove that she was Amity. All that seemed to do was edge out Dauntless. He had no clue how sparing the dog had led her to earn the Amity result.

"What about when the little girl came out?" Dante asked.

For once she was going to answer the truth. Mostly because she thought that he wasn't listening. "What?" she asked dumbly.

"That's when you were supposed to kill the dog if you hadn't yet. But you didn't kill the dog if you got Amity. How the hell did you get Amity?" Dante asked.

There was no rational reason that she had gotten Amity. Eric didn't understand how the hell she had gotten that result. "Oh I, uh, I saved the little girl. I just jumped on top of the dog to save her," she admitted.

Everyone was nodding at her but a nasty scowl had fallen over Eric's face. No matter how much she talked he didn't understand how she had gotten the Amity result. If she really had taken the Aptitude Test in the first place. It only sounded like she could have gotten either Dauntless of Erudite the way that she was speaking. Amity didn't make any sense. She would have needed to avoid the little girl if she had wanted to get Amity.

"Hey, have you guys ever heard of a back-up sim?" she asked.

They all turned to stare at her as Eric's heart plummeted down into his stomach. "A what?" Heather asked.

"Like, if the computer didn't eradicate four of the Factions then you would have to go into a second one to actually get you one result," she clarified.

The table was silent as strange looks were thrown back and forth. Eric was now watching the table carefully. He thought that someone might have been speaking to him but he wasn't listening. She still didn't notice that he was watching her. She was too busy looking at her other friends.

"I've never heard of that, Alex. Did that happen to you?" Heather asked.

Eric didn't bother to listen to the answer. He took a seat at the nearest table up in the Wolf's Den and ground his fists against the metal table. He could see Cameron coming up from the corner of his eyes with his other friends in tow. They were currently speaking with Zeke. But Eric didn't care. He cared about the conversation that he had just overheard. He was now hearing three different ideas behind her Aptitude Test.

She either hadn't taken it, had taken it and had gotten Amity, or she was lying about everything. He knew which one it was. He was trying to think of anything else, anything but what he knew was the truth. But nothing else worked out. She had taken the test. And Amity had not been her result.

He was steaming in his own fury at the table. He didn't know what to do. He didn't know whether to be angry and kill her or stop and speak to her calmly about it. He didn't know what to do. He had never been forced into this spot before. And never with someone like her. Never with someone that he cared for. He just knew that he had to talk to her. But it would not be a calm discussion. He was shaking with anger.
She had to be one of them. He couldn't imagine that she wasn't. There was only one reason that the computer gave a back-up simulation. Eric had only seen it happen twice before. Both times the tester had been Divergent. The only reason that the computer gave one was because it couldn't determine which single Faction that someone was suited for. Jeanine had claimed that Divergent's were no longer being captured during the Aptitude Test. She was right. They weren't. People were helping hide them. Someone was helping to hide her.

But it still made no sense to him. There were plenty of people that hated the Divergent's. That didn't trust them. How was she managing to get away with it? How had Four not noticed during Phase Two? Maybe he had noticed. After all, Eric had watched her go through her fear sim of him hurting her for a few days while Four had recovered from the food poisoning. Maybe someone was teaching her. After all, Eric hadn't noticed anything wrong with her fear sim.

She must have been training herself to get through a fear sim like a normal Dauntless would. Maybe it was Four that had helped her. Or maybe someone else would. Or maybe there was a chance that he was wrong. But he knew that he wasn't. He knew for a fact that he was right. She was one. She had to be one. It was the only thing that made sense.

"Eric? Eric?" He heard Cameron call to him.

He assumed that he had been calling to him for a few minutes beforehand. Eric didn't want to hear him say anything. All he wanted was to knock her head off. She was going to tell him the truth. Eric pushed Cameron to the side as he stood, heading downstairs straight for the bench that she was sitting at with her friends. They were all trying to question her and Eric could see that she looked frazzled. Because she was trying to continue to lie. She was trapping herself in the web of lies. They were all unwinding in front of her. She was digging herself deeper and deeper into the hole.

"Eric, where the hell are you going? We have work to do!" Cameron yelled after Eric.

He didn't give a damn. He had better things to take care of. "Get it done yourself. I'll look over it later. I have something that I need to do," he snarled as he walked by.

He shoved Cameron out of the way, who he heard scoff. "He okay?" another one of their friends, Woody, asked.

"He okay?" another one of their friends, Woody, asked.

"He'll be fine," Cameron said, sounding in between worried and annoyed.

He knew that Cameron was going to question him on it later but leave him alone for now. That was the way that they worked. Instead of getting to work on the project that he had promised Max that he would do he marched down the stairs. He was seeing red. That was the only thing that he could see. Everyone was jumping out of the way as he stormed over to her table. It was clear to see that he was angry and no one wanted to make it even worse. The initiates immediately ceased talking to each other as Eric stood over her small form.

"Amity," he snarled. He couldn't help the cruel note in his voice. She turned to him with a bored look in her eyes but he could see that they held some worry at the strong and cold glare he was giving her. "With me. Now."

For once, she didn't argue. It was clear that she didn't have a choice in the matter. He knew that she wouldn't say no anyways. She didn't bother saying goodbye to her friends as she stood and followed him out of the dining room. He didn't bother waiting for her. She was fighting to keep up with him as he nearly trampled everyone out of the way. He was furious. He just wanted to get to speak with her. He didn't even know what he wanted to say.
She couldn't be one of them. How could the one person that he had ever cared about, other than Cameron, be one of them? He grabbed her by the arm and forced her into the apartment, shoving her inside. She stumbled slightly as she walked further into the apartment. There was a hint of fear in her eyes. He pushed her a few steps forward before slamming the door shut behind him. For once in her life, she was going to tell him the truth.

Alex's P.O.V.

I was nervous beyond belief. If Eric was just giving me an act he was damn good at it. If it wasn't an act this wasn't good. I had no clue what he could possibly be angry with me for. I had never seen him look as angry as he looked right now. It made me extremely uncomfortable. I was afraid that he was really going to hurt me. He looked like he was about to tear my head off. I was shaking slightly as I leaned back against the counter. I had thought that he might drop the angry look once we got back to the apartment but now he only looked even angrier.

So I decided to try a joke. Anything possible to lighten the mood. I wasn't okay watching Eric like this. "You know, if you had wanted to bring me back here all you had to do was ask. You know that I'd come back here with you any time," I told him softly.

He didn't give the slightest clue that he had found what I had said funny. He clearly didn't think that it was funny. I moved forward and grabbed his hand. He didn't let me get my fingers intertwined with his. He moved quickly so that he could grab my wrist in a bone-crunching hold. It was strong enough that it felt like he could have broken my wrists. It hurt like hell.

"Ow, Eric. Let go," I warned him. It was horribly painful. "Eric seriously, that fucking hurts."

He was standing close to me with his hands wrapped so tightly around my wrist I was sure that the bone would snap. "From the moment that I saw you I knew that there was something up," he growled.

"What?"

"Why would an Amity transfer to Dauntless? Especially an Amity that scored Amity on her Aptitude Test," he snarled.

My heart began to race, faster than I thought was humanly possible. Was there some chance that he had found out the truth? How could he? "I..."

My voice trailed off when I realized that I didn't know what to say. "But I liked you. Always did. From the moment that I saw you. I knew that I wanted you. No matter how angry you made me," he said.

Some part of me was slightly pleased that he had said those words but I knew that something bad was following. "I know that. I felt the same way," I told him somewhat honestly.

I knew that physically I wanted him but I had really hated him personally since I had met him. Only recently had I actually come to like his personality. "Did you?" Eric asked darkly.

"From the moment that I saw you I knew that I wanted you. I tried to fight it but I never could. You were the one thing that I could never fight," I admitted. It was the complete truth. From the moment that I had seen him the first time I had thought that I knew that he was the one that I wanted. "I've told you why I came to Dauntless. I knew that I couldn't be Amity. I did it for too long. Screw what the test said, I'm Dauntless. You've seen that. I've proven it."

He couldn't find out the lie. My life depended on it. It seemed that none of my words had moved him.
the way that his had moved me. "You know I had a strange conversation with your parents when they were here," he said.

Once more my heart beat began to speed up. "Did you?" I asked weakly.

I was beyond nervous at his words. At any moment I thought that my knees might give out underneath me. He had to know the truth. It was the only reason that he would be saying these things. He had never before brought up what he had talked about with my parents. He had always made it sound like the conversation was completely innocent.

"I asked them why you came to Dauntless when you had scored Amity on your Aptitude Test," he said.

I wanted to scream until my lungs burst. I had told my parents that I hadn't taken the Aptitude Test. My lies were coming unraveled before me. "And they said?" I asked softly.

"They told me this funny thing that you hadn't taken your Aptitude Test," he said, clearly passing the ball to me.

That meant that he knew what the truth was. "I - I..." I began to stutter. I had no idea what to say. Especially not having him leaning over me like this. Like he was about to rip my heart out. Maybe he was. "Please let go of me."

It was so soft that it was barely anything over a whisper. He didn't let go. He was still towering over me. "No," he growled.

"Eric, I told them the truth. I lied to you. All of you. I'm sorry," I said softly. This was my one chance to fix this. I could get my lie back in order. "I never took the Aptitude Test. The serum made me sick. I threw it back up and the woman that was administering my test told me to leave. That she was just going to program Amity into the computer. She told me that the choice would be mine to make."

It was horribly difficult to keep my voice as steady as I could. I had wanted to tell Eric the truth but seeing him like this made me think once more that maybe telling him the truth was the wrong idea. Eric hummed and gave me something in between a smirk and grimace.

"That's interesting. You know that I'm from Erudite," he said.

"I know."

"They make all of the serums that they use in every Faction. Also the one that they make for the Aptitude Test. It's similar but not the same to the one that they use for the fear sim. Neither one has any known toxins or allergens," he said. I knew that the day would come that I would rue Eric being Erudite born. "It's designed that way. So that it doesn't make anyone sick."

His eyes never once strayed from mine. I straightened my spine out so that I stood a little closer to the same height as Eric. Not that it made much of a difference. I was still about a foot shorter than him. "Think what you want, Eric, but that's the truth. Okay?" I asked.

"Is it?" Eric asked.

"I didn't take the test because the serum made me sick. I know it sounds funny. I couldn't believe that it happened," I told him. It was a half-truth. I couldn't believe that I was Divergent. "I was terrified when I heard that I had to choose based on my own thoughts."
That part was the truth. Even though I had gotten an answer I had still been forced to make the choice from my own mind. After all, only Candor had been eliminated. He nodded but I knew that Eric didn't believe me. The thought sent waves down my spine. Nothing good was going to be said tonight. I wanted him to drop it but I knew that he wouldn't.

"For a long time I thought that it might be the entire truth. A strange story but I thought that there was a chance that it could have been true," he said.

Nerves were tingling through my entire body. How had he figured out that it was a lie? "It is the truth," I whispered.

"I thought that it was the truth until today. You might want to be careful what you talk about in public," he warned, leaning into me slightly.

But it didn't turn me on like it normally did. It made me want to run for my life. My eyes were watering as I shook my head at him. This couldn't be happening. He couldn't know the truth. He'd overheard me. I didn't know what was happening and I didn't want to have to turn around and deal with it. I was terrified. This was not the way that I wanted this conversation to happen. I could only pray that there was still a way that I could fix this.

"Eric, I don't know what you're talking about," I said softly.

The only thing that I could think to do was play dumb, which I knew that Eric would hate. "What did you score on your Aptitude Test? Tell me the truth," he hissed.

My back was pressed into the counter and I was sure that I could have melted into the granite under his intense stare. "I didn't take it," I answered him weakly.

It wasn't the truth but I prayed that he couldn't see through the lie. He was much smarter than me. He knew when I was lying. He always had. He grabbed me by the collar of my shirt and I cried out as he dragged me across the kitchen. My feet were dragging against the floor and I was stumbling as he slammed me into the wall next to the counter. My head rolled back and smacked into the drywall as Eric pressed himself tightly against me. His hand was pressed against my throat and it felt like at any moment I might pass out. I could tell that he was absolutely furious. He was shaking in anger. Or maybe it was me shaking in fear.

"Stop," I begged.

"Don't lie to me. I heard you talking at the table with your little friends," he said darkly. I really thought that we were being quiet enough. "How is it that you knew exactly what was in the Aptitude Test?"

There had to be something that I could say to make him believe that I really wasn't lying to him. "They were already talking. I've known them for months. They talked about the test enough for me to know what was in it. Everyone sees the same things," I said.

And that was the truth. Everyone had the same things happen to them. It was their choices that changed the test. "Not good enough," Eric snarled.

"My two best friends back in Amity talked about it too. I've known enough to know what happens during the test," I tried to add confidently.

"Really?" Eric asked with a teasing snarl.
"Yes," I said weakly.

He didn't believe me. "You didn't take the knife or the meat? You didn't kill the little dog? You thought that the dog was adorable? You jumped on top of the dog? That would give you Dauntless or Erudite. If you took the test," he continued.


This couldn't be happening. He was right. My answers would have only given Dauntless or Erudite. I hadn't thought that part out. Maybe I had been too in-depth with telling my friends about my version of the test. I should have just shut my damn mouth and told them that I didn't want to talk about it.

"I have heard about your last comment. A back-up sim." No, damn it. He heard me. "Very rarely used. In fact, I've only seen it happen twice," he said.

There was a smile on his face but he wasn't happy. He hated me. He hated that I wasn't going to stop lying to him. "I don't know what you want me to say, Eric. I didn't do anything," I told him softly.

That was the first truth that I had told him. I hadn't done anything wrong here. It wasn't my fault that I was Divergent. I hadn't wanted it. I hadn't asked for it. It had just happened. "I think you did," he growled.

"What's going on?" I asked.

My voice was shaking as I tried to keep my lie up. Not that it was working on anyone. We both knew that I was caught in my lie but I didn't want to say anything about it. He did not like that I hadn't dropped the lie yet. He shoved me back into the wall once more and I cried out softly. I had forgotten how much he could hurt me.

"Don't act like an idiot. Tell me the truth. For once in your life, tell me the entire truth," Eric snarled. He couldn't know. "You took your fear sim and that's what happened. You didn't take either the knife or the meat. You questioned it. And the computer took away your choices. When the dog came you realized that it would be friendly. You used reason, intelligence. When the little girl came out you showed selflessness to protect her. Bravery too." He was right. He had already gotten three of them. "I assume that the computer then put you in a back-up sim. What did you get on the Aptitude Test?"

He was right about everything. There wasn't one thing that he was wrong about it. I couldn't believe what was happening. I couldn't tell him. He couldn't know. I knew the truth. He wasn't going to be the hero and save me from danger. He was going to kill me. He hated me, just as I had feared.

"Eric, I can't. I can't... Amity. I got Amity," I lied again. He had to believe me. There had to be some way to trick him into the lie. "I lied to my parents because I couldn't stand for them to know that I got Amity on the test and still defected. I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I lied to you and everyone else. I should have told the truth from the beginning."

None of them could know the truth. Not even Eric. He couldn't know that I was Divergent. He couldn't know that I was the kind of person that he was hunting down. "Yeah. You should have. You should tell the truth. And you should be telling me the truth right now," he snarled.

"I am."

"Stop lying to me!" he shouted.
His shout was so loud that I was sure that the mirror in the bathroom shattered. My body was shaking as he grabbed the glass off of the counter next to us and tossed it against the wall. It shattered at the impact and I glanced down at the floor, the first of my tears finally falling. My head came up slightly and I prayed that Eric’s face would have softened when he saw my tears. But he wasn’t looking at me with anything other than pure, seething, hatred.

"Please. Eric, please. I -" I tried again.

"Shut up," he cut me off.

Until I told him the truth I was sure that he didn't want to hear me say anything else. We would be here all night until I told Eric what he wanted to hear. He knew the truth now. He just wanted to hear me say it. He would hold me down or chain me to the bed until I told him the truth. This time neither one of us would like it.

"Tell me the truth. For once in your damn life tell me the truth. I've never lied to you," he said.

"That's a lie. You have lied to me," I said.

He shook his head at me. "No matter what you think, I've never lied to you," he said.

His voice had softened slightly. He sounded almost kind, almost like he was as heartbroken as I was. The snarl in his voice had gone down and I knew that for one moment the anger had faded from him. But it came back quickly. And it came back not just in him, but in me too.

"Damn you, you've lied to me plenty of times!" I shouted. The shock went through Eric's eyes for a moment but it faded quickly, anger replacing it. I was furious. Not just with him. With everything. I was angry that I had to hide myself. "How many times have you told me that I meant nothing to you? How many times have you called me weak? Those are both lies. You know that I'm strong. I do mean something to you. I know that I do."

There was something a little soft in his eyes. He looked almost pained by the way that he was looking at me. Tears were flowing and I tried to wipe them from my eyes. This whole conversation hurt me more than anything else ever had. Every time that I wiped away the old tears the new ones would form.

"If I mean anything to you, you'll drop this conversation. Right now," I told him.

He clearly hadn't been expecting that one. He leaned into me and I tried to back into the wall as far as I could. "That's exactly the reason that I'm not dropping this," he said.

Despite the tears that were flowing I was able to keep my sobs silent. I was already basically screaming to him the truth. But he still wanted to hear me say it. We both knew that saying it would finally make the whole thing a reality. And Eric had to know that it was the truth. I had no clue what to say to him.

"Tell me the truth. What did you score on your Aptitude Test?" he repeated.

It seemed that he wasn't going to let this go until I told him the truth. Not that I hadn't seen that one coming. There was no chance that he was going to let this go. I just wished that I could go back to dinner and never answer my friend's questions. It was my own damn fault that Eric not knew the truth.

"Amity," I answered softly.
My eyes were diverted to the ground but one shake from Eric and I glanced back up at him. His eyes were strong and beady. They were harder than I had ever seen them. I had always seen some emotion flit through his eyes when he looked at me. Except for right now. They were stone cold.

"One last time. What did you score on your Aptitude Test?" he asked.

"Amity," I said weakly.

It was so soft that I thought that he might not have even heard me. But he had. And he made it loud and clear. Without giving me a moment to compose myself he reeled his hand back and sent it flying forward. His hand came hard across my face and my head was thrown back, my temple smacking against the side of the wall. I cried out softly, mostly in shock.

Eric had only ever hit me once before this. And I knew that this time was about twenty times harder. The last time had only been a little slap. This time he had hit me with full force. It hurt like hell. I leaned back away from him and let my tears fall steadily. Screw him calling me a coward, I couldn't believe that he had hit me. But actually I could. I had seen it coming. He had hit me before. He had beaten the hell out of me. He had thrown me over the Chasm. None of those had been in malice.

This was the first time that he had done it and meant it. "Don't you dare think that I wanted to do that," he mumbled.

Some emotion had come back into his voice as his hands came up to trace the sides of my face. I flinched slightly at the sudden pain that went through my cheek from the hard hit and I noticed his hands shy away from me slightly. Was he sorry that he had hit me? No. He couldn't have been. I had the hit coming.

"Divergent," he growled. Just hearing him say the word hurt. "For a long time I didn't know what they were. I didn't know who they were. Jeanine always made them out to be monsters. Maybe they are. I don't know since you won't tell me truth. Do I know anything about you? Is anything that you told me the truth?"

Another burst of anger shot through me as I shoved him back from me. He hadn't been expecting it as he took half a step backwards. I had told him the truth. Almost everything had been the truth. The only thing that I had lied about was this. It was the only lie that I had ever told him.

"Yes!" I yelled. "Everything that I told you was the truth."

He didn't budge as he took another step towards me. He was staring at me like he had never seen me before. Even though I wanted to curl in on myself and either cry or die, I knew that I had to be strong about this. It was time to face my demons. It had finally come out in the open and we would have to talk about it.

"So what happens now? You kill me? You bring me to her? I know that she wants to kill all of them. So you make your choice. I won't blame you," I told him.

Another tear fell and I shied away once more as Eric came to wipe the tear away. It sent a wave of pain through my cheek. That hit would definitely leave a bruise in the morning. "You think that after everything, everything that I've ever told you, I would just hand you over to her like that? Take care of you myself?" he asked.

It felt like all of the ice in my veins had melted. "What?" I asked softly.

Honestly I couldn't understand what was happening right now. Was he telling me that he wasn't going to kill me? That he cared for me enough to keep me alive? I wasn't sure. So I shook my head. I
wasn't sure what the truth was. I knew that I didn't want him to kill me but I wouldn't blame him if he did."

Why did you never tell me?" he asked.

He was Jeanine's right hand man. He was hunting people just like me. "Look at who you are, Eric!" I yelled.

His eyes hardened but I saw the storm of emotion flitting behind his eyes. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"You work for her. She wants all of them dead. She wants me dead," I told him, essentially admitting to him what I was. "Why the hell are you working for her?" He stayed silent. It killed me. I wanted to know why he worked for her. Especially since he hated her. "If you aren't going to turn me in then what's the point? Do you genuinely believe that there's something bad about me? Look at me. Have you ever been afraid of me? Have you ever thought that I was that different?"

"Of course not," he said.

He was never afraid of me. He never would be afraid of me. I was nothing compared to him. "I know," I muttered.

"The only thing that scares me right now is how you've managed to keep this a secret," Eric said, making me sigh.

It wasn't a secret. But not for everyone. Jeanine knew. So did Max, Tori, and Four. And now Eric. But that didn't matter. People weren't supposed to know. No one was supposed to know. Eric couldn't know. There was one last secret that I had to keep with him. For two weeks I had to keep this secret.

"If you took the Aptitude Test you know that someone else knows what you are. And Four. He monitors the sims. People like you can tell that it's not real. I didn't catch you when I was monitoring the sims. Someone's taught you to keep it a secret," he said.

"Yes," I muttered, even though he knew the truth.

"More than one person," he added.

It was an afterthought but that didn't make it untrue. He was right. There was more than one person involved in this. But I had to keep Four out of this. Maybe there was a chance that Eric would protect me. But there was no chance that he would protect Four. He would look for a way to get him killed.

"Four has nothing to do with this. Someone else taught me," I said softly.

Not that I would know a name to give if Eric wanted one. I supposed that I could have thrown Damien under the bus. He was already out at the Fence. There was nothing more that could be done to him at this point. But Eric probably wouldn't actually believe that it was the truth.

"Keeping him safe?" Eric asked.

"No," I said, shaking my head quickly.

He couldn't know that Four was helping me. I was not going to kill him. I was not going to get him killed because I was in hot water here. "I don't give a damn whether or not Four's keeping your
secret. If I wanted to sell him out it means that I have to say which one of you... is," he told me slowly.

"You can't even say it," I muttered.

It was like a bad word to him. He stared at me for a moment more before shaking his head. "Stay here," he instructed. I nodded again and watched as he backed away.

He headed straight back into the room that I had always assumed was his office and he walked in, swinging the door shut behind him. Almost immediately I let out a deep breath and fell back against the counter. I hadn't realized it but I had mostly been holding my breath. My heart was pounding as I waited for him. Was he going to call someone to take care of me because he couldn't do it himself?

My entire body shook with nerves as I took a seat in one of the chairs at the counter. He knew the truth. Eric actually knew the truth of what I was. The one person that I had tried the hardest to hide it from was now privy to my secret. And I was confused beyond belief. I didn't know what was going to happen. I couldn't tell whether or not he was going to hurt me. He wasn't an easy man to read. He never had been. That was part of why I had liked him in the first place.

I glanced over into the sparkling counter and saw the slightly blue mark beginning to form on my cheek. Damn him. I heard the door to the office open again and I glanced up to see that Eric was holding a strange looking object. It had an odd metal spike with three pegs coming off of it, and a blue hologram popping up in front of them. It looked like some type of torture device. I felt my heart lodge itself in my throat.

"Come here," he said.

I nodded and jumped off of the seat, walking over to him as he pointed at the machine. "What is that?" I asked.

"This is a scanner. It will tell me everything that I need to know," he said.

"Okay."

In all honesty I'd just wanted to say something to break the silence. I had already known what this was. It told the Divergent percentage. Buck had told us about it months ago. I watched as he placed the scanner over my face. It gave a small ding and I looked at the number. One hundred percent.

"No. Damn it!" Eric yelled.

It really wasn't a good thing. I'd already known that it wasn't a good thing. I jumped as he slammed his fist against the wall behind my head. Tears began to form in my eyes again and it only took a moment before they began to fall. I turned to see a slight dent in the wall behind me and I gave a soft shiver. His slap was nothing.

"Has Jeanine Matthews said anything to you? Has she spoken to you since Amity?" he asked.

"No," I lied.

Eric couldn't know the truth. He deserved that much. This was one lie that I needed to tell him. He didn't need to spend the next two weeks worrying just as much as I was. I knew that my face was steady enough that he would buy into the lie. The only thing that I wanted or needed him to believe was that he could keep me safe. He deserved to know that much.

"You haven't seen her?" Eric asked.
"I haven't seen her," I told him softly.

The relief flooded in his eyes. I wished that I was telling him the truth. "Good. You keep away from her, you understand me?" he half-asked and half-ordered.

"Okay," I said, nodding at him.

He deserved to not have to know the truth. He deserved some ounce of peace of mind. "She doesn't know about you. Not yet. During the fear landscape you say nothing to her. When Max offers you a job you deny leadership. Tell him that it's too much," he continued.

"Okay," I repeated.

He was going to protect me. He was always going to protect me. "They watch those on leadership too closely. They'll watch you like a hawk," he said almost bitterly.

Weakly I nodded at him again. What he didn't know was that he was already too late. They were watching me like a hawk. And the moment that he found out the truth, that Jeanine already knew what I was, he was going to explode. I was sure that he was already only seconds from exploding. Eric leaned into me slowly and I winced as he brushed over my cheek once more. He wiped a tear from my eye and came to let his hand fall on my shoulder.

"Why don't you turn me in?" I asked before I could stop myself.

"What?" Eric asked blankly.

"It's your job to kill anyone Divergent and hand them to Jeanine Matthews. So why don't you do something?" I asked.

He shifted slightly and grabbed my hand, walking me over to the edge of the couch. His arms were slightly tighter around me than they needed to be. It almost made me feel a little bit better. It helped just to know that he was going to be there for me. I took a seat next to him and turned to lean into him slightly.

"Do you remember that fear sim that you just had?" Eric asked.

"Yes," I said, knowing that he meant the one where he had attacked me.

"Everything that you said to me? I told you things that no one else knows. You know more than my best friend. You know everything. And I will protect you," he said.

His voice was strong and confident. It was even stronger than I had ever heard him before. He was so sure that he could protect me from everything. But he was too late. He leaned in to kiss me and as our lips met I felt a tear fall, tracing in between our cheeks. He leaned away from me and I nodded at him.

"Really?" I asked weakly.

"Of course. She'll never lay a hand on you. Not while I'm around," he said determinedly.

It hurt me more than he could ever know. I wished that I could tell him the entire truth about myself but I had to hide this. I reached up slowly and wound my hands around the back of his neck. My cheek was throbbing painfully as he traced the outline of it, probably feeling a little bad for hitting me. He kissed me again and wiped a few tears away from my eyes. I was sure that this was the softest that I had ever seen him.
"Amity," I said quickly, in between kisses.

He broke away from me and glanced down at me. "What?" he asked.


He stared at me for a moment and I waited to see what his reaction was. It took him a moment longer than I had been expecting and I waited for him to say something. I was shaking slightly as I waited for his answer. The corners of his lips turned upwards, making me smile awkwardly.

"I see why you didn't get Candor," he said. I laughed under my breath and shook my head. This was my Eric. He kissed me again before leaning away from me. "You should have told me. This is a secret bigger than you. There are so many more than you. You're all in danger."

But I knew that it was only me that he cared about. Not Four. Not any of the rest of them. I was the only one that he cared for. And as much as that warmed my heart, I knew that it wasn't enough. I needed someone that cared about us all. I was the only one that had the chance to convince Eric to turn around and do that right thing.

"Eric, you can change this," I told him.

He leaned away from me and arched his pierced brow. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"You can never go back to her. You can tell everyone what's happening. You can change whatever it is that she's doing. Eric, you are a good man. I believe that. This is your chance to show me. Show me what a good man you can be," I told him.

He stared at me and I grabbed his hands, bringing them into my lap. He shook his head and I felt my heart shatter slightly. He could have done something. I knew that he could. He was not my white knight, but he had the potential to be a good man. I would believe that until the day that I died.

"You overestimate me. I'm not as good as you think that I am. I promise you that," he said and I shook my head.

"That's not the truth. You're a good man. I'll always believe that," I said.

"It's nice but not the truth. I promise you that I will protect you. I won't hurt you. I won't let her hurt you," he said.

I nodded and let a few tears slip out of my eyes. He didn't understand that my lies still hadn't stopped. He didn't know that I was going to die. Maybe not at his hands, but I was going to die. He didn't understand that something was still happening with Jeanine and I. He never would.

"Don't cry. I don't deal with crying girls well," he said.

I laughed softly under my breath and shook my head as he wiped the tears away from my eyes. He kissed me again and leaned me back against the couch as I settled in between his legs. He cared. He cared more than I had ever thought that he did. He cared enough to not kill me. He cared enough to try and save my life. It was more than I had thought that he was going to do for me. And that was enough for me.

"Thank you," I said softly, breaking the kiss.

His pierced brow raised at my words and I knew that he didn't understand what I meant. He leaned into me and wrapped an arm around my shoulder. I leaned into him, trying to savor every last
moment of the two weeks that I had with him. His lips gently brushed across my temple and I smiled at him.

"For what?" Eric asked.

Once more I shook my head and smiled at him again. I grabbed his hands and drug my nails over the palm of his hands. I wanted him. More than I ever had. Maybe it was the knowledge that he had saved me for another two weeks. Or maybe it was just because I was always attracted to him. Maybe it was because, just for this moment, he was my white knight.

"Everything. For being the man that I know you are. For not telling the truth about what I am," I said.

"I'll always keep your secret."

"And I'm sorry for lying to you," I told him.

I'm sorry for continuing to lie to you. He grinned and pulled me to my feet. I laughed softly and let him walk me back to the bed. We fell back as our knees hit the edge of the bed and I laughed as we fell together. I leaned over Eric and kissed him deeply. He pulled away from me and tugged on my hair, brushing it back behind my ears. Although he did keep a tight hold on it. That was the way that he had always liked it.

"Don't thank me. Don't ever thank me," he said.

My head tilted to the side. "Why not?" I asked. I had so much to thank him for.

"Alex, I'm not as good as you think I am," he said.

"You are."

"I'm not. But I'm working on it. I've heard your friends tell you that I'm not worthy enough for you. I am," he said.

Grabbing his hand again, I nodded at him. "You are. I know that you are," I whispered.

I couldn't help it. I smiled softly. He never spoke like this. He was worthy of me. "I'll prove that to you. This one thing, this is how it starts," he said.

"I think you're better than you think you are," I told him.

"I'm not."

"You are. Stop arguing with me."

For once he actually nodded at me as I leaned in to kiss him. It was nice to see that for once he was just going to listen to me and let me boss him around. We tangled together as Eric pushed me back into the bed, probably savoring me. It made it easier that he knew the truth now but it still hurt in two weeks Eric was going to know that I had still lied to him. He would know that I was lying to him right now. I would always lie to him. Because that was just the type of person that I was.

He was a better person than me. No matter what he thought, he would always be the better person. I leaned into him and pulled the shirt free from his shoulders. He watched as I smiled, trying to ignore the sense of impending doom that had sunken into my chest. I hated having to lie to him. I hated knowing that in two weeks I was still going to be stuck with Jeanine. But at least I now knew one
thing for sure. Eric was not going to be the one to kill me.

I grabbed Eric's hand and pulled him up from off of the bed. He stared at me with a raised eyebrow as I pulled him over to the couch. He looked a little confused as I shoved him back onto it and climbed onto his lap. He was laughing softly as I straddled him and attached my lips to his. He smirked into the kiss as my hands dropped down and fiddled with the buttons on his pants. He was clearly enjoying that for once I was the one that wanted to take control. There wasn't much more time that we had left so I wanted to make the most out of it.

"What are you doing?" Eric growled.

"Shut up or I stop."

That was enough to silence him as I grinned against his lips. I wanted to enjoy the time that I had left with him. The button on his pants popped open and I shoved them over his hips. He rose up from the couch for a moment and I laughed as he took my entire weight with him. He was always stronger than I wanted to credit him for. They went down over his legs and I felt him kick them off, shoving them into the corner of the room.

I laughed softly as his hands went around my upper back and dug into my shoulder blades. His hands slithered down over my back and I shivered as he grabbed the bottom of my shirt to pull it over my head. I detached my mouth from his long enough to let it slip over my head and watch as he tossed it into the corner of the room.

Honestly I was sure that I was never going to be getting that shirt back but I wasn't so sure that I could bring myself to care. His room was hiding plenty of clothes discarded in late night hastes. I leaned in to Eric once more and pressed our bodies together. My hands wound around his shoulders and I dug into his hair. It was soft in between my fingers. It was always softer than I thought that it would be.

His hands wound themselves into my hair and I moaned as they caught against the roots of my hair and tugged. It sent a cold chill up my spine and I smiled into the kiss. He grabbed my head and tilted it back as his mouth ran down from my mouth to my chin down my neck and landed at my shoulder. It only took him a moment to pull the strap off of my shoulder and I smiled as it landed on my upper bicep. He pulled the cup of the bra over my chest and I laughed as it slipped down my front. He leaned down and I felt him rub against my core. I shivered slightly and tried to rub myself against him again. I really wanted the friction. But of course he wasn't going to give it to me. Not yet. Not until he was good and ready. He was that type of man.

His mouth attached itself to my chest and I sighed as his tongue swirled over my nipple. A sharp roll of my hips came with the sudden intrusion of his mouth around my nipple and he groaned as I rubbed myself against him. For a brief moment he pulled himself off of me and lifted me up, making me cry out softly. For some reason I had thought that he might throw me to the floor. Instead he ripped off my underwear and pants in one quick swoop.

He dropped me back on top of him and I laughed, feeling suddenly a little ashamed. Eric was not one for subtlety and he was not one for shame. He was going to do whatever he wanted to me without asking if it was alright. And that was perfectly fine with me. Eric grabbed my legs and wrenched them apart so that I was sitting over his lap again. My head fell back slightly and it made me jump as he gave no warning before shoving a finger into me.

That made me throw my head back as his tongue lapped over my nipple and his teeth clenched around it. I cried out softly as his finger curled inside of me and I reached up to wrap my fingers in
his hair. I grabbed on tightly but it didn't seem to bother him in the slightest. He merely slipped another finger inside of me, stretching my walls slightly.

My voice went slightly hoarse as the thrusts of his fingers were so hard that they shoved my entire body upwards with them. I was quaking under him slightly and he knew it as he gave one last sharp tug on my nipple before backing away from me again and attacking my mouth. That was all that I wanted. I laughed softly as my hands wrapped around the back of his neck and my legs began to shake with anticipation.

His thumb was rubbing circles on my clit and his fingers were going in between pumping and curling inside of me. I began to bob with his thrusts so that I could meet them and I shivered under his touch. I wanted all of him in me but I knew that he wasn't going to give it to me until he was ready. In the meantime I was so close. I was right there. But I wasn't sure whether or not he was going to actually let me come undone. Probably not.

He didn't tend to like me get all the way there without him in me. Just as the stars started to flood into my vision he pulled himself away. I knew it. I should have figured that he wasn't going to let me get off. He always thought that it was funny to make me wait. He pulled away and I moaned at the sudden loss of him.

"Shut up. You'll get it."

Eric was smirking at me and I shook my head as I shifted off of his lap for a moment to rip the underwear off of him. He kicked them off quickly before shoving them into the far corner of the apartment. I laughed as he sprang free of the confines of his underwear. It was almost like a cartoon. My hand wrapped around his length and I gave a few pumps before leaning down and licking over his entire length. My back was curved and his hands were tight over my ribs as I ran my tongue over his head.

His entire body shivered and his legs gave a small quake. His grip on me tightened and I knew that it was going to leave bruises in the morning. But it was all well worth it. I liked feeling like even for a brief moment I could be in control of him. My tongue swirled over his head and I glanced up, meeting his eyes for a moment as I closed my mouth over his head. His eyes rolled back into his head for a moment and I smirked. Making eye contact always turned them on.

For a little while I went to his base and licked my way all the way up to his tip, moving my tongue from side to side. Judging by Eric's grunts I assumed that he really liked it. I pushed him as far into my mouth as I could go and began swirling my tongue around him. I could feel him jerking underneath me slightly, his grunts becoming more strained. For a while I rolled my mouth up and down his impressive length, taking nearly all of him into my mouth. He was slightly too large but I was close.

With the length that I was missing I grabbed him with my hand and began to pump softly. I began quickly moving up and down his length before drastically slowing down, allowing him to revel in the slow pace. His groan became almost pathetic and I smirked. As I continued to run up and down his length I took my hands and gently scratched my nails over his hips. He bucked slightly at the feeling.

It wasn't long before he got sick of me being in control. He hated being out of control. He knew as well as I did that he was always in control. Today it didn't bother me. He lifted me up and I sat back on my heels, leaning down onto him. His head hit my entrance and I groaned as my walls stretched as I sank down on top of him. He slipped into me and I gave a soft hiss as I sank the entire way onto him. He gave a groan as well as he let me tighten my thighs around him.
His mouth came down on mine and I smiled into the kiss as I began to slowly bob up and down on him. For a moment we moved together but I quickly realized that I wanted something more. I wanted to do something different. I grabbed Eric and pulled him off of me. He watched as I pulled him to jump over the back of the couch. He watched me with a smirk as I sat on the top of the couch and spread my legs. Eric smirked as he walked over to me and pushed my legs apart.

He shoved himself into me and I threw my head back, leaning back far enough to have him enter me as deeply as he could without making me fall back onto the couch. The two of us rocked together as he pushed himself roughly into me. I groaned and spread my legs a little bit more, positioning my feet on the top of the couch. Eric kept the two of us together as he continued to rock into me, muttering profanities into my ear as I grabbed my hair and pulled me towards him.

The two of us rocked together for a while before he gave me a rough shove. I laughed as he fell out of me and I fell back onto the couch. Eric jumped over the back of the couch before placing himself in between my legs and laying back. Our legs crossed over each others as we laid on opposite ends of the couch and lifted up our hips to meet each others. I grunted as our hips ground together and we continued to meet our thrusts.

Eric's hands were wrapped around my ass to repetitively pull me into him and I knew that it was so that he could control the pace. He was actually going relatively slow and I moaned as the pleasure began to build in my stomach. All I wanted him to do was pound into me. But he had already done that and now he was relying on teasing and torturing me. I wanted him more than anything. I always wanted him. I would want him for the rest of my life. But tonight was the last night. And I was going to enjoy it.

Not waiting for him anymore I began to pick up the pace to make it slightly more frantic as I began to lift my hips up to meet his thrusts frantically. His hands were bruising against my ass. He chuckled under his breath and his pants became shorter as we rocked together. To my surprise Eric grabbed me around the hips and lifted me up, pulling me straight into his lap. I laughed softly as we met chest-to-chest and Eric began bouncing me upwards, entering me even deeper than before.

My chest was bouncing in his face and Eric was quick to press a hot kiss against my mouth. Our tongues traced together as Eric's hands wrapped into my hair, tangling the strands around his fingers and pushing the slightly sweaty ends off of my forehead. I was pretty sure that he was going to let me continue rocking my hips against him, grinding my clit against his pelvic bone, only adding to my pleasure, but he took over before I got the chance.

He grabbed me tightly underneath my ass and I cried out loudly, wrapping my thighs tightly against him as he began to pump into me at a pace that only Eric could. He was the only man that I knew that could go quite as fast as he could, and I reveled in it as the pace went from somewhere between painful and a bliss that I'd never felt before. I let my head fall back and I yelled out. There was the familiar bundle in my stomach and I felt like it was about to explode. And I was right. It did.

Just at the same time that he came undone, I did as well. We both fell together as the stars exploded behind my eyes. I could barely see anything as Eric gave a few last desperate pumps into me and I felt the familiar sticky substance slide down my thighs. I shivered and leaned into him. My head fell against his as we both took a few desperate breaths, almost like we had been forgetting to breathe. I groaned as he grabbed me and lifted me up without pulling out of me. To my surprise, instead of bringing us over to the bed, he merely leaned us over to the side and laid us on the couch.

A small smile fell over my face. Eric had never done this before. His couch wasn't that big so we were almost forced to cuddle. He still hadn't pulled out of me when he pressed his front against my back, wrapping an arm over my hips and tossing a blanket that had been laid over the back of the
couch over me. I smiled when I realized that it was the same blanket that he normally let me use. I tucked it underneath my chin and placed my foot over his.

Eric placed a pillow underneath his head and allowed me to use his bicep as a pillow. As our breathing went back to normal Eric finally pulled out of me. I shook slightly at the loss of him and I smiled, turning back around and leaning into him for a kiss. He grabbed the back of my head and kept my mouth against his for a moment, the two of our tongues tangling together. It was a few minutes before we separated and laid back together.

It was probably the most romantic night that we had ever had together. Although it was a little annoying that even Eric's couch was more comfortable than the beds that were in the dorms. As we laid on the couch I smiled at the heat that was radiating off of him. Eric wrapped an arm a little tighter around me and I smiled. His hand pressed roughly on my hip and we both smiled. I leaned in to give him one last kiss before we both settled down. My hair was over my shoulder and I grinned as he kissed me on the back of the neck, making me laugh softly.

"So... Have you ever let another woman sleep on your couch?" I asked teasingly.

"No. Only you."

"Aren't I special?"

Eric's lips traced over the back of my neck again, making me shiver. I could tell that he was smiling. "You are," he said lowly.

A small blush fell over my face. "Goodnight Eric," I said softly.

He didn't say anything back but he did nip the bare skin of my shoulder, making me shiver slightly. My leg fell back over his and he grabbed me tightly against him like it was the last night that he would ever spend with me. Maybe this was the last night that we were going to be together. But it was a perfect one.
Chapter Twenty-Two

Two weeks had gone by faster than I had thought was possible. It felt like they had flown by. It felt like it had only been a day or two, not fourteen. It was like my clock was running down and the universe was laughing at me. Like it wanted to see my life come to a screeching halt. And it was about to.

Lauren's fear landscape was nothing more than a little blip in my day. Everyone seemed to hate it and think that it ate up too much of their precious time, which it kind of did. They had no idea how precious time really was. They had no idea that the hour and a half I'd spent practicing Lauren's fear landscape over the past two weeks might have been some of the last few hours that I'd spend on my own free will, and I didn't intend to tell them that.

But I was trying my hardest not to dwell on the ending of this story. I was trying to focus on just how well I had done during initiation. I was trying to think about how I had proven everyone wrong. The Amity transfer that people thought would die in the first week was going to come in first place at the end of initiation.

The shortest time that I had gotten attempting Lauren's fear landscape was seven minutes. The next shortest time from someone other than my friends was eleven minutes, from Dante. He had always been pretty good with the mental part of training. My friends had all shifted in the rankings slightly but I was still at the top of the board. Tonight was the last night of the fear landscape practice runs. I hadn't gone today. I'd spent the entire day in the training room. Tomorrow was the final fear landscape. It would be the only time that I would ever see my own fear landscape.

Tomorrow was a big day for more than that. There were plenty of other things that I had to take care of. Tomorrow might be the day that my life was going to end. Tomorrow was the day that I was going to have to face off against Jeanine Matthews. It was the day that I was sure was never really going to come. But it was almost here and I was almost out of time. And, as much as I didn't want to admit it, I was afraid. I had been trying to deny it for months but I was afraid. Now I was finally able to admit it.

Unfortunately there was nothing that I could do. There was no way to get out of all of this. All that was left to do was to play along with Four. That was the only thing that I could do. The only thing that I could do was hope that my plan was going to work. It was by no means a good one but it was more than we had come up with in weeks. I could just hope that Four would stay by my side when I finally came clean to him about my awful plan.

The plan had taken me the entirety of the past two weeks but it wasn't much for the time that I'd had to figure things out. At least it was more of a plan then Four had, which was close to nothing. I hadn't heard anything from Max or Jeanine. I supposed that it was a good thing. I was nervous enough as the days counted down. Anything from Max or Jeanine would make me sure to take my hand off while practicing with the knives.

Other than a few strange looks I had barely noticed Max since he had brought me into his office for a meeting. I was wondering if they thought that I was too afraid and wouldn't show up at Erudite tonight. Or maybe they thought that it was because I was afraid that something would happen if I didn't come. They would be right. I wasn't willing to risk seeing what would happen if I didn't show up. I would hate for something to happen to my family's life or anyone else's.

Once more my mind went drifting back to Eric and everything that was going to happen between us. Things were good for right now but I wasn't sure what was going to happen once he learned that I
was still lying to him. I didn't want him to hate me once he found out that I was the one that Jeanine wanted to talk or show something. Either way Eric had been good to me for the past few weeks. He had been good about keeping my secret and not hanging it over my head.

It had only come up in conversation a few times and each time it was usually a joke pointed at me. He had clearly come to the conclusion that my being Divergent was only dangerous for one person. Myself. It made my heart swell that he only wanted to protect me. But I wished that he didn't have to. It shouldn't be his job. It didn't really matter. I knew that if I survived tomorrow I wasn't ever going to be with Eric. Jeanine would never let me.

I'd spent most of my nights with Eric lately and it didn't seem that it had bothered him one bit. He probably thought that it was because I liked his bed more than my own, which was true, but it was mostly because the end of our relationship had been pushed back another two weeks. But the end was still in sight.

It turned out that I had only spent about three nights a week at the dorms with my friends. They had simply been teasing me that I was enjoying spending time with 'my man.' Heather was still the only one that knew about Eric. I would eventually tell my friends that Eric and I had been a thing. Hell, I'd love to see the reaction I'd get from that. But that day was still a ways away.

Completely different from my personal relationships there was also the rankings. They had shifted slightly over the past two weeks while everyone was practicing the fear landscapes and going back to physical training on their off days. Some of the changes were for the better and others made me want to tear my hair out. I was still in the number one spot and Aaron was still trailing me. Dante was behind him, having pushed Jackson back into the fourth spot.

Draven, Michael, Greg, Jax, Buck, and Heather were rounding out the top ten. I was glad to see that Heather was still safe from Fence duty. Jet, Cole, Lisa, Darren, Serena, Sara, Jason, and Jade were following them. Colt was behind Jade, unfortunately safe from being thrown out of Dauntless. As long as he didn't screw up his fear landscape he would be staying, but in a low ranking. He would at least be on Fence duty most of the time. Aria and Hunter were set to be leaving Dauntless tomorrow afternoon.

At least one person I hated would be leaving. Even with two people leaving tomorrow, and so close to the end, the party was in full swing. Everyone was celebrating the end to Dauntless initiation. Even though there was still one day left people were thrilled that after a long eight months training they would be ready to end. Everyone was taking the opportunity to celebrate. Even those that never partied were down in the Pit. Like Four.

After all, these eight months had seemed like they were never going to end. But it was here now and there was only one more thing that I needed to do before the final fear landscape. Tonight I would be going to Candor with Four. I knew the one thing that I needed to grab. Maybe it was the one thing in my plan that was a good idea. Or maybe it would end up fucking me over. Either way, we were leaving in a few minutes.

Despite the fact that it had been a good day so far I knew that it was time to get to work. There was only so long that I could enjoy myself. That came with the territory of being a Divergent. We never seemed to be able to enjoy ourselves. I leaned over to talk to Heather, who was dancing at my side. We had been dancing for most of the night and my thighs were killing me. It was mostly us trying to enjoy our last moments as initiates. At least, that was what Heather was doing. I was enjoying what very well might be my last night of freedom and the last few moments that I had with my friends.

"Hey, I'm heading out for the night," I mumbled to Heather.
She turned to me and said, "I figured you'd be leaving soon."

"I'll see you in the morning. Tell everyone else that I said goodnight."

They had all scattered long ago. Some had gone with girls that they were hoping to get lucky with, others were hanging with the Dauntless born, some were in the fighting pits, and the rest were all hanging around the bar. It was the first night that I'd really seen them cut completely loose.

"I will," she said.

"Thanks."

I smiled at her and walked over to the edge of the Pit. She was on my heels as we marched over to the edge of the dance floor. I could see Four making his way slowly out of the Wolf's Den too. It was a good thing that Eric seemed to be in the middle of a meeting. He was speaking with the other leaders frantically which meant that he wasn't paying a lick of attention to me. As Heather and I made it to the edge of the Pit I saw that Four was standing a few meters away from me.

"Tell Eric I said hello," Heather teased.

I laughed and gave her a soft shove. She still got a kick out of making fun of me with Eric. "I'm sure that he says hello back," I said, winking at her.

Heather laughed and I shook my head. We both knew that Eric couldn't have cared less about her or any of the other initiates. He really couldn't care much about any of us. With me being the exception. I wrapped Heather into a quick hug before pulling away. I turned to leave and walked out of the Pit quickly, ensuring that Eric didn't see me slipping away. That would be a tough one to explain. I rounded the corner and smiled when I saw Four waiting for me. He was fast.

"Ready?" Four asked.

"Ready. To Candor we go," I said.

Four nodded and we walked together as we headed through the sub-levels of Dauntless. We were keeping a tiny bit of distance between us as we headed for the back entrance of Dauntless. The last thing that we needed was people thinking that there was something going on between the two of us. Like I didn't have enough problems. We walked out to the back of Dauntless and headed straight for the train tracks. I knew the schedule by heart; we had to wait a few moments for the train to come.

We stood together and I noticed that we were both shifting slightly as we waited for the train. It rounded the corner after a few minutes. Four and I began to sprint to catch it. I let Four catch the train first and he hung off of the edge of the car, holding a hand out to me. I grabbed it and let him pull me into the car. It was nicer than Eric, who had tripped me the last time that I was jumping into the train. He walked in after me and we both headed over to take a seat against the other wall.

My hands were shaking slightly and I wasn't quite sure why. I took in a few deep breaths, trying to shake out the nerves in my arms. My hands were shaking as I folded them over my thighs. If this was how I was acting on the way to Candor I wasn't ready to see how I was going to act on the way to Erudite tomorrow.

"Alex?" Four called.

"Yeah?"

He was staring sidelong at me. There was something almost weak in his eyes. I assumed that he had
never felt the need to protect someone the way that he protected me before. His eyes were filled with worry but his face was stone cold. It was easy to see that he was getting more and more concerned for me the closer that we got to tomorrow night.

"What is it that you want to do in Candor? You said that you had a plan. Are you finally going to tell me what that is?" he asked.

It had completely slipped my mind that I had never told Four why I wanted to go to Candor with him. In fact, I hadn't really told him much of anything. I was just thrilled that he was sticking with me, no matter what. Even if I told him that I wanted to jump off of a cliff he would be there. That was the type of person that he was.

"That compliance serum," I said.

It was easy to see the shocked look that fell over Four's face. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"You were saying that Candor is one of the few places that have it other than Erudite. I need a vial of it. Just one. I promise that I have a plan. It's not the best plan but it is something. I'll tell you what it is once I have the vial. I just need you to keep Jack Kang busy until I can get it," I explained.

My plan with the compliance serum was a terrible plan but it was better than the first few things that I had come up with. Although I was sure that Eric was going to kill me for it. I knew that he was going to be there and the moment that he realized what my plan was, I knew that he was going to lose his mind. Four probably would too.

"I can do that," Four said.

"Thanks."

"Just come wait outside the office once you have it. Make sure that no one sees you with it. They'll take it and bring you straight to Jeanine if they see you with it."

I was not planning on going to see Jeanine early. "Wouldn't that be a shame? Someone taking me to Jeanine a day early," I muttered to myself.

Four laughed and I smiled slightly, leaning into him. I was nervously braiding my hair as I pressed my back up against his chest and dropped my head back onto his shoulder. In the meantime Four was drawing the Dauntless fire symbol onto my upper back with his fingers. I figured that it was a nervous habit. I was afraid of what was going to happen tomorrow. And I knew that even though Four wasn't going to admit it, he was nervous too.

We both hated to admit it but we were afraid of Jeanine. She was the silent type of scary. In a fist fight I knew that we could both beat her. But she had the power and wits against us. It made for an extremely unfair fight. It wasn't that I was quite afraid to die but I was afraid that I was going to be powerless to stop a war that I had seen coming for months.

"Four?" I called.

He looked up from his lap to look over at me. "Yeah?"

"Thank you. For everything," I said softly.

His fingers stopped moving across my back as he let them fall over into my lap so that he could grab my hands. They were tight around my own and I dropped my head onto his shoulder. He would never make me feel the same way that Eric did, but I needed Four. I loved him. We were like family
now and I knew that we always would be.

"Don't thank me. Not yet," he said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"I haven't done anything for you yet."

He didn't understand that he had done everything for me. The moment that he kept my secret was him doing something for me. "Trust me when I say that you have," I said.

"I'm going to try my hardest to help you tomorrow, but I'm not sure how much I can do."

Four had already done more for me than he would ever realize. I shook my head at him. "It doesn't matter. Not to me. All that matters to me is that you're trying," I said.

He smiled at me. Four was a good man. "And I'll continue trying until I can't," Four said determinedly.

I wished that this wasn't happening. I wanted Four to be with a nice girl that would love him. I didn't want him to have to fight a war that we were destined to lose. "Even if I die tomorrow or get put on display for the public to goggle at, all that matters is that you're here with me. You're doing more for me than you ever had to. Thank you, Four. You're a good man. You deserve better than this," I said.

He merely shrugged his shoulders and I leaned forward to look at him. "Maybe. But this is what I want," he said.

His arm wrapped back around my shoulders once more and I leaned into him, folding my feet underneath me. "Thank you," I whispered.

"I want to stop this war. I want to help you. I want to do something good in this world. And if that means spending my last moments at your side, fighting Jeanine, I'll be happy to say that that's the way that I went down fighting," he said.

His face was deadly serious and I couldn't help but to smile slightly. If it was the last thing that I was going to do I was going to make sure that Four was not going to go down fighting. He deserved to make it out of this mess. I could go down, but the last thing that I wanted was for Four to come with me.

"Thank you, Four," I told him softly.

No matter what he thought about all of this - whether or not he deserved the thanks - I was going to thank him. He had no clue that he had really helped me more than anyone else had. In fact, he had even more than Eric had. Four snorted and I shook my head at him.

"I'm serious. Thank you. For everything. No matter what you think you have or haven't done, thank you," I said.

He nodded at me but I knew that he really didn't believe that he had done anything. He probably would never think that he had helped me. "You're welcome, Alex."

"I would have lost my mind without you."

His head perked up slightly at my words and he looked over at me. "Really?" he asked.

He looked more than a little shocked that I had told him that. "Of course," I said with a small smile.
"Just so you know, I feel like I'm losing my mind whenever I'm with you," he said.

We both laughed loudly as I shook my head at him. I gave him a soft shove and shook my head irritably when it did absolutely nothing. He was stronger than me. Like Eric, my physical assaults were pretty much useless. Four looked up out of the door to the train and stood from his seat.

"We're here. Come on," he said.

It was already dark out when Four gave me a hand up. I took it and walked with him towards the edge of the train doors. I could see the Merciless Mart passing us by and I couldn't help but to wonder whether or not Iris and Florian called it that too. I was pretty sure that Candor didn't call it what the rest of us did. I let Four jump out first and watched as he stuck the landing. It was like he had glue on the bottom of his boots. I followed and tucked into a roll when I felt my legs give out from the momentum. Four grabbed me as I came back up, keeping me from keeling forward.

We took no time before heading straight into the Candor building and walked into the main lobby. It was extremely boring and a little eerie too. The air was cool to the point that it made Dauntless seem like it was constantly heated. And Dauntless was freezing with the exception of the training room. I supposed that was why everyone in the main lobby was wearing long pants and jackets. They were all looking over at Four and I like we were the dirt on the bottom of their shoes.

They probably thought that we were. Although Candor was probably the most similar to Dauntless, they still didn't like us. They were colder and more calculating. My knee length pants and tight tank top which rode up slightly on my stomach suddenly made me feel extremely under-dressed as I glanced over at a woman in a sharp white suit. She clearly didn't like Four and I being here.

The lobby was horrifically tall, leaving the main area open all the way to the top of the skyscraper. It almost made me a little sick. There only other thing there was a reception desk. There were also two elevators that I assumed would take someone to the rest of the Faction. There weren't even people milling around. Other than Four, myself, and the receptionist, there were only another two or three people around. They all seemed to be in a hurry to go somewhere else. The strangest thing was that no one bothered to say anything to us. Even in Erudite someone had said something to us.

Of course I had been with Eric at the time and even though Four had a powerful air about him, Eric was much more imposing. Plus most people knew that Eric was a leader and they knew that he wasn't someone to trifle with. I would rather have Four angry with me than Eric.

"What do you need?" a woman called ed from behind us.

Four and I turned back to see a woman with a clipboard standing a few feet from us. It looked like she wanted nothing to do with us. She was wearing a tight white skirt and a slightly loose black button down shirt. If she would smile I was sure that she would have been extremely pretty. But she had her dark hair pulled back in a tight bun and was staring at us with a stern expression. The glasses that were raised high on her nose made her looked extremely irritated. It seemed to be a common trait in Candor.

While I stared awkwardly at the woman and glanced over to scrutinize her, thankfully Four spoke up. "My name is Four," he told her, holding out his hand for her to shake. She looked horrified at the prospect of touching him but she did give him a quick shake before retracting her hand. She looked more than relieved that I didn't put out my hand for her to shake. "I'm a trainer and surveillance manager in Dauntless. I have an appointment with Jack Kang right now."

"Yes. We have you on the schedule. You are?" she asked me.
My voice lodged itself in my throat. "This is one of my initiates. I've brought her here on orders from Max," Four said, thankfully thinking more than I was.

"For?" the woman asked.

I fought to steel my face, hoping that I wasn't going to give anything away. She had the capability to pick out our lies. "She needs to head downstairs," Four explained.

I assumed that that was where the compliance serum was stored. How Four knew that I was pretty sure that I didn't want to know. He had to have done something illegal to get that knowledge. The woman stared for a moment before turning back to Four. She still looked less than impressed with us.

"Right. Jack Kang is waiting for you. I take it you know where the office is?" she asked Four.

"I do," he said.

"Do you know where you're going?" the woman asked me.

I froze in my spot, half pleased that she hadn't picked out my lie and half afraid of what to say now. "Yes," I mumbled.

The woman nodded back at me before turning. "Head straight there and do not touch anything or speak with anyone. People are busy," she snapped, storming away.

That was the good thing about Candor. They were always so busy that sometimes they couldn't see the lies that were right in front of them. I watched as the woman stormed away, staring at her clipboard like it was the most fascinating thing in the world. My eyebrows were nearly up to my forehead. She had been everything and nothing like I was anticipating a Candor member to be like. I hoped that Iris and Florian hadn't become like that.

"She's pleasant," I mumbled.

Four laughed and nodded, leading me down the first hall to an elevator. "That's Candor for you," he said.

Jack Kang's office was on the top floor. Iris had mentioned it when she and Florian had been in Dauntless. "Alright, go. I need the distraction," I said, knowing that I needed the time to go and grab the serum.

Before I could walk through the hall Four reached out and caught my arm. "Alex," he called.

"What?"

"Do you know where you're going?" he asked.

"Yeah."

But that was a complete lie. I really had no idea where I was going but I did know that it was down in the sub-levels. I was sure that there weren't too many doors that I would have to look through. Hopefully it would be easy enough to find. I would just have to be careful not to get caught by anyone.

"I don't know where they keep the compliance serum but I think that it's in the sub-levels somewhere. Just go fast," he said.

"Got it."
"You have an hour at the most, okay?"


Hopefully I would be done within twenty-five minutes to be safe. The last thing I wanted was someone to catch either one of us and report us to Jeanine. "Alright, I'm going to be out of here in about an hour. Be ready to go. Meet me back here when you're done," he said.

"No problem," I said, giving him a gentle shove towards the elevator. I pressed the button for him to get him to leave. "Go. Now. I can figure this out."

The elevator gave a soft ding. The doors slid open and Four nodded at me before disappearing into it. The doors quickly closed and I watched for a moment, the numbers ticking upwards on the electric reader above the doors. Once it hit the fifth floor I turned and walked away, following the signs towards the staircase. I didn't want to use the elevator just in case someone saw me and asked what I was doing. It was pretty obvious that I was Dauntless and didn't belong here. Even if it took me longer, I was going to be sticking to the back hallways.

As I opened the door to the staircase I let out a breath when no alarm went off. I knew that a few of the staircases in Dauntless were armed with alarms. Thankfully Candor was not quite so mistrusting. As I descended over the steps and headed to the sub-levels, which seemed to be a few floors below the main lobby, I started to think back to just how I was going to be able to sneak out a vial of the serum. I was sure that it was going to be guarded. They would have to be morons if they didn't keep it guarded.

Or maybe the doors had some high security lock on them. Either way, it was not going to be easy to get into the room. I would have to find the room first. I had no clue what it looked like and no clue where it was. I could only hope that an hour was enough time to find it. The woman out in the lobby was going to kick my ass back over to Dauntless if she found me snooping in the serum room. If I could manage to find it.

The door that I came up on had a large S printed on the walls but I could tell that a few floors were still below us. I groaned softly. It was nearly impossible to figure out. I decided to go give it a chance as I walked over to the door and threw it open. I walked out into the hall and froze when I saw that there must have been at least thirty doors on this single hall. This was going to take me all night. But I had to find where these serums were. It was vital to my plan.

"Alex?" a soft voice called.

Slightly surprised from the call, I turned back on instinct to see a pair that was extremely familiar to me. I had nearly forgotten that there was a good chance that I might see them here. I guess I had thought that they would be in their rooms. I turned back to them and smiled softly.

"Alex!" Iris yelled again.

"Iris! Florian!" I chirped happily.

She and Florian ran up to greet me and I laughed softly as they wrapped me into their arms. "I'm so glad to see you! What are you doing here?" Iris asked.

It was almost like we were back in Amity. That was the way that we had all acted together when we were in Amity together and hadn't seen each other for a few days. The thing about Amity was that working in the fields would keep you busy for days at a time. Amity wasn't like Dauntless where you partied with your friends at night, despite how hard you had been working during the day.
“Sad to see me?” I teased.

“It’s not that we don’t love you. It’s good to see you again. But what are you doing in Candor?” Florian asked.

Iris shoved him gently and I smiled at the two of them. I was glad that after a few months together they still seemed to be doing well. “Business,” I said flippantly.

“We heard a rumor that two of you were here today,” Florian continued.

My eyes widened. How had that gotten around so fast? I supposed that news traveled around Candor faster than I had thought that it did. Or maybe we had already been here for longer than I had thought that we were. That meant that my hour was dwindling fast. I didn’t want to get Four in trouble too. If I got in trouble that was one thing, but I was trying to keep Four out of trouble for as long as possible. I didn’t want him to be put in danger. Jeanine could easily find out that he was one too.

“We’re that important?” I asked.

“It’s pretty rare to have two Dauntless members in Candor,” Iris explained.

“I’m here with my trainer. Four. He had to go to a meeting with Jack Kang and I needed to pick something up,” I said awkwardly.

“What do you need to pick up?” Iris asked.

I had to be careful. I didn’t want anyone to know that I was close to them too. “Listen, I can’t talk. I gotta go,” I said quickly.

Turning on my heel, I went to leave the narrow hallway and continue my hunt for the compliance serum. “Alex!” Iris called.

She jumped after me and ran to catch my arm and pull me back. “Iris, come on, I gotta go,” I said.

I could have easily pushed her off and continued to walk but Iris was my friend. I wasn’t going to hurt her. “Wait a second. You just got here. We haven’t seen you in months. Normally we’re only going to be able to see each other once a year. We can talk for a while. Catch up,” Iris said brightly.

My heart caved slightly at her words and I shook my head. I wished that I had more time with them. “I can’t. I gotta go,” I said.

“We’ll come with you wherever you’re going,” she offered.

There was no way that they could come with me. I had already gotten Four involved in my stupid plan, there was no way that I was dragging Iris and Florian into this too. At least Four could defend himself from someone else. As much as I loved my two oldest friends, they were weak. They could never defend themselves.

“I - I can’t hang out with you guys. I’m sorry,” I told them.

The wavering in my voice made the smiles drop off of both of their faces as they stared at me suspiciously. “What?” Florian asked.

“It’s serious, what I’m taking care of. I love you guys and I’m glad to see you again but I need to take care of this. I can’t drag you both into it,” I said, hoping that they wouldn’t want to drag this conversation out.
I turned to leave again and this time it was Florian that came after me. "Alex!" he yelled, grabbing onto my wrist similarly to the way that Iris had.

His grip was stronger than hers but I knew that I would still be able to get out of it. I let him hang on to me. "Florian. Please let go," I said softly.

"You can't say something like that and then just leave us. What's going on? Are you alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine," I said weakly.

They were Candor. They could see right through me and being my best friends only made it easier. "Come on, Alex, we're your best friends. We're family. Maybe we aren't together all of the time anymore but that doesn't mean that we don't love you. That's never going to mean that we don't love you. We're here for you. We always will be," Florian said.

It was like my heart was shattering into a million pieces. I shook my head at him and pried my arm away. His grip had loosened slightly and I sighed. It was nothing like the way that Eric or Four would grab me if they were trying to get me to stay and tell them something. They would have practically broken my wrists.

"I know. And I love you both for that. I really do. I'll always love the two of you for everything that you've done for me. But I can't drag you into this. It's too dangerous," I said.

Florian was staring at me with a scrutinizing glare and Iris looked extremely concerned. "What are you talking about?" Florian asked.

"It doesn't matter. I need to go. Tell no one that I was here. Alright? Don't let anyone know that you know me," I told them.

The last thing that anyone needed to know was that I was friends with Iris and Florian. It would only make things worse for them. I knew that Jeanine would hang them over my head the moment that she found out about them. She knew too much already.

"What did you do?" Iris asked.

I nearly laughed. She knew that I was always the one to get us in trouble back in Amity. "You always think that it's me," I teased.

I was not going to get them in trouble. They had started a new life away from me. "It usually is. Alex, you were always one to get yourself into trouble. But this is something more. This isn't just you being in trouble. This is something more. It sounds like you're talking about life or death. I don't like that. Not when it comes to you," Iris said.

She didn't understand it but she sounded a little bit like Eric at the moment. I grabbed Iris's hand and noticed that it was a little clammy. She was clearly nervous for me. I could only imagine what she would be like right now if she knew what I was planning to do tomorrow. She would be passed out on the ground.

"I love you. I love you both. I wish that we could talk more but I need to go," I told them.

"Absolutely not!" Iris shouted.

"Alex, get back here!" Florian added.
Before I could get too far I froze. There was something that I needed and it was important. "There actually is one more thing that I need from you both," I said as I turned back.

They both perked up and smiled at me, clearly happy that I wanted something from them. "What is it?" Florian asked.

"There is a serum control room here, isn't there?" I asked, hoping that they wouldn't question me too much.

Iris and Florian both turned to look at each other for a moment. It was like a weird couple thing that they were doing. Talking to each other without actually saying something. They both looked a little confused about what I had asked but I saw something else in the back of their eyes. Maybe it was suspicion. I wouldn't blame them. Not many people would have said something about the highly protected serum room.

"Yeah," Florian finally said. "There is one. Not many people are allowed back there. I mean, you need clearance to go back there."

My heart fell slightly. I couldn't get back there without the clearance and I couldn't tell anyone why I needed the vial. "You do?" I asked.

"Yes. I have a clearance card."

Or maybe not. I smiled brightly at Florian who was smiling back softly at me. I needed that clearance card right now. Florian had put my plan back in motion. I just needed that card. I knew that I would be able to easily take the card from him but the last thing that I wanted was to hurt him. He was my friend. I had changed enough the past few months. I had done things that I wasn't proud of. I didn't want to know that I was capable of hurting a friend too.

"I know this is going to sound strange but give me the card. I need it. I'll give it back when I'm done with it. I promise that I have a good reason for needing it," I told him softly.

He stared at me for a moment. I needed that card more than anything. I hoped that Florian would remember all of the times that I had done something for him back in Amity. There had been plenty of times that I had done something for Florian that had ended up getting me in trouble.

"I know this is going to sound strange but give me the card. I need it. I'll give it back when I'm done with it. I promise that I have a good reason for needing it," I told him softly.

He stared at me for a moment. I needed that card more than anything. I hoped that Florian would remember all of the times that I had done something for him back in Amity. There had been plenty of times that I had done something for Florian that had ended up getting me in trouble.

"I'm not giving it to you," Florian finally said.

A small scowl crossed my face. We were friends. I had gotten in trouble for him a million times. "What?" I asked irritably.

Why couldn't he do this one thing for me? "We could both get executed if they find out that I gave you my card," he said.

I sighed at him. He was right about that. "I know but it's important," I said desperately.

"I know, which is why I can take you down there. We make it fast. We're your best friends. We're here for you."

A small smile graced my face. Even though I would rather do this myself I knew that they weren't going to let me go alone on this one. "Whether or not you want the help from us, you're going to get it," Iris snarled.

"You almost sound Dauntless," I said.
She didn't smile. She wasn't happy with me. "I don't know what you did but I can see that you're in deep. And that's what scares me," Iris said.

I nearly laughed at her words. It scared me too. She had no idea how afraid I really was. "I can handle it," I said.

"That's what really scares me. You don't look scared. You look determined. I don't like that look. I don't like the thought of you going and doing something stupid. You might not hold your life at a high value, but I do. We do," she said, motioning to herself and Florian.

The thought almost made me smile. She was right. I didn't hold my life at high value. But I did hold theirs at high value. I held Eric's at high value. Four's. The rest of my friends. Everyone. But not mine and not Jeanine's. We were the two that were really in this fight and only one of us could win it. But that was going to stay between me and myself.

"And I hold yours at a high value, which is exactly why I can't tell you what's happening," I said. "Please be careful," Iris begged.

"Always. And thank you. You can bring me down there to get the serum and that's it. You don't need to know why and you don't ask any questions. Trust me, it's safer that way," I told them.

"You can tell us when you need," Florian said.

It seemed to take a moment but they both finally nodded at me. I was sure that they wanted to say something else on the matter but they were smart and stayed silent. "I know. Thank you. Both of you. Let's go. I don't have much time," I told them.

Without giving me any warning that they had heard me, Iris and Florian turned and started to walk away. It took me a moment but I quickly followed. As I walked behind them I noticed that the pair were both wearing matching clothes. A white button down shirt with black slacks. They looked nice. But they were much duller than they had been in Amity. Of course, I supposed the same could be said for me. I now wore almost all black all the time.

Iris and Florian walked back into the staircase that I had just come out of and groaned. I had been wrong. We headed back into the stairwell and made our descent into the bottom of the sub-levels. As we walked I glanced up at the clock on the wall and saw that it was late. It was already well past ten o'clock. I was shocked that Jack Kang wanted to have a meeting this late. But it was better. Having the meeting so late was the only reason that I had been able to come here.

"So," Iris called.

I turned back to her. "What?" I asked.

There was an almost playful look in her eyes. It looked so different than the serious look she'd had a moment before. "The man that you're with," she continued.

"What about him?"

"Anything going on there?"

A guffawing laugh escaped my mouth and Iris turned to me with a curious glance. I couldn't help it. She didn't quite understand but it made so much sense that Iris would take any chance to gossip with me about girl things. I assumed that she spent most of her time with Florian in Candor. I hadn't heard them mentioning anything about other friends or something like that while I had been near them. But
I did appreciate her effort.

It somehow managed to get my mind off of tomorrow. It was nice to think about something else, even if it was just for a few minutes. But I couldn't help the little blanch that fell over my face. There was no way that I would ever do anything like that with Four. That was disgusting. It would be close to incest for me to be with Four. We were like siblings.

"Should we talk about the two of you?" I asked, trying to distract them.

"Eventually. But it's your turn now," she said.

"No. Not Four," I said with a little laugh.

Even Florian looked a little intrigued now. "Four?" he asked.

"That's his name. He's like my brother. I love him to death but I could never do something with him without wanting to take a bath and boil my skin," I told them honestly.

To my surprise both Florian and Iris laughed. It wasn't just a soft laugh. It was a loud and barking laugh. It showed me that they were happy here. Happier than they had ever been in Amity. I had never heard either of them laugh like that before. And never with each other. They used to hate each other. But it made me glad to see them together. I loved that the two of them were happy together. I was glad that someone could be happy if I couldn't.

"Well what about someone else?" Iris implored.

"You're terrible. We're supposed to be on a serious mission right now," I told her.

"Whatever How go things with that guy that you hate? Eric, I think it was," Iris continued.

It was a little shock that Iris actually remembered Eric's name. It had been months since they had seen him and it had only been for a brief minute or two. "You remember his name?" I asked.

She smiled at me. "He's a little hard to forget," she said.

"He's an asshole," Florian snapped.

I couldn't help it that time. It wasn't just the shocked and horrified laugh that I had given her when she had mentioned Four, this was one of those ironic laughs. Mostly because she had called it with the two of us months ago. Both Iris and Florian were staring at me like I was insane. We walked out of the staircase and I headed down the hallway with them. There was only a few rooms down here and it was extremely cold. It felt like Erudite down here.

"There is someone else," I told them softly.

Both Iris and Florian stopped walking and I slammed into Florian's back. He tripped slightly as I helped steady him. "You're faster on your feet," Florian commented.

"Comes with Dauntless territory," I teased.

They both looked thrilled as they grinned widely at me. They clearly wanted to know. "So... Who is it?" Iris asked excitedly.

"You do remember Eric?" I asked them.

"Yeah."
"Of course."

"And do you remember when I insisted that we weren't sleeping together?" I asked.

"Duh," Iris said.

"Please no, Alex," Florian groaned.

Iris slapped him in the stomach as I grinned. "It was the truth at the time. We're sleeping together now. We are together," I told them bluntly.

The moment that I said it I wished that I could have taken it back. There were probably better ways that I could have gone about it. Iris squealed loudly and I laughed as she launched herself into my arms. We stumbled back and I tightened my arms around her. It was similar to the way that Heather had taken the news. Although Heather actually knew Eric. Iris had only briefly met Eric. Florian's head dropped back as he groaned and I laughed softly at him. He wasn't a fan of Eric. He thought that he was a dick. I wondered what he would think if he knew that Eric was jealous of Florian because of a picture of the two of us kissing.

"I knew that something was going on between the two of you!" Iris shouted.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," I groaned.

Tell me everything. Tell me what he's like. Tell us how it happened," she squealed.

There were some Amity traits that were hard to kick. One of them was loving to gossip. Iris had always been the bigger gossip, but I had enjoyed the occasional girl talk from time to time. "No!" Florian shouted.

Both Iris and I laughed. She shoved her boyfriend and I grinned at them softly. "You fon't want to hear about it?" I asked Florian teasingly.

"Do not tell us how anything happened. I don't want to hear about how the two of you got together. I don't want to hear about how you two spend your private time together. I'm not interested in anything like that," Florian continued.

I couldn't help but to wonder for a moment if it was because I had once been the person that Florian had come to at night. It almost made me shiver in disgust when I thought about it now. I wanted to know what would happen if I could get Florian and Eric alone in a room together. I was honestly curious what made the two men hate each other so much.

"Come on, Alex, seriously?" Florian asked.

"What?" I said, surprised.

"That asshole?"

Honestly I was a little surprised at his language. It didn't seem that Candor were much for profanity and I knew that Amity never cursed. It seemed like a mostly Dauntless trait. Although I did hear it from Candor and on rare occasions, Erudite. It simply wasn't something that I ever heard from Amity or Abnegation members.

"Yes, that asshole. I happen to like that asshole," I snapped.

"Eric is a better man than he makes himself out to be. I promise. We've been good together. I'm happy being with him. I hope that one day you guys get the chance to meet him and actually get to know him. You'd like him," I said.

Iris smiled but one look from Florian made me wonder if I had just said that to try and placate him. "You so sure about that?" Florian asked.

"Actually, maybe you wouldn't," I laughed.

Florian nodded with an arrogant glare and I smirked at him. He hated Eric and always would. I wasn't sure whether or not I blamed him. He certainly wasn't the type of person to put on the charm at first meeting. Hell, he had called me pathetic and told me that he was going to throw me from the roof the first time that I had actually met him.

"Florian is just jealous," Iris teased.

"I am not!" Florian shouted.

The indignant scoff from Florian was louder than I had been expecting. "He doesn't think that anyone will ever be good enough," Iris continued.

"Someone will be. Just not him," Florian interrupted.

"Just so you know, I don't either," Iris continued.

I gave a soft laugh and smiled at the both of them. At her words, Florian brightened slightly. "If Eric makes you happy then that's all that matters to me. To us," she said with a soft nudge in Florian's side.

He merely grunted. "Yeah. Whatever. We're happy for you," he muttered.

"One day I would like to meet him. Actually meet him. When he's not trying to intimidate us," Iris said.

That was something that I would have liked that too. But I was pretty sure that no one would ever meet Eric without him trying to intimidate him. He was the type of person that always wanted to be the alpha male in the room. Plus there was the issue that we would likely never see each other again as Jeanine would be sure to end my friendship with Iris and Florian and my relationship with Eric.

"I don't think that you're ever going to see that. He likes to intimidate people," I told them honestly.

Iris smiled softly but Florian looked irritated as hell. "We can tell," Florian groaned.

It made me laugh softly and shook my head as we stopped in front of a door that was right around the bend in the hall. There was no label on the door but the window was blacked out and there was a restricted sign hanging across the front. I watched as Florian reached into his back pocket and pulled out a single card. It was black and looked a little metal. He held it up to the scanner and looked to me for confirmation. I took a deep breath.

"This is it?" I asked.

"This is it."

"Do it. I need to get in there. It's important," I said softly.

He nodded and I noticed that Iris took a step closer to me as he brought the strip on the back of the
card down over the scanner. It took a moment before making a shrill beeping noise. I jumped slightly and noticed that both Iris and Florian smirked at me. It had been slightly louder than I was anticipating. The lights on the door changed from red to green before the door slid open and the three of us made our way inside.

Inside was a rather large, but dull, room. There were rows upon rows of vials being made in every corner of the room. It made my stomach twist itself into knots. It seemed that at least half of the room was dedicated to the unacceptable batch and that made me sigh with relief. I supposed that was a good thing. I walked over to the area that was sectioned off for the acceptable batches and shook my head. They were barely there.

It looked like there were only about twenty or thirty vials. There must have been hundreds in the unacceptable pile. I walked over to the few rows of the acceptable pile and looked over them. They were all bright blue and in small vials, each one clearly only meant for one person. My fingers trailed over one of the vials and just before I grabbed it, Florian's voice stopped me.

"Just so you know these vials are still in the test phases," he said.

"I know," I said, turning back to the vials.

Florian walked up to my side but Iris stayed in the background. I assumed that she wasn't down here often. "They don't always work. Not even in the acceptable stages. It just means that the mix is appropriate," he said.

"Really?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"So it's just a guessing game for which one works?" I asked.

I was always terrible at guessing. "Unfortunately. I'm sorry but I can't let you take more than one. Someone will notice if more than one is gone," he continued.

That was an even smaller chance of me being right. "That's fine," I said, even thought it really wasn't.

"Alex, keep in mind that they don't work for that long. They're still in the test phases. It won't work long. Maybe ten minutes, maximum," Florian warned.

How was Jeanine ever going to get these vials to the way that she wanted them? They weren't guaranteed to work, most didn't work, and the ones that did didn't last more than ten minutes. It made me confident that it would at least be years before they were ready for mass production. At least ten minutes was all that I needed.

"Ten minutes is all that I need," I finally responded.

It was the truth. "That's all that you needed?" Florian asked.

I smiled at my friends before pulling them into a hug. They both laughed as I let them go. "Thank you, both of you. For this. For everything. I know that you risked a lot bringing me down here," I told them.

"Of course," Florian said.

"Anything to help," Iris added.
They really were my best friends even though we didn't see each other as much as we used to. I wished that we did. I turned around and looked back down at the vials. I grabbed one out of the far corner and tucked it into my back pocket. Here's hoping it was the one that worked. It was the only way that my plan would work.

"I have to leave," I said.

"Already?" Florian asked.

"Four is getting ready to go and I need to go back with him. I love you both," I told them honestly. Florian ushered us out of the room and the door made a low droning noise as it closed again. I heard the bolts lock behind us and I walked quickly with my friends back towards the staircase. I had what I needed and now I needed to get out of here as fast as possible. This was a big risk, me carrying around the vial.

"We love you too. We always will. Alex, you come to us any time that you need something. You understand us?" Florian asked.

"Of course," I said happily.

"No matter how bad it is just come back to us. We'll be here for you. No matter what it is. We're your best friends. We're your family. We love you," he said.

Had I not been expecting him to say something like that my eyes would have watered. Even though I had been expecting it my lip did give a soft quiver. "I know. I love you both too," I said softly.

"We only want to help," Iris said.

I grinned softly at her before walking to the doorway that would lead us back into the main lobby. "Trust me when I say that you've both done more than you can imagine," I said.

"I just want to make sure that you're safe. I know that you're a big Dauntless bad-ass now but that doesn't mean that you're safe from everything," Iris said.

I laughed loudly and shook my head. "Trust me when I say that I know that," I teased.

She had no idea how true that was. "You don't have to fight alone, Alex. You aren't alone. You never will be," she said softly.

I gave them one last smile and fought back the tears that were rimming in my eyes. "I know," I whispered.

They would never know just how much their words meant to me. I wished that I could tell them what was happening, but I knew that I couldn't. Their safety was number one. So I gave them a soft thanks and wrapped them both into tight hugs. Iris was shaking slightly when I grabbed her and Florian held me tighter than I was sure that he ever had. I was glad that I hadn't just been in a fight recently because his grip was crushing.

As they let go of me I leaned in and gave each of them a kiss on the cheek before allowing them to walk out of the stairwell. We all knew that I couldn't be seen with them. I waited a good two minutes before heading up and walking out of the stairwell after them. No one would ever know that we were friends. It was a secret that we were going to have to keep. As I walked into the lobby I saw that Four was already waiting for me.
Apparently we had perfect timing. He gave me a sharp nod and I nodded back to him as we both turned and walked out of the Merciless Mart together. No one said a word to us and most of the Candor residents ignored us as we headed straight for the train. One was speeding by us at the moment and Four ushered me on first. Now I realized why we only had an hour. The trains were always on time. They didn't wait for people. I walked into the train and stepped away from the doors. Four followed me in a second later. He walked us both over to take a seat on the back wall.

"How did it go?" Four finally asked.

Not bothering to say anything to him I reached into my pocket and slipped out the vial. It was tiny. It seemed like it wasn't even enough for one person. The blue liquid that was shining inside seemed like the only hope that we had. Four was looking at it closely and I could see that he sucked in a breath. He probably didn't think that our stupid little plan today was actually going to work. He gently took it from me to look.

"I got it," I told him rather unnecessarily.

Four turned a glare on me. "So I see," he said blankly.

"Took me a little bit but I got it. I could only take one. I can just pray that it's going to work. Keep it with you for now. It's safer than me having to hold onto it," I said.

It was the truth. I was sure that the serum was safer with Four than it was with me. There was a chance that my friends could see it, or even worse, there was a chance that Eric could see it. That would be the worst. He couldn't know anything more about my truth. Four nodded and grabbed the vial before tucking it into a deep pocket on the side of his pants.

"So are you going to tell me why exactly you needed to get that serum?" Four asked.

I glanced over at him, somewhat surprised. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"You've had this plan in the works for weeks now and you haven't said anything to me about it. I need to know. We're going to be in Erudite in sixteen hours. We don't have much more time to plan. You need to tell me and I need to know. We're in this together," he said.

A deep breath left my mouth and I shook my head. He was right, I had barely told him anything. It had mostly been so that I could protect him. But now I knew that he had to know. It wasn't fair that I hadn't been telling him the truth. It wasn't fair of me to try to protect him by essentially freezing him out.

"You're right. We are in this together. Just let me get all the way through the plan and I want you to say nothing, alright?" I asked.

I knew that he was going to try to interrupt me and tell me that it was a terrible plan. That was just the way that he was. "Okay," Four finally conceded.

"I know that it's not the best plan but I need for you to listen to me," I repeated.

Four stared at me for a good long moment before nodding at me to continue. "Alright, fine. Just tell me," he said.

For a long time I sat there, simply staring at Four. My entire plan was a really bad idea and I knew that, and I knew that telling Four would only make things worse. The plan was probably going to sound about ten times worse once I actually spit it out. So I took a deep breath before I could try to change my plan again - as I had changed the plan at least ten times already - and I launched into my
idea.

It turned out that it was a really bad idea. I knew that each time I added another step into the plan there were just more holes forming. I could see that Four knew it as well. Each time I had to skip over a little piece of the puzzle I could tell that Four was starting to believe in the plan even less. He did seem to be fond of the idea of a sneak attack. It seemed to me that he didn't think that any other part of my plan would work. Maybe it wouldn't. I wasn't quite sure. But I was willing to try.

Rattling off the last few details of my plan I closed my mouth and looked over at Four again. It was like I was watching the gears grind together in his head. He was processing my story and he didn't seem the least bit fond of the idea. He took a few minutes but finally he shook his head and I hung my head back. I knew that he wasn't going to like this plan. Damn him.

"Alex, we can't do that," Four said.

"I knew you'd say that."

"That plan is suicide. For me and you," he tried to reason.

He was right. Every fiber of my being was arguing with me that he was right and I needed to recognize that. "I know," I said.

"So let's come up with another plan," Four argued.

"We don't have time!" I shouted.

"Well we aren't going to go where either one of us could die!" he shouted back.

The two of us sat in silence before I leaned over and grabbed his hand. "I've tried to think of any other thing that we can do. I've taken weeks to think about any plans that we could possibly make. I've tried to think of something else. I can't. I can't figure out anything else to do. There is no other way," I told him truthfully.

"There has to be another way."

"There isn't. You know it and so do I," I said softly.

Four sighed under his breath. There was no other way to do this. "Are you sure?" he asked.

"I'm sure. So I'm telling you that with or without you, I'm doing this," I announced proudly.

Four sat still for a moment before moving towards me slightly. He grabbed my hands. They were just as clammy as my own. "I know," he said softly.

For a while I waited for him to say something else but when he said nothing I shifted uncomfortably. That wasn't really the answer that I wanted. Did that mean that he wasn't going to go with me? Was he really going to leave me out there on my own? I had to say that the thought hurt me a little bit.

"That's why I'm going with you," he told me darkly.

"Thank you."

It didn't seem like it was enough. Even if I had been able to think up something else to say back to him I wouldn't have. So I smiled and leaned into his shoulder. Four was grinning above me and he caught his arm around my shoulder. I closed my eyes and leaned my nose into his shoulder. It did make me feel a little bit better that he was at least here with me. If nothing else, at least I wasn't in this
thing alone. But I still wanted to cry. For the first time in a long time I actually wanted to be able to cry. I wanted to run away and pretend that this wasn't happening.

But I knew that it wasn't an option. I had to get off of my ass and do something. For the good of everyone else I had to do something to stop the war. I had lost any option to do anything else. A few minutes after closing my eyes I heard the train arrive at the Dauntless compound and allowed Four to help the both of us off of the train.

We landed together in a weak crouch and I smiled. That hadn't gone nearly as well as I had thought that it would. But it was slightly funny. He grabbed me by the arm and led me into the main area of the compound, kicking some of the rocks around his feet. We walked through the halls for a moment before Four stuck his arm out to stop me. I looked over at him and smiled softly. It looked like he wanted to hug me and never let go.

"You shouldn't go back there. Not tonight. Not when tomorrow..." Four said slowly.

I knew what he meant. He didn't have to finish. "I know," I said softly.

"Spend the night with Eric tonight, just in case," Four added, almost regrettably.

It surprised me that he had said something like that. I took a moment just to stare at him. He was right. I didn't know whether or not something was going to happen tomorrow. I didn't know and he didn't know. He was right. I should spend this last night with him. Just in case something was going to happen tomorrow. For one last night I wanted to be with him.

"Thanks Four, you're right. I'm going to go to him. I'll see you during the fear landscape tomorrow," I said, trying to keep the wavering out of my voice.

He didn't need to know how I was feeling right now. He didn't need to know that it felt like I was already dead. I didn't want him to know that. The two of us joined hands and I smiled, pressing a small kiss to Four's cheek. I went to turn on my heels but before I could, Four spoke up again.

"You probably won't take this to heart but hear me out anyways," Four said.

I turned to him and gave him a little nod. "What?" I asked.

He might have been wrong. I wanted to hear what he was going to say. He was like a brother to me. His opinion and advice meant everything to me. As much as I wanted to pretend that we would be back here in the morning with nothing being any different, I knew that it wasn't the case.

"Tomorrow is a long and important day. Try to get some rest. Even with everything happening you still have appearances to keep up. And if you don't stay in the number one spot you don't have to worry about Jeanine. You'll have to worry about me coming after you," he teased.

A short bark escaped my lips as I laughed and moved in to grab Four in for a hug. We stayed together for a moment before he planted a small kiss on the top of my head. I gave him one last smile before departing from him and laughing softly as I walked down the hallway. He was a wonderful man. I hoped that after tomorrow he would get a chance to live out the rest of the life. We both deserved to get to live out full lives.

We both went our separate ways at the fork in the hallway and I headed off to Eric's apartment for the night. For maybe the last night. I wasn't quite sure whether or not Eric was expecting me but I was pretty sure that I didn't care. I just wanted to see him one last time. I wanted to have faith that we were good together for one last time.
Walking through the hall I found myself quickly at the door for Eric's apartment. It was already well after eleven but Eric was a night owl. He was probably still awake. He normally didn't go to bed until after midnight anyways. I gave a soft knock on the door before walking through. As expected, Eric was still awake.

He was perched on the counter and thumbing across his tablet. He seemed to be bored with whatever it was that he was doing. He glanced up from the tablet and stared at me as I walked in. He dropped it and it made a small clattering noise on the counter. Swaying my hips slightly, I walked forward happily as he grinned darkly at me. I saw that behind him the picture of me in the red dress was hung now hung up on the refrigerator by a magnet and I smiled softly. He walked up to me and I laughed as he wrapped his arms around my waist.

"Honey, I'm home," I sang to him.

I had heard the line in some old show that I had put on once when Eric was asleep and I couldn't get to bed. It had been a cute show and I was glad that I'd watched it. Although when Eric had woken up he had nearly smashed the tape when he saw it. Apparently he had always hated that show. He had made it painfully clear to me once he had gotten me to shut it off.

"Shut up," Eric snarled.

I smiled and leaned in to give him a quick kiss. "Just kidding," I said softly.

"What are you doing here?" Eric asked.

"Well I thought that I was coming to visit you," I teased.

He grinned down at me. "I thought that you left with your friends for the night?" he asked.

For a moment I felt like a moron. He had thought that I'd left with them, not Four. It was a good thing that he had been so distracted by work when I had left. I could only imagine how the conversation would be going right about now. So I smiled and decided to tell him something nicer than the truth. I didn't want to lie to him but I had to. For one last night. He grabbed me around the waist and I laughed as he placed me on the counter.

"Well I figured that tonight was the last night that our relationship isn't allowed in Dauntless. After that I'm no longer your initiate and our relationship is no longer against the rules. I figured we could have one last night of debauchery," I teased.

My leg was slowly making its way up his thigh and I felt him tense slightly underneath me. He merely grabbed my leg and forced it back down onto my side. "There's the Erudite coming out to play," he teased.

In the meantime a hand wound its way up the back of my spine and into my hair. I laughed heartily and pulled him into me, smashing my lips against his. Ever since I had told him what I was he had made little remarks like that. He seemed to enjoy teasing me about it. He had done it enough times. Of course it was only because he thought that I was safe from Jeanine. Things would change once he knew that I was still lying to him. I supposed that was just who I was; a liar.

"Come on, I'm not that dumb," I told him proudly.

I was smarter than he gave me credit for. He was still smarter than me but I was also smarter than he thought that I was. "Never said that," Eric said lowly.

But I knew that he still thought that he was smarter and I was stupid. "Even if I hadn't gotten Erudite
I still know some big words. Probably more than you," I told him.

Eric merely scoffed at me. We both knew that that was a lie. "Is that so?" he asked.

"In fact, I know lots of big things," I said, making sure to give him a pointed look.

Eric smirked at me. "Yeah?" he asked darkly.

I smiled and nodded at him. "Yeah."

"Like your fat head," he said, whacking me over the back of the head.

It was slightly harder than I'd been expecting. I laughed loudly and shoved back against him. I hated the feeling that was stirring in my gut as Eric caught my lips in a kiss once more. I cared about him. More than I had ever cared about anyone else. Who knew? Maybe there was even a possibility that I loved him. But I couldn't tell him that. I could never tell him that. It would scare him off. And I still didn't know if I really did love him or if it was just an infatuation. It didn't matter either way.

He grabbed me under the thighs and pulled me over to the couch. As he swung me around my head spun slightly, almost making me feel like I was drunk. He pushed me back against the couch and I laughed, falling over him and landing awkwardly in his lap. He was used to my awkward landings as he wound his hair and I groaned, moving as close as possible to his body. I could feel every contour in between the two of us and I wanted nothing more than to have every bit separating us gone. For one last time.

"You know what I was thinking about?" I asked as I pulled away from him. He hummed at me, his lips pressed gently against my mouth. "I'm going to finish in the number one spot."

He pulled away that time to give me a blank stare. I merely grinned at him and laughed softly.

"There's that big head again," he teased.

I laughed and thumped my finger across his head. He really did drive me nuts. But I would never want it any other way. He nudged me back and I laughed against his shoulder for a moment, shoving his face away from me. He was such an ass. But it was just the way that I liked him. I would never like him any other way.

"Shut up. They say that it's an Erudite trait. And Dauntless," I said, giving him a pointed look.

"Whatever," he growled.

Be damned what the test told him, I knew that Eric was both Erudite and Dauntless. Just like I knew that Heather was part Candor and part Dauntless. No one could just be one thing all of the time. It didn't work that way. No matter what Jeanine and the rest of Chicago thought.

"That means that I'm going to finish higher in ranking than you did," I said, grinning proudly.

He merely glared at me. The glare dropped off of his face and he leaned into me with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. "Is that so?" Eric asked.

"That's so," I said.

"We can try a fight and see who wins," he said.

I knew that it was a challenge that he knew he would win. I still laughed as Eric knocked into my chest and sent me off balance. I hit the back of the couch and smirked as he leaned over me. His
hands tangled in my hair as he rested himself in between my legs. His mouth traveled from the skin that was revealed on my chest all the way over my neck and up to my lips. I groaned softly into the kiss and wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling him as close as possible to me.

It was nights like this that I was going to miss deeply. I wished more than anything that I could tell him the truth but I also knew that it had gotten to the point where no one could help me. The only help that I had was from Four. I refused to drag anyone else into this. I had to do this on my own. Four was just the added bonus that I got.

I leaned back against the couch a little more so that I was lying flat on my back. My hands traveled down Eric's torso and I wrapped them around the edges of his shirt. I grabbed it tightly and bunched it up, grabbing it and dragging it over his shoulders. I didn't know if I was ever going to get the chance to do this again so I was going to make sure that my night was well worth it. I grabbed Eric under the shoulders and rolled him off of the couch, our limbs tangling and knotting together.

We both laughed as we fell over the edge of the bed, each of us smiling at the other. Eric leaned into me and kissed me hard on the mouth, his knee hitching underneath mine, effectively trapping me. I laughed against his mouth as I drug my hands over his bare chest. Each muscle gave a small twitch as I ran my nails over them and I grinned. Nothing made me happier than seeing what I could do to him. Eric grabbed my lip in between his teeth and I smiled. It was one of the little possessive habits that he had.

His tongue slipped into my mouth once he let my lip go. It ran gently over mine and I smiled at him. His mouth always felt good as I dipped my tongue back and forth in his mouth. He had a slightly minty taste to him and I knew that he had just brushed his teeth. It reminded me of all of the little things that I knew about him. The strange things that shouldn't have meant anything to the average person, but meant the world to me. He hated having bad breath, his toothpaste always had to be directly next to his toothbrush, and his toothbrush could never be left out.

They were just little things, but I loved knowing them. Underneath the taste of toothpaste I could taste the barbecue from tonight. Funny. I hadn't even thought that he liked barbecue. There were so many things that I didn't know about him. There were so many things that I wanted to ask him. But I didn't have the time. I just had to think of all of the things that I did know about him.

Laughing softly as Eric reached for me, I leaned up slightly so that Eric could pull my shirt over my head. The shirt caught on my shoulders and I chuckled as Eric practically tore it off of me. He was not a patient man. He never had been. But there was something about his impatience that I liked. There was something about the way that his actions were all carnal that I loved to see. He was a good man, and a man that I could have seen myself with for a long time.

But that wasn't the way that it would go. It wasn't long before my pants came off as well. Eric grabbed the bottoms roughly, yanking the button open. He practically dragged me across the floor as he grabbed at the tight bottoms. Maybe I should have worn something a little looser. It didn't take Eric too long to rip them off and toss them over the back of the couch, out of sight.

Eric grabbed me under the thighs and I gripped onto his back tightly as he lifted me up and walked me over to his bed. The sheets were already messed up, seeing as he probably hadn't remade it this morning. He was smart enough to know that we would just mess them up again. Eric's hands wound into my hair and I smiled as he tugged the strands back, pulling our mouths together. Eric was kind of stumbling around, unable to see.

For whatever reason, I trusted that he wouldn't drop or hurt me. Eric finally dropped me onto the bed and I laughed as Eric took no time to rip his pants off. They were discarded at the foot of the bed before I leaned over and reached to rip his underwear off. He looked surprised at the sudden action
but he said nothing against it. He simply let me.

It was all because we were about to spend our last night together. Not that he knew that. I couldn't bring myself to tell him. I pushed him back against the bed before leaning over and grabbing his underwear, ripping them the rest of the way off. Eric grinned at me as I dropped down and grinned at him. He laughed slightly as I leaned over and kissed his head. He groaned and his head fell back against the bed.

My tongue flicked out of my mouth, flicking against his head a few times. Once more he let out a little groan as his fingers wrapped around my hair, dragging my mouth over him. I opened my mouth and let my lips run over his length a few times, my tongue licking the back of his hard length. Eric groaned deep in his throat as my hands came up to dig my nails gently into his thighs. I was sure that at any minute he was going to explode by the way he was writhing on the bed. He always had liked when I did this for him.

It helped that I'd always loved having him in my control. It wasn't very often that he allowed me to take control, but if it meant that he could get some pleasure out of it, I knew that he would allow it. My tongue was swirling over his length as I ran my mouth over him again and again. He was making all sorts of sounds that sent chills down my spine and into my core.

Before I could finish him off, Eric grabbed my hair roughly and yanked me away from him. I let out a tiny grunt of pain but allowed myself to lift up from him. Eric didn't let me stay on my knees for long. Before I knew it he had barrelled at me and knocked me back into the bed. I laughed under my breath as Eric grabbed my bra and snapped the hook, popping it off of me. It wasn't half a second later that my underwear had followed. Both garments were tossed across the room, presumably to never be seen again.

In the meantime Eric threw me back against the bed and spread my legs wide enough so that he could fit in between them. I groaned and threw my head back as he thrust into me roughly. He was certainly wasting no time tonight. I assumed that he wanted to have as good of a go as he could tonight. I was already dripping and it meant that he could slide in with ease. Eric's forehead dropped against my shoulder as I breathed out raggedly.

He leaned down and pressed a kiss against my lips that I responded to, nipping softly against his lips. He pulled back out only to slam into me again. My chest was bouncing almost painfully up and down as he rocked into me, each thrust harder than the last. As we moved together a bead of sweat from Eric's forehead dripped onto my shoulder. My legs wrapped around his waist tightly as a bundle of nerves began to tighten in my lower stomach.

His thrusts became more desperate as he came closer to his end and my legs began to quiver as my end neared. It wouldn't be long before I couldn't stand it anymore. Eric's hands went down to my waist and I hissed as he tightened them so much to the point that I almost thought that he would break my hipbones.

Another two thrusts and I was sent over the edge, my legs shaking so pathetically that I knew that I would never be able to stand. At least not for a good while. My head fell back and loud, nonsensical, moans escaped my mouth. Eric followed with his own release a few thrusts afterwards, his warmth feeling oddly comforting. His rode out his high with a few more thrusts and I moaned at the sensitive bundle of nerves in my lower regions. As Eric finally came to his finish and pulled out of me I gave a sharp yelp.

He let me rest against him for a while before once more he leaned over me, beginning the process all over again. He was taking my one last night seriously. He wasn't going to let me get a wink of sleep. We ended up all over his apartment, each time more than once. As I had tried to brush out my hair
before going to bed - at least, I'd thought that I was going to bed - Eric had bent me over the sink, probably enjoying watching the faces that I was making in the mirror.

That hadn't even been close to the end of our night. As I had tried to walk back to the bed Eric had pinned me up against the apartment door. I had been somewhere in between mortified and turned on when a group of people had walked past, obviously hearing what Eric and I were doing. It didn't help that they knew that it was Eric's apartment. I had almost asked Eric to move away from the door but what he had muttered in my ear had completely distracted me from any desire other than to finish.

We had even moved over to the bar that was attached to the kitchen. Eric threw me on top of the bar and pushed us backwards. I was sure that I had never been so grateful for it. The two of us had even taken a few shots from the bottle of liquor that he'd had sitting on the edge of the counter. It only made things more fun - and definitely a little hazier.

At different points throughout the night we'd even ended up with me on the table, the two of us leaning over each other in the chair, on the floor of his bedroom, one of the bar stools and back on the balcony. I was reasonably certain that a few Factionless men got more of a show than they were asking for. By the end of the night I was sure that my legs would never stop shaking.

It wasn't until well after three in the morning, after our fifth go-round that Eric pushed himself deep into me and released himself. I was bent over the bed again and heaving heavily from the exhaustion. If I could have gone another round I was sure that I would have. But I knew that I couldn't and I actually did need to get some sleep before the final test tomorrow. Eric grabbed me and tossed me up onto the bed, surprising me slightly.

He laughed at my shocked face before falling back onto the bed and grabbing me, pulling me with him. It amazed me how much he could be rough and tough one second and then be almost romantic the next. It was a good thing that he had pulled me up, considering that I could hardly move. I wasn't sure that I had ever had a night like that, but I was glad that I had actually experienced it. It was almost funny that the night that it finally happened would be my last.

As I drew patterns against Eric's chest I glanced up at him. "Eric -" I muttered softly, not really sure what I wanted to say.

I just wanted to say something before tomorrow came. I wanted him to know that I cared for him before I betrayed his trust once more. Part of me wanted to tell him the entire truth for what was going to happen to me tomorrow - I knew that it would be good to tell him the truth beforehand - but I couldn't bring myself to say it.

"Go to bed," Eric said softly.

I laughed at him and shook my head. "Goodnight," I said softly.

That was Eric for you. He leaned in to kiss me again and I let him. He grabbed me around my waist before throwing me over his torso, onto the other side of the bed. I laughed softly and rolled my eyes as Eric threw the sheets back over us. He grabbed me tightly and I smiled, leaning my head into his shoulder. He gave me another kiss on the lips. It was searing for a while before he finally released me. Once he let me go I turned away from Eric, pressing my back against his shoulder. He kept flat on his back as his fingers twisted through my hair, continuing until I was about to pass out. He wouldn't fall asleep until I did first.

The morning came after a long night spent with Eric and I groaned, covering my eyes with my forearm. Our last comment about having one last night of debauchery hadn't gone unnoticed by Eric.
He had made sure that we enjoyed our final night together. I hadn't really gotten any sleep last night. Not that I was completely shocked by that. Eric hadn't let me get any sleep and I wasn't completely sure that I had wanted to get any sleep anyways. I wasn't sure that I could get any sleep.

Not when I kept thinking about what was going to happen today. I was relatively certain that we hadn't fallen asleep until well past three in the morning. Not that I minded. Although it did make for some soreness in awkward places now. Slowly I sat up in the bed and let the sheets pool around my bare waist. My eyes felt like they were glued shut and I rubbed over them a few times, hoping that the feeling would go away by the time I got to the fear landscape.

I glanced over into the kitchen and saw that Eric was already in there, apparently making breakfast. He had a towel wrapped around his waist and I smiled at him. Leaning over to the edge of the bed I grabbed his shirt and pulled it on over my head before standing from the bed and heading over to him. He was making eggs and coffee and I grinned; it was the only breakfast that I liked. I leaned over him and pressed a kiss against his bare back.

"Last day of training it today. It felt like today was never going to come," I muttered into his back.

He tensed up slightly at my words but it seemed that he relaxed quickly. "No, it always feels like it takes forever. It never seems like it ever ends," he said.

I couldn't help but feel like there was another meaning to the words that he was saying. "Did your initiation feel like it took forever?" I asked.

"In some ways."

"Has mine?"

"Yes."

He turned back long enough to give me a pointed look. "Why's that?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

And Eric knew that I knew the answer too. "You know why," he snapped.

"Thanks for breakfast," I said softly, knowing that there was something else going on - something that involved me that he didn't want to talk about. And I didn't want to push him.

"You're welcome. Training is finally over and you're still set to be in the number one spot," he said, changing the subject again.

Eric finally turned around and I smiled as he wrapped his arms around me. They went over my shoulders and I smiled as his lips met mine in a rough kiss. Whatever had been bothering him a moment before had passed. I wanted to ask him what it was, but I knew that he wasn't an open man. He would tell me if he felt the need. The kiss lasted for a few minutes before he pulled away from me. I smiled as he turned back to the eggs and began to prod at them.

"Are you ready for it?" he asked.

"No," I told him.

The answer came faster than I had meant for it to and I nearly laughed. Eric looked a little surprised but I shrugged my shoulders softly. He didn't realize that I had meant it in more way than one. I meant it for everything that was going to happen tonight. But I did mean it for the end of the initiation period too. I really wasn't ready for anything.
"I'm not too worried about it. I can handle it."

"So what's making you nervous?" Eric asked.

The fact that you're about to find out just how deep my lie runs. "It's just strange to think that the end of initiation is here. I'm not going to be a dependent or initiate anymore. I'll be a full Dauntless member," I said softly.

It didn't have the ring to it that it had once had. I took a few steps backwards and leaned against the opposite counter. "It'll be fine," Eric muttered as he began to scoop the eggs out of the pan.

"I know," I said softly.

"You get out of this one and you never have to do it again," he said.

I nodded at him. Eric pushed some eggs onto the plate and poured a cup of coffee for me before doing it for himself. He handed me the plate and cup myself and I thanked him softly, eating the eggs quickly. I wanted to be down to training early so that I would be able to get ready. I wouldn't have much time once they started, considering that I was going first. They had already told me that much.

"Don't think that this means that I'm going to stop calling you Amity," Eric said as I shoveled the eggs into my mouth.

Nearly spitting the eggs out onto the plate I coughed and gulped down a few chugs of the coffee. He was staring at me in confusion and I smiled back at him. Nothing would have felt right if he were to stop calling me Amity. I was pretty sure that I would think that he was angry with me. As much as I hated to admit it I had become very fond of the nickname. It was better than initiate and Softie. And Amity was pretty much solely reserved for Eric these days.

"I wouldn't dream of it," I teased.

"Good. Because I'm not stopping."

"Good," I shot back.

All of that was despite the fact that I was going to be at the top of the leader-board and was clearly no longer an Amity member. But that didn't mean that Eric would ever respect me enough to call me a real Dauntless member. We both sat together in silence and ate our breakfasts. We both liked eating in silence. It was one of the few times of the day that we could enjoy the company of another person and not have to worry about speaking to them.

Whenever I was with my friends it seemed like I was forced to eat with them. Eric ate quickly and I smiled when I realized that he was watching me eat. He seemed to watch me a lot. It was almost like he was waiting for something odd to happen. I finished my meal in silence before leaning over to Eric and giving him a kiss. He responded to the kiss before I jumped into his lap, grabbing at the knot in his towel and attempting to undo it.

"What are you doing?" Eric asked as he broke the kiss.

Honestly I wasn't really sure what I was doing. I just knew that I wanted one more night with him. I just knew that after tonight things were going to change. And I wasn't ready to face that yet. I just wanted this one last moment. I wanted to enjoy the last moment that I had with him. I wanted to enjoy this last real moment of privacy that I might ever have with him.

"We have time. Come on, I have time," I told him as I glanced up at the clock.
"Do you?" Eric asked.

"I don't have to be ready for another thirty minutes," I purred.

It was a blatant lie. And if he looked at the clock he would know that it wasn't the truth either. There was only another ten minutes before I had to be down at training. Eric was smarter than me and he had better self-control than I thought that he did. He looked over at the clock and half-smiled and half-scowled at me.

"You need to be down there in ten minutes," he said.

"The one time you don't want morning. -" 

"I always do, just so you know," Eric interrupted.

I merely gave him a little smile and shook my head. That was technically true. We were supposed to be early to the final test, and even though I really did have thirty minutes, I was supposed to be down there in ten minutes. I merely shrugged my shoulders and went back to undoing the knot at his stomach. He easily caught my hands again.

A frown marred my face as I stared sideways at him. I had thought that he wanted to have a morning go with me. I thought that it was one of his favorite things. He was always trying to have a morning with me. He had just said that he wanted a morning with me. It was why I had been late to training a few times. It was also why Four always seemed to scowl at me when I said that I was staying with Eric.

"What? Are you saying no to a morning with me?" I asked, feeling a little prissy.

Just as I had been thinking, as just as he had said, that wasn't what Eric had meant. He did want a morning rendezvous with me, but we really didn't have time. I knew that he wasn't going to let me think that he wasn't interested in me anymore. He merely brushed some hair back off of my face and held my hip tightly.

"One last day that you actually need to be on time. You're tempting, Amity, but I get raked over the coals when the initiates are late. Even though that's supposed to be Four's damn job," he muttered.

I laughed under my breath and shook my head. I had never realized just how much shit Eric got when Four's job didn't quite work out. "Just tempting, am I?" I asked.

"You have no idea," Eric said.

"Nothing more than that?"

"You don't need to get your head any more inflated," Eric growled.

"Sure I do."

"Go before I decide to keep you here," he said.

His fingers were hooking over the edge of the shirt that I was wearing. Part of me had been hoping that he would pull it off of me but his control was a little more impressive than that. He knew how to use it when he actually wanted to. Eric merely tightened his grip on the shirt as much as he could so that he wouldn't tear the material.

"Careful what you wish for. I might just like that," I teased.
Eric smirked at me as I stripped off his shirt and jumped off of his lap, sauntering across the room. He was watching me carefully and I smirked down at the floor, knowing that he was regretting saying no to my earlier proposition. This really was the better option. Today was a bad day to be late. Especially with Jeanine already here. The only important thing right now was that I went and enjoyed my day while I was waiting for the night so that Four and I could slip away undetected.

I headed over to the edge of the bed and grabbed my clothing, slipping it on quickly. My underwear was first and I heard Eric grumble once I had hidden my private areas from him. I snorted under my breath as I adjusted them. They were slightly stretched out and there was a little tear in the back of them. My tank top went on next and I slipped on a thin jacket over the top of it, one that I had left here weeks ago that Jeanine had found.

I grabbed my pair of tight jeans after that and moved them over my hips before grabbing my boots and pulling them on, tucking the material from my pants into them. Once I had straightened out my hair and pulled it back into a ponytail I turned back to Eric. His eyes hadn't strayed from me once the entire time that I had been getting changed. I walked over to him slowly and he grabbed me tightly, leaning in to kiss me.

"Get out of here before it's too late. I'm about ready to keep you here," he said.

"Remember... I offered."

He grinned at me, pressing a small kiss against my neck right behind my ear. I let out a deep sigh and shook my head. I wanted him to keep me here. I wanted to stay in this apartment forever and forget that there was a war brewing. I wanted to forget all of my troubles. But instead I gave him a soft smile.

"If only training was over," I teased.

Eric laughed and swatted me in the butt before I turned and headed out of the apartment for what very well may be the last time. The door shut behind me and I let out a deep breath. I would only see Eric a few more times before tonight. Taking in another few deep breaths I walked down the hallway and headed straight to the fear landscape room. I knew that my friends would already be out of breakfast at this point.

"All initiates report for final testing. Repeat, all initiates report for final testing," the man on the PA system announced.

They really didn't want to take a chance with us being late. So I nodded to myself and took a deep breath, heading straight for the fear landscape. This was it. As I approached the set of double doors I could hear everyone inside chatting among themselves. I assumed that quite a few people were in there at the moment.

Grabbing the handle of the door I pushed them open and walked into the room. Just like I had been expecting, it was crowded beyond belief. I was shocked that this many people could even fit in the room. Despite the fact that I knew a lot of people could fit in here, it seemed that it was bordering on about fifty of them right now. Although I could still see that my friends were standing in the back corner of the room. I smiled and headed straight for them.
"Hey guys!" I called.

They all turned back to me. "Hey," Buck greeted, wrapping an arm over my shoulder.

"The last day of training. Is everyone ready?" I asked as I came to stand beside Heather.

"Alex!" She called happily.

I laughed loudly as Heather wrapped me into a hug and her arms tightened around my mid-section. I leaned into my friend even after she let go and took a deep breath. I was going to miss these days. I was going to miss Heather. I was going to miss everyone that was standing around us right now. With her arm wrapped over my shoulder, Heather led me to stand in the center of our circle of friends. Not that there was much room. There was hardly any room at all.

"Come on, we're all ready. Right guys?" Heather asked everyone.

They all nodded back at her with different expressions on their face. Some people, mainly the ones that I was closer to, all looked happy and excited for this. Maybe to be over or maybe to finally get to be a Dauntless member. Others, mostly the people that were closer to the middle and bottom of the pack, looked nervous. I assumed that it was because of their precarious position of the leader-board. But no matter what, everyone looked like they were ready for this to be over.

"Of course," Cole said.

"We're almost there," Dante said excitedly.

"Never thought we'd see it," Jax added.

"Hell yeah!" Aaron yelled, startling me slightly. "This is my one last chance to take over the number one spot again."

He nudged me in the side. I laughed and shook my head at him. He was not taking the number one spot from me. "Absolutely not," I said, shoving him back.

It seemed that everyone else agreed with me that he was not going to be taking the number one spot back. And I knew that Aaron knew that too. He just liked to tease me about getting the number one spot back. "I don't think so, man," Dante said.

He was patting Aaron on the back. I laughed and shook my head at the two boys. "Oh, come on!" Aaron cried.

"I think Alex wouldn't let you pry that from her cold, dead, hands," Dante said.

I couldn't help it, I shivered a little at the thought that someone might be moving my corpse in a few hours from now. But they didn't need to know that. So I simply smiled and laughed with them, reminding myself that it was only a joke. They didn't know what was coming to me.

"You would think right," I told Dante.

Jackson nudged me and I turned to smile at him. I didn't talk to Jackson much but that didn't mean that I didn't like him. He was one of the friendlier Dauntless born. He just didn't look like it. "Then we're just going to have to battle for that second place spot," Jackson teased Aaron.

I could tell that the two boys were best friends. Lisa had once told me that they had been raised together, their parents each other's best friends. But that didn't mean that they weren't competitive. So
I laughed softly and shook my head at the competitive nature of the Dauntless boys. It was somewhat cute.

"Come on!" Draven yelled, startling everyone.

All eyes turned to him in complete shock. Draven was normally somewhat soft-spoken. To hear him yell like that was something strange. Normally it was Buck, Heather, Dante, and myself that were the loudest. "What?" I asked dumbly.

"You guys are seriously going to let yourselves be beaten by a five foot tall blonde girl from Amity?" he asked.

"Draven!" I shouted.

We all stared at each other before all eyes turned to me. I blushed softly and shook my head. It took a few moments before everyone began to laugh loudly. He was right. I was hardly the one that they thought would be the one in the first ranking. "He makes a fair point," Heather said.

I was in first ranking but I was also leading myself into slaughter. I supposed that all things came at a price. "She's a lot fiercer than she looks," Michael said.

"Thank you," I said happily.

He was one of the middle ranking Dauntless born and I smiled at him. Like Jackson, I didn't talk to him much, but I knew that he was a good guy. He always said hello to me in the halls. Everyone laughed loudly again and a few of my friends gave me gentle shoves. I was smiling softly at them as they all moved around me. I was going to miss them. I wanted to be able to stay friends with all of them. But things couldn't happen that way. Not now.

The room went a little quieter as people began to move around, each person moving to their final stations. We were close to the testing period. "Not that I don't enjoy talking about little missy over here, look at everyone around us," Jet said.

I smiled and stomped on Jet's foot lightly, making sure that it wasn't going to do any damage. "Don't be an ass," I shot back.

Suddenly I remembered what he had said about looking around us. I didn't bother to look around like the rest of our friends. I knew who was standing close to us. I didn't want to think about the people that were standing close to us. I couldn't bring myself to care right now. As everyone's eyes shifted around the room I made a point to stare at the floor. Somewhere in here Jeanine Matthews would be watching me. But I didn't want to see her until I absolutely needed to.

"I can't believe that they have this many people here," Buck said, turning the attention back to the small group of us.

"There are a lot of people here," Jet added.

"I didn't think that the end of Dauntless initiation was a big deal. I'm pretty sure that none of the other Factions have a last test that's as popular as this one," Buck pointed out.

The final Amity test was just a string of words and comments that were designed to make you lose your happiness. No one ever watched them. They were boring because no one ever failed. Plenty of people could fail the final fear landscape. The only thing that I had to make sure right now was that I was not one of the people that failed it. I wouldn't. I knew that I wouldn't.
"Maybe they like watching everyone's fears," Jax muttered under his breath.

"They probably do," I said.

He seemed to be as fond as the rest of the people in here that I was. All of the initiates nodded and shifted uncomfortably in their spots. These were the people that were here to determine their futures in Dauntless and society. I knew that they were nervous. I wondered how I would feel if I were in their position. It was obvious that some people were a little more concerned than others. Cole was one of the ones that I could tell were nervous. He was as pale as a sheet right about now and it only looked like it was getting worse by the second.

"I'm not sure if I want everyone in here to know my fears. Half of the people in here are in my fears," Cole muttered, panicked.

I couldn't help it. I stared laughing heartily, happy that he had said something to lift the mood. Within moments of my outburst the others followed me in laughter. Although no one seemed to be enjoying it more than Heather, who looked like she might piss herself. She loved watching her boyfriend embarrass himself. Something that he did frequently. It wasn't Heather that came to Cole's aid. She wanted to continue laughing. Instead it was Lisa. She wrapped her arm around Cole and I smirked at her.

"Of course they are, Cole," she said patronizingly.

I laughed loudly and shook my head as the rest of us began to make little jibes at Cole. "Some of these people are a little scary," I said softly, looking around.

"Come on, I mean I know people like Four and Eric appear in people's fear landscapes but how can half of the people in here be in yours?" she asked him bluntly.

I gave a sharp shiver but made sure to steel myself so that no one could see. Two of the people in this room were in my fear landscape. Actually, most of the people in this room were in my fear landscape. But I had a damn good reason for them to be there. Flipping her hair over her shoulders I turned to smirk at Serena. We had started out on bad terms but it seemed that we had become relatively good friends over the past few weeks.

"That's just sad. I hope that you guys can get through these things without mortifying yourselves. At least all of my fears are completely normal. There are mostly strangers in my fear landscape. At least, I think they're all strangers," she said, the last part more to herself than to anyone else.

I shook my head as Serena swung her hair over her shoulder once more. I liked her just fine but there were moments that I wanted to kill her. This was one of those times. "Alex!" I heard over the background noise.

"What?" I asked, turning back.

A blush fell over my face the moment that I realized what had just happened. The room silenced itself slightly as all of the faces in the room turned to look at me. My blush increased and I gave a little smile as I walked over to where I had heard the voice come from. Just as I had expected, it was near the center of the room, right where the chair was. All of the guests were sitting against the edges of the room, clearly waiting for my fear landscape to begin.

"Come on up, we're ready for you," Four said.

He was standing right next to the chair. "Okay," I muttered, walking up.
He had dark bags under his eyes and I figured that he hadn't slept too well last night. "Everyone else, head out into the waiting room. I'll call you in as the turns progress," Four instructed.

All of the other initiates nodded to Four before turning to leave the room. Pretty much everyone that walked by wished me good luck's and well wishes that I responded to. Heather was the last to walk by me but I grabbed her arm before she could depart from the fear landscape room.

"Heather -"

"You'll be fine, don't panic. You're the best one here. You're fine. You're going to go in there and spend some time by yourself and when everything is over we're going to celebrate together!" she yelled.

I smiled at her. I wished that I could have done that. But I celebrated yesterday. There was nothing for me to celebrate today. "Thanks," I whispered.

"And you're going to pull Eric in for the biggest kiss you've ever had in front of everyone," Heather teased, leaning in slightly so that no one else could hear her.

We were both smirking at each other as I laughed and shoved Heather gently. She was laughing and I shook my head at her. I was going to miss her more than anyone else in here. I would miss all of them, but I was sure that I would miss Heather the most. I wanted to tell her the truth more than anything else but I knew that I couldn't. No one could know.

"I will," I told her.

It was a lie but Heather didn't see through it. I wondered if maybe she was losing some of her Candor qualities. "Don't worry. We'll have fun later," she said.

"Of course. I'll see you later, Heather. I love you. And thanks," I told her softly.

She smiled at me as I grabbed her for one last hug, quickly letting her depart to the rest of our friends. "Love you too!" she called.

Once I saw Heather leave and the door clicked shut behind her I turned on my heels and headed over to the chair that I would be taking my final test in. I took a deep breath and walked up the stairs to it, letting my eyes wander slightly. I wanted to know just how many people were really here. It seemed like there were a lot.

Up on the stage area there was only Four, who was waiting for me with the needle in his hand. He was beckoning to me with a tiny nod. Around the rest of the area I could see the others Dauntless leaders that I rarely ever saw, Max, Jeanine Matthews, Lauren, Jack Kang, Marcus Eaton, Johanna, Cameron, Zeke, a few other higher up members, and in the corner of the room, Eric.

Each of them was watching me with a different look on their face. The leaders that I rarely saw were all looking at me with something in between pleasure and curiosity. I wasn't sure that I liked any of their looks. Max and Jeanine Matthews were both watching me with little smiles that unnerved me to my core. I knew that they were both thinking about what was to come tonight.

Jack Kang was giving me an even stare but he had a tiny, comforting smile on his face. Lauren was smiling at me as well, clearly rooting for us. Marcus Eaton had a nasty sneer on his face and I looked past him quickly. Johanna was giving me a bright smile that screamed that she was proud of me. I smiled back at her. Cameron and Zeke were both giving me silly faces and teasing smiles. Eric was the only one that was giving me a look that said more than just I'm proud or I can't wait.
His said that he was proud and everything more. I gave him an almost imperceptible smile before turning and taking a seat in the chair, trying to push my thoughts about him away. Four walked up to me quickly and I leaned back, letting him brush the hair from off of my shoulders. I felt the sharp point of the needle drive into my skin and I shivered slightly. Here goes nothing. Four leaned down to my ear but I continued to stare straight ahead of me.

"You're ready. You can do this," Four said.

"Thank you."

"They can see your hallucinations on the screen. So you get past your fears the way a Dauntless would, but do it quickly," Four warned me softly so that no one else could hear.

I nodded at him but stopped the moment that I felt the needle tugging at the skin in my neck. "Right. Get out of there fast and keep the number one ranking. Thanks Four, for everything. I'll see you on the other side. And I'll meet you tonight. You remember the plan?" I asked him.

"Got it. Focus now," he said.

I leaned back, crossing my hands over my lap. Before the plunger was pushed on the needle I glanced over to the edge of the room to stare at Eric once more. He now had a straight face on. He gave me one last nod as the plunger went down and the icy feeling soaked into my veins. Eric's unreadable face was the last thing that I saw before slipping into the abyss.

When the world came back into focus I knew instantly where I was going to be. In the room in Erudite with my parents and Jeanine in there together. It was obvious from the room that we were in that things were going to be going a little different in the fear landscape. For one, I knew for a fact that this wasn't the same room that my original fear had been in. I watched as my parents were each dragged into the room and I reached on my body to see if there was anything that I could use as a weapon.

The only thing that I had was a bobby pin that was in the back of my head. It was against the base of my skull and I grabbed it out of my hair quickly, ensuring that no one could see what I was doing. I knew how to end this fear sim before it could even really begin. There was no way that I was going to let her say anything. I had to win this one. Jeanine had taken enough from me. She was not going to take my spot in Dauntless as well. Not the one that I earned.

Moving carefully I snapped the bobby pin in half and turned up the edges to make sure that they were sharp enough. Hiding it in the palm of my hand I watched as Jeanine Matthews walked into the room with two body guards at her side. They each grabbed onto one of my parents and I walked up to Jeanine slowly.

"Miss Freesia. Do you know why you're here?" Jeanine asked.

She had a bright smirk on her face and I watched as she held up a hand, motioning to her men to put their guns up to my parent's heads. This had bothered me for so long, but it didn't bother me anymore. I was ready. I stared at her for half a second before nodding with a smirk of my own.

"Yes," I answered quickly.

I grabbed onto the bobby pin tightly before running after her and jamming the edge into her eye. Jeanine dropped to the ground, bleeding all over the place and screaming to the bloody skies. I blocked out all sights of her and grabbed the gun from the floor, the one that she must have been holding before. Turning to the two men that seemed to be in between killing my parents, killing me,
or helping Jeanine, I put off two shots through each of their eyes.

My heart was pumping as I waited for the second fear to arise. The blue room that I was in faded and I watched as another room came into view. This one was gray and I stared at it in horror. I knew which one was coming. This was the one where I had to kill Eric to prevent Jeanine from carrying out her plans. I hated this one. A gun was strapped to my thigh and I grabbed it, checking to make sure that there was still only one bullet. Just like I had expected, the fear hadn't changed. There was still only one bullet.

Knowing what I had to do, I dashed behind the computer counter and waited for everyone to walk into the room. It took a moment or two but when they did I made sure not to waste a moment's time. Eric came in first and behind him I could just barely see the swish of blonde hair that I knew would be Jeanine. I aimed over the edge of the computer cabinet and just before I ducked out I caught the sight of Jeanine's grinning face. Jumping out, I aimed the gun at Eric's forehead and pulled the trigger. The gun recoiled and I watched as Eric fell to the ground, another body falling behind him, their limbs tangling together.

I barely had time to mourn what I had done and watch the lifeless eyes of Jeanine and Eric before the scene changed once more. It felt like I was flying through the fear landscape right now. I knew that I couldn't even get through Lauren's fear landscape this fast. The room went through a strange warp and the next thing that I knew I was falling. I let out a short shriek before my feet hit the ground of the walkway in between the Erudite and Candor buildings. My baby sister dying because I couldn't get to her fast enough. I knew how to get through this one. I just had to go fast.

Brushing through the crowd quickly, I noticed that I was getting lots of nasty looks. It didn't matter. There was only one thing that mattered to me right now. I dashed after the man that I needed before catching him out of the corner of my eyes. The Factionless man was already at my mother's side. He had his hand on her arm and I grabbed after him. When I was just a few paces shy of the man I jumped the rest of the length, making sure that he wasn't going to get to her this time. He growled darkly as I shoved him to the ground and punched him in the throat. My mother and father both cried out but it didn't matter. My mother was safe.

I stood weakly from the ground, searching desperately for the right words to say to my parents but I never got the chance. As soon as I got up from my spot on the ground and straightened up I noticed that the world had changed again. I shivered as I watched and saw that I was back down in the snake pit. This was certainly one of my worst fears. I darted over to the walls of the cave as the snakes began to slither out of the edges of the cave and I screamed as one of the snakes got in a good bite to the edge of my shin. I knew that I could keep going. I had been bitten plenty of times before when I was practicing this fear.

My legs pumped as I ran over to the edge of the pit and grabbed onto the bottom rock. I groaned as my legs and arms strained at each grab and more than once I felt the snakes bite at my hands and feet. I cried out softly at each new bite and groaned as I felt the blood pooling around my wrists and ankles. It didn't matter. All that mattered was that I got out of here. I was slowly making progress as I grabbed the top of the wall of the cave and yanked myself out. A few snakes came flying up with my leg and I cried out in fear as I straightened up and began to run at a full sprint away from the cave, ignoring the sharp pains in my ankles.

As I continued to run I jumped in surprise when I went smashing into the wall of another room. This one was white and I rolled my eyes. It was the room where all of my friends and family were gathered to insult me. Like the other times that I had been in here I was with the other initiates, my friends in Dauntless, Iris and Florian, my parents, and Eric. Jeanine Matthews was in the room too and I knew that somewhere she had two of her goons watching over Four's body. The thought sent
chills down my spine.

One by one they all went back through insulting me and I had to listen to them all. I hated thinking that some part of them might have been right. I hated thinking when they told me that I was going to die that they were right. I watched as Jeanine called out for the men that held Four's corpse and I growled deep in my throat. As Jeanine teased me I grabbed out for the gun that one of her men was holding.

She yelled in surprise as I shoved the butt of the gun into the man's face before turning and firing a bullet into her knee. She dropped weakly and I smirked down at her. I raised the gun once more to shoot her again, directly in the forehead, but before I got the chance the scene changed again.

Just as I had expected, I was back in Dauntless, standing in the training room. I leaned back and waited for Eric to walk into the room, just like I knew that he would. It took a few moments longer than I had thought that it would but Eric finally walked into the room and I smiled, trying to pretend like I didn't know why he was here. He grinned at me and I gave him a smile back. Before he could try to smooth talk me into sparring with him I swung a fist out, managing to catch him in the cheek. It connected roughly with him and I watched as he fell to the ground hard. It was obvious that he hadn't been anticipating me to hit him.

For a few moments we traded blows back and forth before he managed to catch me under the leg and drag me out to the Chasm. It was the same thing that always happened. I was too weak to fight back with him on that one. I thrashed back at forth, trying to get away from him, but my thrashes weren't strong enough. And I knew that they never would be. I had to grab the railing.

That was the one way that I knew that I could beat him. As he dragged me to the edge of the Chasm I caught the railing just before Eric could throw me over and I wrapped my legs around his waist, kicking off to the side. Each time Eric caught me but I refused to give up. I was going to get him away from me. I kicked out a few times in his jaw and shoulders before his grip on me finally loosened enough for me to kick him over.

I wrapped my arms around the Chasm railing as tightly as I could before kicking out at Eric one last time. My booted foot connected with his cheek and I watched as he began to slip over the edge of the railing. He caught onto my thighs and I groaned at the sudden pain that was shooting through my thighs as I slipped over the edge of the walkway. It took me a few kicks to Eric's face to get him to release me but once he had I managed to weakly pull myself back up onto the walkway, nearly vomiting on myself. He was heavier than I had expected. And now his corpse lay at the bottom of the Chasm.

I tried to sit back up and let out a breath but before I could I went shooting up in the dentist chair that was in the fear landscape room. Everyone was sitting around giving me a soft round of applause and I noticed a few strange expressions being exchanged from between Eric, Four, Jeanine, and myself.

"Well done. Well done. There's no way that anyone else is going to take over the number one spot," Four said, making me laugh.

"Thanks," I muttered.

He was right. It had only taken me just over seven minutes. "Now go sit outside. Wait for me. Try not to dwell on everything," he warned me softly.

Weakly I nodded at him before standing. As I exited the room I walked past Eric and Jeanine. He gave me a little nod and Jeanine had a wicked smirk on her face. Not wanting to face what was going to happen in a few hours I leaned back on the wall and closed my eyes, choosing to walk past
my friends and not say anything to them. They didn't seem much for chatting anyways. Not that I had expected them to. Everyone was nervous for what was to come.

As I sat against the wall I watched as the minute and hour hand on the clock ticked by and the rankings moved over the electronic board, moving their people into their final spots. One by one my friends began to rejoin me as we all watched the rankings finalize themselves. While people were becoming more and more excited I was getting more and more nervous. It was getting too close to when I was supposed to leave.

In just a matter of a few dozen minutes Four and I were going to have to go and take care of both Jeanine and the war. There was no way out of it. We had officially reached the end of the line. Our time was up and we were about to go on a suicide run. It killed me to think about it but we were finally here. I tried to distract myself by watching the rankings move around but when Heather came out of the room I smiled slightly, forgetting what I had to do for just a moment.

She was going to be safe in the top ten. That meant no Fence duty for her. Unfortunately though, Colt had managed to worm his way into the safe side of the rankings. He would be staying in Dauntless. Although it looked like he would be on Fence duty at least. It turned out that it was Hunter and Aria that were leaving. At least I got rid of Hunter.

As the bell rang, signaling the end of initiation I heard the cheers from everyone around me. We had all made it. All of my friends were whooping and yelling at each other and I smiled as they all ran out into the Pit, beckoning for me to join them. I said that I would but it was just another lie. Most of the other Dauntless members were all laughing at our antics and I smiled softly. I wished that I could be like one of them, enjoying that we were finally real members of the Factions that we had all fought so hard to become a part of.

I watched as the last of my friends ran off towards the Pit and I gave Heather a shouted promise that I would be out there soon. A hand laid itself on my shoulder and I turned back to see that it was Eric who was standing behind me. He was smirking down at me and I gave him a weak smile, trying not to show that I was nervous.

"Not bad, Amity," Four said.

"Thanks."

"Enjoy the celebration. I have things to do tonight. If you want I'll be back later," he shrugged.

I knew where he was going. Little did he know that we were going to the exact same place. "Okay," I muttered.

"Probably around midnight or so," he continued.

"I'll be there."

Stop lying to him. I nodded again and waited for him to leave me. He did, but it wasn't the way that I was expecting. Eric grabbed the back of my head and I gasped loudly as his planted a harsh kiss on my lips. I heard a plate clatter behind me as I stood stupidly ramrod still. He finally broke away from me, but not before giving me a proud wink.

"See you around, Amity," he said before turning and leaving.

"Bye," I muttered.

It didn't take long for me to smile bashfully as I turned the other way, trying to avoid the shell-
shocked gazes of the Dauntless members that were still flooding in the hallway. Turning on my heels, I headed to walk away, not wanting to make this any worse for me. Damn Eric, I should have known that he would do something like that the minute that I was a real Dauntless member.

"What the hell?" a Dauntless woman whispered as I walked through the hallway.

"Did Eric just kiss her?" a man that was standing near her asked.

Come on people, was it that hard to figure out what Eric had just done? A loud and barking laugh came from the far end of the hallway and I blushed softly. If I somehow lived through tonight I was going to kill Eric for this. I was never going to hear the end of it. This wasn't the way that I'd wanted our relationship to become public knowledge.

"Isn't that the Amity transfer?" another man asked.

They had to be joking. I was a real Dauntless member now, they weren't allowed to call me the Amity transfer anymore. But I knew that they always would. Just the way that Eric always would. Another woman that was standing at the end of the hallway was the next one to speak.

"That was Eric, right?" she asked her friends.

I nearly laughed at her words. Of course it was Eric. I supposed that it would have shocked me too if I were one of them. I was still a little shocked myself. Walking out of the main area for the fear landscapes I headed towards the train station, trying to sneak past a few kids that were darting into the Pit for the celebration. This seemed to be one of the biggest days here in Dauntless. I wished that I could be here to celebrate it with them.

"Come on! The party is starting!" a few younger kids yelled to me as they ran by. I smiled at them and shook my head. They were faster than I could ever give them credit for. "Come on! It's time to go!"

They continued to yell as they banked the corner for the Pit. I watched through the walls that led to the Pit with a soft smile as my friends were welcomed as full members into the folds of Dauntless. They looked thrilled. A few times I had to shift behind the wall to avoid their gazes. I knew that they were all looking for me considering that I had said that I would be right there.

"You ready?" Four called out to me.

"Sure."

He was standing only a few feet from me. He was probably the only person in the compound right now, beside myself, that wasn't smiling. He was standing there with some clothes in his hands that I looked over. I could tell that they were the clothes that he wanted me to wear. They were more protective, like the ones that I had worn during our mission to Amity a few months ago. I nodded at him and grabbed the clothes, walking on shaky legs with him towards the train station.

As we walked I finally turned back to Four and attempted a smile. It probably looked a hell of a lot more like a sneer. "Four," I called.

"Yeah?"

"I'm not ever going to be ready. But being here and not being alone, that's the best thing that I could ask for," I told him honestly.

"I'll always be here. Until the end."
Four smiled at me sadly and grabbed my hand. I noticed that his were about as clammy as mine were. As we exited the building towards the train station I risked a glance up at the clock. It was only just approaching six. I smirked, perfect timing on our part. We walked hand-in-hand towards the train and I sucked in a breath as it approached. This was it. No matter what was about to happen, this was it. And I was glad that I wasn't alone.
Chapter Twenty-Three

The train came roaring past us and for a moment I found my feet glued to the ground, unable to move. It seemed that Four felt the same. He was frozen in his spot as the train went blowing past us. As each car moved past I could practically see myself in it. The first time I was on the train, headed into the Dauntless compound. Heather standing close to me, meeting all of my friends for the first time.

Then again, a few months later, on the way to Capture the Flag. I had been so nervous yet so excited. I hadn't understood just how big of a deal it would be. All I had been concerned about was that Eric had just shot me in the stomach to wake me up. Then the last time that I'd been on it, on the way to Erudite when I had gone to get the plans. The last step forward in Eric and I's relationship. That night everything had changed between us.

All of the thoughts came flying through my mind and each of them made my heart twist a little more. Every time a car passed us by I saw another face of someone that I was hurting by doing this. It was just now that I was starting to understand how many people I was really going to hurt by this. Mom and Dad were the worst. They had a new baby to keep themselves occupied. Would they feel like they had ignored me in the weeks leading up to my death? I hoped not.

Unfortunately they would never understand why I had to do this. Not unless the plan worked. And if the plan worked there was a damn good chance that they would never want to see me again. I hated this but I had to do it. I would not let this world fall into a war that I knew for a fact I could have stopped. Maybe my life wouldn't change if I did that but I would never forgive myself for knowing and doing nothing.

My hand tightened around Four's briefly and I wondered if he was thinking the same things that I was. I knew that he, like me, wasn't afraid of death. But there had to be something about this that was hurting him. Either something that he was afraid of or someone that he was afraid he would end up hurting. I wondered if there were people in the compound that hurt him to leave behind. Probably Zeke. Maybe some of his other friends. But I couldn't imagine that there was anyone else.

His family were all back in Abnegation and I wasn't sure how he felt about any of them. He had never said anything to make me think that he was fond of them. But then again, maybe this was easier. Maybe it was easier to not have anyone to say goodbye to. It was definitely lonelier, but it was probably easier.

As the end of the train neared I felt Four tugging at my arm to get me to run. Unless we wanted to run all the way to Erudite we would have to leave now. We both broke into a slow run before blasting into a full sprint. Four and I broke apart for a moment before allowing each other to dash into the last available train car. Four went in first and hung out of the side of the car, reaching down a hand for me. My legs pumped harder than I thought was possible and as I reached out and grabbed his hand, yanking myself upwards.

His hands went around my waist as he supported me against him. My hands wrapped around the edge of his shirt and I yanked him in after me. We both went stumbling across the train car awkwardly as we each fell into a seat on the back wall, laughing softly. I figured that it was because our minds were elsewhere that we weren't as steady on our feet as we normally were.

Once we had both steadied ourselves and fallen into the seats normally I leaned back and took a look around at the car. I knew this car. This was the same car that I had been in on my way to Dauntless for the first time. I recognized it from the childish writing that was scratched into the back corner. It
was almost laughable. It made sense that the same way that I came into Dauntless would be the same way that I was leaving it.

I could see everyone in here just as clear as I could on that day exactly eight months ago. It felt like a lifetime ago. I could see Heather, trampling me as she jumped into the car. I could see Jade and Colt, each sneering at us like we were the dirt on the bottom of their shoes. I could see Cole in his pathetic attempt to flirt with me. I could see all of the boys, each showing me who they were now that they were free.

The mood seemed so much different now. On that first day there had been so much excitement. On that first day there had been nerves and sorrow for leaving everything that I had known, but they had been overpowered by the knowledge that I had picked the place where I would be happy to live out the rest of my days. For a long time I had wondered if I had made the right choice. I had wondered that even more once everything with Jeanine had started.

But even now, sitting here on my way to who-knew-what, I knew that I had made the right choice. Even eight months of happiness was better than a lifetime of boredom. It was worth it. Meeting all of my friends, Zeke, Four, and Tori. Especially Eric - who was the best part of Dauntless. It was all worth it.

The train gave a small lurch and I felt a bit of bile rise in my throat. I didn't want to do this. But it was already too late. The last chance that I'd had to back out of this had already passed me by. Every inch of my body was telling me to turn back and run, but I knew that it was the wrong thing to do. This was what I had come to Dauntless for. I was here to be brave and do something good with my life. Even if this was the only good thing I would ever do.

"Alex?" Four called.

I glanced over at him. "Yeah?" I asked, wanting him to say whatever it was that he was thinking.

"There's something that I want to tell you before we get there. Just in case something -" he began.

I cut him off before he could say anything else. "Stop," I said quickly.

"Let me talk, Alex."

"Please don't," I muttered.

I knew what he wanted to say and it was not something that I wanted to hear. I didn't want to hear him give me the 'if we don't survive' speech. Until I was sure that our lives were in danger I wanted to pretend that I would walk back into the Dauntless compound tonight and celebrate with me friends, finding myself in Eric's bed later.

"Come on -"

"Don't," I muttered, surprised at how soft my voice was. "Please don't. Nothing is going to happen to us."

Four merely cut me off again.

"Let me tell you," he said.

That was when I realized that whatever he wanted to tell me was something that he wanted to get off of his chest. It had to be serious if it was something that Four wanted me to hear that badly. He never wanted to talk to me that badly. The only time I'd heard him speaking to me like that was when he
had given me the serious talk about Eric and I. It had to be something serious if he was telling me right now, on the way to what could very well be our deaths.

"Okay," I whispered.

"It's something that I've never told anyone. The only people that know are my parents," he said softly.

And that was what told me that I was right about it being something serious. If it was something that only his mother and father knew it had to be a big deal. Hell, I was pretty sure that there was nothing that my parents knew that no one else did. There were plenty of things that others knew that my parents didn't.

"Alright," I said softly, motioning for him to continue.

For a few moment we sat in silence as Four began to breathe in and out slowly. Whatever this was was certainly something that Four was not proud of. I grabbed onto Four's hand and pulled it over into my lap. I knew what it was like to tell a secret that ate away at you. It was scary and freeing all of the same time.

"You can tell me, Four. I won't judge," I whispered.

"I know. I told you that I was raised in Abnegation," Four said.

"Yeah. I know."

"My parents were Evelyn Eaton and Marcus Eaton. My name is Tobias Eaton."

My head felt like it was spinning. Tobias Eaton. I'd finally earned his real name. "Tobias," I muttered awkwardly. "It doesn't suit you."

"There were a number of reasons that I changed my name," he muttered.

It was nice that he had told me his final name. I appreciated that he trusted me enough to tell me. But why would he tell me something like that right now? And was he serious that he was really Marcus Eaton's son? That was when I realized what his comment about having multiple reasons that he changed his name actually made sense. No one had seen Marcus Eaton's son for years. No one even knew who he was.

"Eaton? Marcus Eaton was your father?" I asked him stupidly.

"He is," Four muttered.

I took a few deep breaths and shook my head at him. There was no way that the rumors of Marcus Eaton being abusive could be true. Could they? "There were all sorts of rumors that Marcus Eaton abused his son and that was what lead him to transfer Factions. I never believed them. I always thought that it was just something to make people hate him," I said softly.

With everything that was about to happen, I didn't want to upset Four in the event that the rumors were true. "They're true. All of them," Four nearly snapped.

My throat closed itself off slightly. They were true. I had no idea that anything like that was true. I'd always thought that they were just nasty rumors. Marcus Eaton really had abused his son and his son was sitting right in front of me. Was this why Four was as hard as he was? Or was that something that Dauntless had done to him?
"My mother died when I was younger. My father was so furious, so broken up about it, that he started to take out his anger on me. A belt. That was what he used to use to hit me with," Four admitted.

I shivered at the admonition and shook the image of a younger Four recoiling away from his father. "Four... I-"

"So hard that I was sure that I was going to die. When I took my Aptitude Test it seemed that they thought that I would have been best off in Abnegation. But I couldn't stay there. Not with him there. So I decided that I would go to Dauntless. And I did. When I dropped my blood into the burning coals I had never seen my father so angry. If he could have hit me right down there on that stage I'm sure that he would have," Four rambled.

"You made the right choice," I muttered.

My eyes were watering slightly at the image of my tough trainer and friend reduced to nothing more than a sniveling child, terrified of his own blood. It made me want to hug him and rip out Marcus Eaton's throat at the same time. I wanted to say that I was sorry, to say anything comforting, but that wasn't what came out.

"Why tell me all of this? Why now?" I asked him. Heartless, Alex.

All of me wanted to spit something out and tell him that I was sorry for what I had just said and that I was sorry for everything that had happened to him but I was unable to say anything else. My voice seemed to have been lost. I merely stared at him and willed for him to say something to alleviate the tense air.

"Because I want someone to know. I've never told anyone that story, Alex. No one. Not Zeke, not anyone else. My father is the only one that knows. And now you," Four admitted.

It only made me feel even worse for not saying something else. "Thank you for telling me," I said softly.

"I trust you."

"I trust you too. I'm so sorry, Four. I'm really sorry that happened to you," I said, thanking myself silently for finally saying something to him.

He nodded at me and I grabbed his hand a little tighter, holding it in my lap hoping that he couldn't feel my arms shaking. I wished that I could have said that it was the cold air but it was only my nerves. "It happened. It's over," he muttered.

"You're a good man. You didn't deserve anything like that to happen to you," I told him.

Four nodded at me and grinned. "No one deserves something like that," he said.

"You know, you're more like Eric than you know. He had a terrible childhood too," I told Four.

The last thing that I wanted to do was admit to Four everything that had happened to Eric when he was growing up in Erudite. It wasn't my business to tell. And I was sure that Eric would kill me if I admitted to Four what his childhood was like. Part of me was convinced that Eric didn't even like me knowing about his childhood. But it was a little too late to take those admonitions back.

"Eric told you about his childhood?" Four asked.
His face was shocked and I almost smiled. He still didn't think that Eric was as open to me as he really was. "Kind of," I said.

I pulled my hands out of his. He was staring at me as I stood and grabbed the clothes that Four had brought me. "When?" he asked.

"At first I found out about it on accident. I looked at a file of his in Erudite. Found out about him. At the time I didn't even know that he was from Erudite. From there he started telling me little bits and pieces about himself," I told Four, who nodded at me.

"That's nice," Four muttered.

"I think the two of you really would get along if you could just talk," I told Four.

He merely laughed louder than I had thought he was capable of. It wasn't too often that I heard Four laugh and it was even rarer that he laughed like that. "I don't think so," he said.

"I'm serious. Four, I want you to do something for me," I said softly.

If Four was going to tell me something about him because he believed that he was going to die I wanted Four to know something just in case I was the one that died. Which was a very good possibility. There were a few things that I needed to get off of my chest before the night came to a head.

"What's that?" Four asked, looking every bit curious.

I began to unfold the clothes that Four had brought with him and I smiled at them. I was pretty sure that they were the same clothes that I had worn on our trip to Amity. It almost brought a real smile to my face. We had all been so different just a few months ago. As I looked them over I realized that they were the same, just a little longer.

"Just in case something happens to me tonight and I can't go back to Dauntless I want you and Eric to try and be friends."

"Alex -"

Someone needs to be there for the both of you. The two of you can't keep going the way that you have been. It's going to drive the both of you into an early grave," I told him softly.

It startled me slightly when Four jumped up from his spot in one of the chairs on the back wall of the train and made his way over to me quickly. He grabbed the clothes out of my hand and tossed them back into the chairs, placing his hands in my own. It was the most intense that I had ever seen him, and I had seen him act pretty intensely before.

"Nothing is going to happen to you, Alex. Nothing," he said.

I wanted to cry. He was so determined to save me that I was afraid that it was going to risk his own life. "You either," I said.

He wasn't getting hurt. Not on my watch. "Why do you think that I'm coming with you? For exactly this reason so that nothing happens to you. I could never forgive myself," he muttered.

"You'll have to," I said.

"Eric would never forgive me."
That wasn't the truth. There was no way that that was the truth. Eric would get over me. He had told me enough times that I made no difference to him. That I was just a bed warmer. Maybe he cared about me a little more than he had cared about anyone else but that didn't mean that he wasn't going to be able to get over me. He would. He would have Cameron to help him get past me. Four would manage to get over me too. Everyone would.

"Just make me the promise please. Just in case. I don't think that anything is going to happen to me, but I need to know that just in case..." I muttered, trailing off when I couldn't bear to say the last of the words.

We stood together in silence for a moment, each of staring at the other, neither one of us wanting to say anything. We both knew what was at stake here and we both knew just how likely it was to happen that one of us would die. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Four nodded at me. It was barely perceptible but it was there.

"I promise, Alex," Four said. It was so soft that for a moment I wasn't even sure that he had said anything.

"Thank you," I said softly, grabbing his hand.

We both walked over to the edge of the train car and took our seats again. I grabbed the clothes that he had brought for me and laid them out in my lap, almost afraid to put them on. Mostly because I knew what was coming the moment that I put them on. I knew that things would suddenly become even more real than they had been a few moments beforehand. And I wasn't sure that I was ready to face it just yet. I needed a few more minutes.

"There's something else that I wanted to ask you," I said, after a few minutes of silently picking at the hem of the sleeve on the new shirt.

He turned to me and gave me a little nod. "Of course," he said.

"I see why you changed your name. Didn't want anyone to know who you are," I told him.

"That's right."

"But why did you pick the name Four?"

I had been curious about that from pretty much the moment that I had met him. It was what had originally tipped me off that he was a transfer, the fact that I knew that he had changed his name. I knew that it was something that almost everyone in Dauntless was curious about. Part of me had a feeling that even Eric was curious why Four had changed his name to a number.

"I was wondering if you would ever ask me that," Four said with a wry smile that I returned.

I had wanted to know forever I just hadn't gotten the balls before to ask him why. "I've been curious since the moment that we met," I admitted.

"Took me a while to think of it. My old trainer, Amar, was actually the one that coined it," he said.

"Explain."

"He started calling me it once we found out that I only had four fears," Four finally admitted.

A little laugh escaped my mouth as I shook my head at him. "Four fears?" I asked.
Four nodded at me and I shook my head. I supposed that Four was a little more clever than I thought
that he was. I was impressed. Or at least, I was impressed with Amar. I'd never heard of the man
before so I could only assume that the worst had happened to him. It wasn't something that I wanted
to think about right now.

"Clever. I don't think I'll ever be able to say your name the same way," I told him. Four laughed
loudly and nudged me gently. "And here I was thinking you just had that one stupid fear of heights."

Once more Four let out a little laugh. "At least it's not snakes," he said.

It made us both chuckle. "What are the other ones?" I asked curiously.

One of his fears was probably his father but I couldn't imagine for the life of me what the other two
might be. "I suppose I might as well tell you," he said.

The tone of his voice made me laugh. Might as well, considering that we were probably about to die.
"Tell me," I goaded.

"Obviously there's the fear of heights that you're so fond of," he muttered. I laughed softly. He knew
that after being through the height fear so many times I hated seeing it. "My next one is
claustrophobia. Confined spaces." Part of me wanted to snap at him that I knew what claustrophobia
was but I didn't. I giggled softly. Why the hell was he afraid of confined spaces? "Don't laugh! It's
the truth. And at least I'm not afraid of snakes."

Despite myself I laughed and shoved into Four roughly. "Enough with the snake comments," I
growled.

He was right though. I couldn't laugh at his fears. Not when I was afraid of snakes. Especially not
when you couldn't even find any snakes in Dauntless. The only place that had them was Amity. That
alone could have been reason enough for me to leave in the first place. There were plenty of
confined spaces in Dauntless.

"Why are you afraid of confined spaces? You don't exactly seem like the type that should be afraid
of confined spaces," I told him.

With everything that I tried to think about, I wasn't quite sure what I meant by that. I just knew that I
meant that Four seemed too strong to be afraid of things like heights and confined spaces. He seemed
to be stronger than that. Clearly I had touched a nerve and it made me immediately want to take my
words back. But before I could tell him that he didn't have to explain and not to worry about it, Four
started talking.

"When I was younger my father would punish me. The way that he would punish me, when it
wasn't physical, is he would lock me in the closet for hours on end," he said.


Thinking that someone had ever laid a hand on Four in that way made me furious. It made me want
to go back to Abnegation and rip off Marcus Eaton's head. It was a shock that someone ever had
done that to him, considering the few times we had sparred Four had nearly kicked my head off.

"I suppose I've just always been afraid of confined spaces after that. It just reminds me of those hours
that I spent in the closet, terrified that my father would forget me and I would die," he said softly.

And suddenly my fears felt like nothing. I was willing to die to keep a war from starting. That was a
perfectly reasonable fear but it could have been worse. If that was the way that I want out of this
world, so be it. But Four had real problems. His father had laid unwanted hands on him, the way that no parent should ever think of laying their hands on their children. Four was the one with problems here, not me. I was now making his problems even worse.

"Your father was not your father," I told Four.

He glanced up and looked over at me, clearly startled by my words. "What?" he asked.

"I told Eric the same thing once. Your father didn't deserve you. Anyone that treats their child like that is not their parents. You may share DNA with them but they are not your family. Those of here in Dauntless, Zeke, me, we're your family," I said stubbornly.

It wasn't just me trying to make him feel better. It was the truth. It would always be the truth. Being here in Dauntless had taught me that Faction before blood actually was true in some ways. I still loved Mom and Dad and I would love my little sister when she got here, but the people in Dauntless had become my family. They were the ones that were always here for me. And as for Four, he had no family back in Abnegation. The family that he had were here in Dauntless.

"Yes. You are," Four said with a smile.

"I always will be."

"Eric had a bad childhood, I suppose?" he asked.

Staring at Four for a moment, I nodded slowly. "Not really my place to say, but yes. Not the same as yours. Bad but for a different reason," I muttered.

The two of us stared at each other as Four nodded. We had all had our problems when we were younger. It made my family seem like they were angels, compared to Four and Eric's upbringings. I grinned softly at Four and leaned in to give him a long hug. Once we finally pulled apart I nodded for him to continue telling me his fears.

"The next one is a woman that is holding a gun up at me. There's another gun on the table and I have to kill her. I have to kill an innocent woman," he admitted.

"That sounds like the type of fear that you would have," I said softly.

"Does it?" he asked.

"Yeah. You're strong and noble. Killing an innocent woman would be horrible for you. I think that it shows strength and restraint."

"Thank you. The last one is my father. Holding a belt up at me and hitting me with it. It's the worst fear. It's the one that brings me back to Tobias," Four said softly.

They were all fears that sounded completely reasonable and very much like Four. It was no shock that he had any one of those fears. I just wished that he would have told me all of this before. I would have wanted to be able to help him for longer. I wanted him to know that I was always going to be here for him, no matter what.

"I'm sure that Tobias was just as good of a man as Four is," I told Four honestly.

He gave me a small smile as he leaned back in the chair, folding his arms over his chest. "Weaker... But I suppose that he was a good man too," Four said.
"I would have liked to meet Tobias," I said softly.

Four merely laughed at me and shook his head. I supposed that he didn't think that anyone should have met Tobias. I begged to differ on that one. I really would have wanted to see Tobias before he had turned into the Four that I knew and loved. It would have been interesting to see just how different a few years had made everything with him.

"I wouldn't have wanted you to meet him," Four said.

"Lucky for you, I won't."

"Now it's your turn. Do you have anything to tell me, something that you want to get off your chest before we go in?" he asked.

Chuckling under my breath, I merely smiled. In all honestly I wasn't really sure that I wanted to admit to him the one thing that was clawing at the back of my mind. I hadn't told anyone and I wasn't sure if Four was the first person that I wanted to tell. I had thought that I would have time to tell Heather.

"Want to tell me that you killed a man?" he teased.

Once more I laughed and shoved Four on the edge of the chair. "No, but I'm thinking about it," I said, giving Four a pointed look.

We both smiled at each other. Standing from the chair, I unfolded the clothes that Four had brought me and looked them over. There were long compression pants that were similar to the ones that we wore for training. The only difference was that they were made out of a slightly thicker material and they had something akin to pads over the knee. They were the standard Dauntless black. I slipped my pants down over my waist, glad that Four had the decency to turn while I changed.

"Have you ever been in love?" I asked Four, unable to stop the question.

Decency momentarily forgotten, Four twisted his head back to look at me, the shock plain and clear in his eyes. I smiled abashedly at him and shook my head as I pulled the new pants over my hips and fastened the button. Once I had corrected the areas that the padding was covering I finally glanced over to see that Four was shaking his head at me. Obviously that wasn't the question that he had been expecting me to ask.

"No," Four said.

"I thought not."

As much as I loved Four, I was pretty sure that I had been expecting that answer. So I nodded at him and grabbed the shirt, pulling it over my head. It was long sleeved, the same typical black, and left just a tiny bit of skin revealed at my waist. The sides were made of a protective sort of metal and the same material went over my chest. It made me shiver that it was designed to protect my vital areas from bullet wounds.

"Have you?" Four asked.

Definitely should have been expecting that one. Had I? I was pretty sure that I had never been in love before but it wasn't like I really knew what exactly love was. I knew that my parents were in love. But they were my parents. That was different than someone like me. It was different with a Dauntless. They didn't laugh and smile and love each other. They poked and prodded and beat each other up. That was just the way that we were. I had no clue if I had ever been in love before or not.
There were a few men that I had been with back in Amity. I'd never really been in love with the first few guys that I had been with. I hadn't really liked any of them that much. As much as I loved Florian, he had always just been a friend. He was never anything more than that. And as for Damien, he had been something to pass the time. He was just something that was a little entertaining. But Eric... What was he?

"I - I... I don't know," I said honestly.

It didn't seem that Four was satisfied with that answer. He shook his head at me and took a few steps forward as I grabbed my hair together in my hands and tied it over the back of my head. As sweet as Four was, he was also extremely stubborn and tough. When there was something that he wanted to know, he got it out someone.

"I think you do," he said.

I shook my head at him. I really didn't know. "I don't," I said.

If Four knew I would be more than happy for him to tell me. "Are you in love with Eric?" he asked.

My hands were shaking slightly as I shook my head, partially at myself and partially at him. "I don't know," I told him honestly.

"Are you sure?" Four asked.

"No. I don't know that I'm in love with anyone. I've never been in love with anyone. I mean I've held love for plenty of people. My parents, my friends, everyone here in Dauntless, you... Eric," I said, barely speaking his name at anything above a whisper.

Four was nodding along with me. "But are you in love with him? They're two very different things," he said.

"I don't know if I'm in love with him or not. I was with a friend of mine back in Amity. His name is Florian. I always held some type of love for him in my heart but I was never in love with him. Then there was Damien. I see now that that was all a sham. Neither one of us ever had feelings for the other. But Eric, there's just something different about him," I told Four.

Four nodded at me and I smiled softly. I really did like Eric and part of me wanted to say that I loved him. But I supposed that I really wasn't sure whether or not I loved him or I just enjoyed having someone like that in my life. Maybe it was both. Although I did feel my heart fluttering in my chest every time that I was around him. He was different from any other man that I had ever been with and I craved the feeling. But was it love? I couldn't be sure.

"Alex, I don't know a ton about love. I've never been in love before. I've never been with anyone. Gone on a few dates but never anything serious," Four said.

I couldn't say that it was a total shock. Four didn't seem like the type to really be in a relationship. "Really?" I asked.

"No one ever drew my attention enough. But I do know what love looks like. I know what it's supposed to look like. And I know that the look in Eric's eyes whenever he sees you is the closest thing to love I've ever seen."

The smile that had faded off of my face came back and I sent it in Four's direction. That was a sweet thought. My heart fluttered in my chest. "That's not true," I whispered.
"It is."

"Are you sure?"

"I've known Eric a long time. I've seen him with a lot of people. But I've never seen him look at anyone the way that he looks at you," Four continued.

My heart fluttered in my chest again. Could that really be the truth? Maybe, but probably not. Eric liked me more than the average person but I knew that I didn't mean that much to him. And on the other end, I wished that I could say that I loved Eric. I wished that I could say that I didn't. I wished that it was a simple answer. But the truth was, it wasn't. There were no simple answers. Not with life and certainly not with Eric.

"I like to think that too. But I'm not sure that it's the truth," I told Four softly.

"I am," he chirped quickly.

I couldn't deny that hearing Four say that made me feel just the slightest bit better. "Not after tonight," I muttered.

"I doubt it. Just in case you doubt me, glance over at Eric once we get in there tonight and tell me that it doesn't look to you like he loves you," Four said hardheaded.

If there was any chance that Eric had loved me before, he certainly wasn't going to still love me after tonight. I nodded at Four sadly and shifted in front of him. We were staring out the door and waiting for Erudite to come into view. We had already passed by the Merciless Mart and I knew that Erudite would be coming up soon. It was barely a minute after I had thought that that I saw the Erudite sector pass into view. I felt Four tense at my side and watched as he turned back to nod at me.

"We're here. Take this," he said.

He handed me over a gun and I stared at it for a moment. It felt strange to actually see one that would be mine. One that I might have to use on something other than a paper target. I grabbed the gun from Four's hand and checked the magazine. It was full but it only held six bullets. Six bullets to change the world. I took it from Four and stuffed it down the back of my pants.

"And this."

Four held out the vial of the compliance serum and I grabbed it, pushing it up my sleeve, hiding it from view. I had almost forgotten that we had it. But it was a vital part of the plan. I couldn't forget this part. I was sure that we would both die if I never got the chance to use it.

Despite the fact that we were here and probably should have gone over the plan again it didn't seem that Four or myself could bring ourselves to talk about it. Four nodded for me to step back and I did, leaving him just enough room to take a running start. He did so and I watched as he took a flying leap off of the train. I followed a moment later, landing at his side. There were a few Erudite members milling around that looked a little surprised at our sudden appearance but they said nothing to us and we said nothing to them. They weren't who we were here for.

My hand was on my waist and the tip of my finger was crossed over the gun that was hidden from view. Just in case. Even though I was sure that everyone else wasn't aware of what was happening tonight, I found myself extremely nervous. As we marched through the Erudite building I didn't bother giving a look around. All that mattered was that we were headed in the right direction.

It made me feel a little sick to my stomach that we were really here. I nodded at Four to take the front
and I watched as he headed through the lower halls. The woman at the desk was trying to say something to us but neither one of us listened. Neither one of us gave a damn about manners anymore. The only thing that mattered was that we got down to Jeanine before she could hear that we had come early. That I was here early. And that I had brought a friend.

The halls were cordoned off with a sign that announced that they were closed for a special event. I was right about the fact that she wanted to keep this all quiet until she knew for a fact that she was doing the right thing and that her plan would succeed. I smirked and shook my head, knowing that it was to keep people from coming to see what it was that Jeanine wanted me to do. She wanted to ensure that she would succeed in her plan. She wouldn't.

Four and I easily brushed past the sign and headed into the lower levels. Four was leading us and I realized that he had probably looked over every plan of the Erudite building layout to ensure that he knew where we were supposed to go before we even got here. I was sure that Four knew exactly where it was that we needed to go. So I nodded for him to lead us in the right direction.

Four motioned for me to grab my gun and I did so, walking with him along the edge of the walls. We were slinking along slowly to ensure that we weren't about to give away our movements. As we walked we slowly got closer and closer to the room with a door that was just barely cracked. It must have been the room that I was supposed to go in. I could hear two voices ringing inside and I took a deep breath, trying to ignore it.

The scratching in the back of my head was telling me that one of them was Eric and the other was Jeanine. We walked through the halls and just before we could break into the room that I could just barely heard Jeanine's voice drifting through. I couldn't quite hear what she was talking about. Four turned back to look at me as if to ask whether or not I was ready. No. But I nodded my head yes anyways.

My heart was pounding in my chest and I was sure that at any minute it was going to beat out of my chest and go flopping onto the floor. At least I wouldn't have to worry about dying later. I could just off myself without a problem. Four's boot connected with the door to shove it open. There were a few gasps and I ran after him as we darted into the room.

There were six guards in the front of the room and I heard a shrill shout that must have been Jeanine. The largest man raised a gun at me but Four was faster. He fired and the man went down. I fired at the man that advanced on us next and clipped the man's shoulder. I was shaking so badly that I could barely focus. I righted myself a little more before firing again, this one piercing his forehead, killing him. I just killed a man. But I couldn't stop there.

Reaching down again I looked for the next man. I hadn't quite been expecting it to go this fast. Another man fired at Four and I breathed out a sigh of relief when I saw that the bullet had just clipped him. It was just a flesh wound. He would be fine. I grabbed my gun tighter in my hand before shooting off another bullet, this one going into another man's head.

Four had dropped another man as we both shot two men that looked like they may have been twins. I knew that I only had two more bullets and there were two more guards. I took out the one on the farthest left, hissing in fury when he ducked out of the way, the bullet barely catching him in the stomach. I wasn't quite sure whether I had finished him or not but I didn't want to use the last one, just in case something else happened.

A pained grunt sounded off to my side and I turned to see that Four was on the ground, clutching his shoulder. Someone had shot him. I couldn't believe that I hadn't seen someone shoot him. He really was going to get hurt because of me. I shouted as I ran after him, panicking when I saw the blood that was coating the hand that was covering his shoulder.
"Four! No!" I yelled.

My heels ground against the stone floor as I went to jump over one of the dead guards just before a click of a gun sounded off to my side. I glanced out from behind me to see that Jeanine had picked up the gun that had once been Four's before he had dropped it. Clearly she was the one who had just shot him with it. For a moment I thought that she was pointing it at me but one good look made me realize that it was pointed at Four.

She had caught me and she knew it. "Leave him be," I warned.

"Drop the gun. Now. Or your little friend dies," Jeanine growled.

Jeanine wore a searing smile and despite everything that I wanted to do, I dropped the gun. There was no way that I was getting him killed. Four was attempting to get back to his feet as I looked around the room. Blood was soaking the floors and all of the guards that had once been protecting her were all fallen around the front of the room. They hadn't been ready. They had only been expecting me and they hadn't been expecting me for another hour.

"Alex," a breathy voice called from behind me.

It was a voice that I knew all too well. With a knot forming in my stomach I turned back and saw that Eric was standing off in the corner of the room. There was a look in between fury and pain on his face and I knew that if he could have slapped me right now he would have. I gave him a last, sorry, glance before turning back to Jeanine, who looked all too pleased at the turn of events. She walked over and kicked Four in the bullet wound. The moment that I twitched to move and kill her with her own necklace, she brought the barrel of the gun down to Four's forehead, making my movements immediately cease.

Jeanine was wearing the same blue suit that she seemed to always be wearing and she gave a nasty grin as she stepped in between Four and myself, beckoning Eric to come closer. He looked like he had been run over by one of the trains. My heart gave a painful twinge. I knew that I had done the wrong thing by not telling him the truth.

"I suppose they were rather useless anyways," she said, motioning to the six dead men around us.

Men that Four and I had killed. Four attempted to get back to his feet but one kick from Jeanine sent him back on all fours. "Get away from him," I warned.

She barely looked at me. "It shouldn't be a surprise that you're early, or that you brought help. No. None of this should be a surprise for anyone. With the exception of you, Eric. Did you know that it was your little Amity friend that would be here today?" Jeanine asked him.

It drove me out of my mind the way that she spoke to him. She had been waiting for this to happen. If he could have killed Jeanine with just one glare I was sure that she would be dead ten times over already. He was seething. His chest was rising and falling rapidly as he looked between Jeanine and myself.

"Did you know that it was her when you told me about this?" Eric asked Jeanine.

She merely nodded at him slowly, looking all too pleased with herself. "Of course I did," she said.

She turned around and looked back to me. "Jeanine -"

"Now it leaves just the four of us. Well, the three of us," she corrected herself, looking down at Four and giving a sharp giggle. She had interrupted Eric and I was sure that she wouldn't let him speak
much tonight. I merely glared darkly at her. "I've brought you here for a reason, Alex. I told you once that I wanted us to be friends. I still think that there's a chance that we can be friends."

"We are not friends," I snarled.

"See... There's something that I need from you. A box. The Box. There's only one person that's capable of opening it. And that's you. Come here," Jeanine snarled.

She began to take a few steps back from me but I refused to move. This was not going the way that I had planned. I hadn't been expecting Four to get shot. I had been hoping that I would be able to kill Jeanine and finish this without a fight. But I had also been convinced that this plan was suicide. And I was proving myself right.

"No," I growled. She turned back to me and raised an eyebrow.

"You are in no place to be making demands," she said.

Unfortunately she was right. "Let Four go. Let Eric walk out of here. You don't need either of them here. This is between you and me. No one else needs to be here. There's no point in having them here other than to make this harder," I tried to reason.

Of course I should have figured that Jeanine was not the reasonable type. She took another step towards me so that we were nearly pressed up against one another. But I made no mistake. Her gun was still trained on Four and she would kill him if I made one wrong move.

"That's exactly why they're going to stay. See? You won't make a stupid move while his life is in danger. And as for Eric? I'm not letting him leave. Simply because I want him to see you. That machine up there? No one has survived it. If you continue the trend Eric has to watch you die. If you live, well he can watch me kill you instead."

Not once had her smiling gaze faltered and I hated myself for shivering. I could not let her see that she was getting to me. To Eric's credit he hadn't wavered either. With the exception of a small twitch in the corner of his eye he had remained completely still. Just as I thought that I saw Eric take a step forward and advance on Jeanine. But she was faster and clearly knew what he was thinking about doing. Before Eric could get to her she raised her pistol to my forehead and I froze in my spot, the breath in my throat catching.

"Ah, ah," Jeanine tutted. "You work for me. Your spot, it's because of me. And just in case that isn't enough anymore, her life is now in danger. You make one move to kill me, just know that even if I die she'll be dead too. Are you willing to risk her life? Are you willing to kill her yourself?"

To my surprise, Eric didn't just stay in silence. "Fuck the spot in Dauntless. Fuck leadership. No matter what happens in here today, if I ever see you again, I'll blow your head off," Eric snarled.

It wouldn't have been enough to say that I was a little surprised. I turned to him with a slightly shocked glare and went to take another step towards him. Just as I had expected, Jeanine aimed her gun down to Four making me freeze again. No matter what any of us did, the four of us were at an impasse. At least until Four could get over the pain in his shoulder and upper chest and get up to help us. But in the meantime I knew that he was down for a count.

"Stop this. Stop threatening him. You've done enough to him. To both of them. You wanted me here, well here I am. Tell me what you want. Why am I here?" I asked Jeanine.

Her gaze turned from Eric onto me and she let out a shrill bark of laughter. "How sweet of you. Trying to save both the men that you love," she commented.
My cheeks burned slightly at her words but it seemed that they had gone unnoticed by both Four and Eric. "What do you want?" I repeated harshly.

"You should never have brought him here. Here's going to die for you," Jeanine told me, motioning back to Four.

My vision went red but I forced myself to stay still. Four was not going to die because I couldn't control my temper. "No. He won't," I muttered.

"And him, he's going to watch you die. You should have never set foot near her, Eric. But I know that you've always liked to prove that you can have whatever you want," she continued.

Eric's jaw set but he said nothing to her. "Enough," I snarled. I was in no position to be making demands or speaking to her like this but I couldn't help it. She was making my nerves stand on edge. "This is between the two of us. They don't matter." It wasn't the truth. They could make a huge difference. "What did you want me here for?"

Like herself, my patience was wearing thin. She took a few steps away from us but I didn't miss the way that her finger was curled around the trigger on Four's gun. She was about ready to kill me, at least once I did whatever it was that she wanted from me. Something about this Box thing.

"Yes. Enough of the games. This is what I brought you here for," Jeanine said.

She motioned to the corner of the room and I glanced over. It looked like something out of the old movies that I had watched on occasion when Eric was busy. There was a large metal machine with odd looking silver pipes running out from the ceiling. It looked like a torture device. I had a bad feeling that Jeanine wanted me to do something with it. The other thing that she was motioning to was a decrepit gold box. It had the symbols of all five Factions on it and stood out like a sore thumb in the mainly black, gray, and white room.

"What is all of this?" I asked Jeanine stupidly.

She smiled and motioned to the machine that was in the back of the room. "This... Well we aren't quite sure what to call it. But rest assured we do know what it does," she told me with a sour grin. "It works directly with this. We call it the Box, simply. It came to us from a friend. I believe that inside it holds the key to your kind. More distinctly, the key to destroying your kind."

All of her information was running through my head but things didn't quite add up. "You said that you believe it holds the key to the information on how to destroy Divergent's," I told her.

I didn't miss her flinch at the word. But she still managed to keep a straight face and nod at me. "I did," she said slowly.

"That means that you haven't actually opened it. You don't know what's inside of it," I reasoned.

It seemed that Jeanine was impressed with my deductive skills. It didn't take a genius to figure out that she hadn't opened the Box yet. She was just running on assumptions. "You are correct. I haven't opened the Box yet. I would do it myself but you see to open it, I need one of your kind," Jeanine
"So that's why I'm here. You need a Divergent," I said, frowning softly.

"Yes. I've tried with others before. We quickly learned that a Divergent was the person that we needed. But we soon realized that it wasn't just any one that we needed. We needed someone with an aptitude for all five Factions. In the simulations you see one of each Faction. If you pass the simulation you move on to the next one. If you fail, you die," she said with a bright grin.

Her words reel through my head. I was going to die today, but it wasn't Jeanine that was going to kill me. "I don't understand why you're wasting any time with me. I didn't score all five of the Factions. You would have known that had you bothered to ask me. I lack Candor. I'll fail on the Candor sim. Bringing me here was a waste of both of our time," I told her.

"I wondered if you might ask about that. We've figured out something else about these simulations. You don't actually need to have an aptitude for all five Factions. Many of those we have brought in to try this have passed simulations that they didn't have an aptitude for. The point is to go in and see if you can handle it the way that someone with that aptitude would," she said.

I nodded again and tried to keep my gaze away from Eric, whose sharp stare had been aimed in my direction for most of the past few minutes. As I stared at the machine I wondered just how many people had died at the hands of Jeanine. How many people just like me had died for her stupid vendetta? How many more were going to die if I couldn't get through this? Would she make Four do it once I was gone? Maybe she would make him go first. Punishment for me bringing him here in the first place.

"How many people have died here? How many of them have failed this?" I asked, fighting to keep my voice steady.

"We've lost count," she said with a bright smirk.

My stomach roiled painfully. I knew that she was saying that to try and make me rise to her bait and it was nearly working. My hands were clenched at my side with my nails digging into my palms. Despite the fact that she was probably exaggerating not knowing how many had failed at opening the Box, I was sure that she had killed countless Divergent's to unlock this damned thing. And she would keep killing them until she did.

"I haven't seen anyone unlock more than three of the simulations. But I have faith that you can be the first," Jeanine said.

Three. That was underwhelming. Not that I had been expecting something better. Taking a quick glance down to Four I saw that he was on all fours, clearly trying to get back to a standing position. One nudge from Jeanine sent him back down, plopping onto his front. He looked awful, turning paler by the second.

"Leave him be," I said quickly.

"Say yes," Jeanine shot back.

"Alright. I'll do it. But I want you to do something for me," I told her.

Jeanine whipped back to me faster than I had thought was possible and for a moment I realized that she was actually afraid. I finally had a feeling that I might have had the upper hand in the argument, but that scared me. It wasn't just me. It wasn't just Four. Every single one of us in here were afraid of what was about to happen.
"I don't think that you're in the position to be making demands here. I don't care what you want, Miss Freesia. The only reason that you're still alive is because I permit it. The only reason that you killed my men was because I didn't call more in here. You have no right to demand anything. Eric, grab her," she snapped.

"No," Eric growled.

When he didn't move Jeanine shifted the gun from Four back onto me. "Now," she added.

He quickly moved over to stand at my side. I knew that it was what she was going to do because that was the type of woman that Jeanine was. She was too stubborn to think for a moment that she didn't always have the upper hand in the fight. And I was about to prove that to her. Eric walked up to me and I felt his hand wrap around my forearm. It was tighter than it normally was. So tight that it was almost painful.

It was just because he was extremely nervous. He'd thought that I was going to be a stranger. My hands were shaking under his tight grip. As Eric grabbed me and pulled me into him I shivered. I hated having to do this to him. Slipping the vial out of the corner of my sleeve I turned back to face Eric, jamming it into the vein on his neck before he could react.

His eyes went wide and I heard a shout from Jeanine. The serum immediately emptied from the vial and went into his veins. Eric grabbed my hand in a crushing grip, forcing the needle out of his neck. I heard a gleeful laugh escape Four's throat as Jeanine ran up to me. Before she could get too close though I leaned into Eric.

"I'm sorry," I muttered, well aware that it wasn't going to make any difference.

"Alex..." he started, trailing off as the serum took over.

"Eric, I need you to do something. Raise that gun to my temple. If I give the order, I want you to shoot me," I said, loud enough so that both Four and Jeanine could hear me.

Eric wore a look of horror as he wrapped one arm around my neck, pressing my back against his front. His free hand was holding the gun up against my temple and I could feel him shaking, trying to counteract the effects of the serum. The look in Eric's eyes was something in between fury and horror. Fury at me for what I had done and horror at what I was asking him to do. Not that I blamed him. I would have reacted the same way if it were him asking me to do that.

"What do you think you're playing at?" Jeanine sneered. "I thought that you wanted to live, I didn't think that you were going to ask him to end it. You're going to die here anyways. Why would you think that it would make any difference that he be the one to do it?"

I had been hoping that she was going to ask that. As she shifted towards us I ordered Eric to take a step back. "I spent weeks wondering what it was that I had over you. For the longest time I couldn't think of anything. And then I realized that there was something. You need me. A Divergent, but you need one like me. Someone with a one hundred percent Divergent testing. That's me. You said yourself that there's no one else. You lose me and you lose any chance that you had at opening that Box and figuring out how to destroy the rest of my people. You need me and you need me alive," I warned.

"Clever girl. Very clever. I must say that I'm impressed with you. I didn't think that you had it in you to even think that far ahead," she said.

I scowled but stayed still, trying to ignore the fact that Eric had a gun pressed against my temple. "I
did score Erudite, in case you didn't notice," I snapped.

She merely ignored me. "What do you want? I assume that you want something and that's why you're pulling this little stunt? You care very little for your own life, as we see. Clearly you only care for your friend's life. So what is it?" Jeanine asked.

It was easy to hear the snarl in her voice. "Smart woman," I snapped back at Jeanine. She let out a low growl and stared darkly at me. "I don't give a damn what happens to me but I do give a damn about what happens to the rest of them. You let Four walk out of here to get medical treatment."

Jeanine nodded after a moment's hesitation. "Deal," she agreed.

"You let Eric keep his ranking as a leader in Dauntless. But he never works for you for another day."

This hesitation took a little longer but she finally nodded her agreement. "Deal," she repeated.

I could feel Eric shaking a little behind me, trying to fight the effects of the serum. "You will leave everyone in Dauntless, Abnegation, Candor, and Amity alone. They aren't your toys. You let the war go. Erudite is under your control. We all know that you rule the government truly. You don't need a war," I told her.

This time the anger was clear in her eyes. I knew that this was the part of the deal that she wouldn't like. She took a step towards me but I turned back and whispered to Eric to tighten his grip on the trigger. While I gave a little shiver I felt Eric try to fight the grip he had on the gun. The serum was too strong. He couldn't release the gun.

"Damn you. I need the war. Your people, they need to be exterminated. All they do is pose a threat to the Faction system. You have no right to ask that," she sneered.

"I have every right to ask that," I snapped back. "You promise me that and I go up there and do my best to open the Box. You can kill me after that. Make me a show of what happens to people like me that don't conform. But you do not need this war. You can kill me once I open the Box. Just agree to call of the war. You don't have to kill the other Divergent's. The only thing that you need to do is tell me yes. Tell me yes and I get up there and do whatever you want. You get the Box unlocked and me dead. The things that you want most."

Four was writhing on the ground, probably wanting me to not agree to this. Eric was still shaking and every now and again I could feel him jerk slightly, trying to break the already weak grip that the serum had on him.

"Fine," Jeanine finally agreed.

I had to fight to keep the smile off of my face. "Thank you," I said.

"No war. But if your people try to resist for even a moment, they die. All of them. And you won't be here to stop them. Now get up there. I've waited long enough to see this."

That was all that I needed. She had given me everything that I wanted. I nodded at her and mumbled to Eric to let me move and walk over to the large machine that sat in the corner. Eric stood with me as Jeanine walked us over to it. His gun was still at my forehead. Even if Jeanine tried to shoot me, Eric would get to me faster.

Jeanine motioned for me to walk up to the platform that was right beneath the silver tubes. I stood and watched as Jeanine programmed a few commands into the computer that was clearly hooked up to the machine. The tubes began to writhe around, almost like snakes, and I shivered. Why the hell
did it have to be snakes? They had sharp, pointed rods on the end of each of the tubes and I groaned. This was not going to be pleasant.

The first of the tubes reared back before launching after me and jamming itself into my chest. I yelled out in surprise but for whatever reason, not in pain. The tube didn't hurt. It felt almost like a ghostly tickle in my chest. Eric jolted slightly and I turned to him, giving him a small nod. The serum was still making him stand completely still, his gun never once training away from my skull.

It was horrifying watching as the other tubes circled around me. "There is no time limit but you must pass each of the stages. Pass them or your little friend here dies," Jeanine said, smirking as she leaned over Four.

Her gun was aimed at his head and a lump formed in my throat. Part of my deal had been to leave him be. "You swore!" I shouted.

She merely grinned at me as the second tube came froward and launched itself into my stomach, the claws sinking in. "I did," she whispered to herself.

This time I actually felt a little bit of pain. "You swore to me that you would leave all of them be!" I yelled, trying to escape the grasp of the silver pipes.

But they were locked into my skin and I knew that there was no way that I was going to get out of here. Jeanine was smarter than me. She was planning on this. She knew that the moment that I got in here I would be trapped and she would once more have the upper hand. She was right. She laughed and took a few steps towards me. I could see Eric shaking so that he could break the control of the serum but it still had a hold on him.

"I swear lots of things. Mostly to people like you. Too foolish to see past the objects of their own desires," she said.

There was a small smirk on her face. I watched as she typed in another command and the rest of the silver metal tubes shot up. The first two went soaring into my thighs and another two came down into my shins. It only took another moment before one clawed its way through the skin on the back of my neck and two more launched themselves into my forearms. The tubes lifted me up from the ground but other than an odd tugging sensation there was little pain. Although I did feel like a marionette.

That took a major hit to my pride. Not that it was my pride that I should have been concerned about right now. The spikes at the edge of the tube were all hitting my veins and I knew that the simulation serum must be programmed to run through them. In just a moment I would be trying to fight my way through the Box simulations. Maybe I would be dead in a matter of minutes.

Jeanine was standing at the computer, typing in commands and I looked over at her. She was preoccupied. Eric was still trying to fight the serum. Four was still having trouble standing. It wasn't until now that I'd noticed that he hadn't just been shot once above the chest. He had another bullet wound in the top of his thigh. That was what was slowing him down. Before Jeanine could get the chance to look over at me and hit the final button on the machine I glanced over to Eric.

He was still staring at me and I felt tears prick my eyes. I had hurt everyone tonight but I had hurt him most of all. And I felt absolutely horrible about it. So this was going to be my way to make it up to him. Maybe there was some chance that I could fix things once this was over. Maybe I could change the course of this war.

"Eric! Kill J -"
Before I got the chance to finish I felt the serum run through my veins, effectively cutting off anything that I was going to say to him. Shutting down the last chance that I had to save them. I was going to have to do this. Eric was shaking, trying to follow the order, but I hadn't been able to finish. He was stuck and so was I.

Jeanine was grinning at me and waiting for the serum to take effect. But it seemed that it never did. I merely hovered there and waited for it to start. Never felt the fading into the blackness that I was used to. Instead within the blink of an eye I found myself back in the Dauntless headquarters. Immediately I knew that I was in the Dauntless sim first. Easy. I watched my friends stand at the end of the hall, each one smiling at me. There was a gun in my hand and I stared down at it. Why was I holding this?

And then it became painfully clear as Erudite guards began to stream into the room. I ran forward and raised my gun, killing the first of the men with a single shot. Another turned to me, closer than I had thought that he was, and punched me hard in the face. My grip on the gun loosened long enough for him to pull it out of my grasp and turn it back to point at Cole. I screamed low in my throat and jumped onto the man, wrapping my arm around his front.

Unfortunately I couldn't grab the gun from him and I saw that he was pointing it down at my forearm, probably planning on shooting me with it. So I did the last thing that I could think to do. I leaned down and drove my fingertips into his eyes. He screamed louder than I thought was possible and dropped, letting me grab the gun back from him. I raised it once more and shot through his forehead, ending his misery.

Glancing up as I dashed forward I shot at two more guards that were surrounding Iris and Florian, each one pressed against the wall. Turning away from him I grabbed onto another guard and pulled my arm around his neck, cutting off his air circulation. A minute later he dropped, blue in the face. Three more bullets went to three more guards that were currently fighting against Buck, Dante, Jax, and Draven. A hard punch was sent at my face and I ducked, narrowly dodging it. I turned back and sent my booted foot into the man's knee, making him drop. Another bullet was sent through his forehead, leaving Tori to run for it.

Down the hall I could see that Zeke and Cameron were both bloodied, trying to fight two guards off. One of my bullets went into the taller man's head, killing him immediately. The other turned from the boys and ran after me. I turned to run back but he was faster. He caught the back of my knee and pulled me to the ground. I hit roughly and rolled in pain.

My booted foot went back into his face and I leaned over myself, grabbing his hair to use as leverage to send my knee into his face. He shouted in pain as I drug my nails into his skin and down his neck, grimacing at the sudden sight of his vocal chords. My gun had been knocked away from me so I settled on the one thing that I had hoped that I would never have to do. I grabbed into the man's neck, where I had already made the puncture wounds, and grabbed the first thing that I could.

It was his vocal chords and as I tugged on them, they pulled loose from his neck. I gagged and nearly vomited on the floor but I was never given the chance. The man fell to the ground, dead, and the rest of my friends ceased their fighting. With small nods and smiles in my direction they all backed away and I found myself changing before my eyes.

The room was already familiar to me. The walls were painted a light gray and I knew that I was still in Dauntless. This was in the back halls. But it was no longer the Dauntless sim. I had beaten it. This had to be one of the other sims. Probably the Erudite sim. As I found myself back together once more and not bloodied I saw that I was actually walking through the halls and my friends were at my side. To my surprise, it was all of them.
Each one was laughing and smiling at me and I nudged Heather as she let out a little laugh. It was happier than I had seen her in a long time. All of my friends were all shifting in their spots and I found myself happy for what felt like the first time in a long time. I was genuinely happy. I was at peace for the first time. At least the first time in a long time.

Each one of my friends were teasing me and I smiled at them all. I wasn't sure that I'd ever been quite as happy as I was. Not in Dauntless and certainly not in Amity. Heather was teasing me about my relationship with Eric. She kept telling me that I was probably the craziest person in the world for being with him. She might have very well been right about that. I was rather insane. Buck was asking me if I was sure that it was really Eric that I was with. That earned lots of laughs.

Draven was telling me that I was way braver than the rest of them because I could find myself in bed with Eric. They were all laughing with me and I appreciated their arms over my shoulders. It made me feel like they were my family. It made me feel like this was the way I was always supposed to be.

It wasn't long before Eric came sauntering through the halls and my friends all departing, saying hello's to him as they walked. He nodded to them all and gave responses where required. His arm wrapped around my shoulders as we walked and I pressed myself into him. As we rounded a corner Eric grabbed my hands and pressed me back against the wall, kissing me deeply. I smiled into the kiss and let my head fall against his chest once he pulled away.

"I love you," Eric muttered against my forehead.

My mouth opened to repeat the words back to him when it felt like the entire world shattered around me. He had just told me that he loved me. Eric, who had always told me that I meant nothing to him had told me that he loved me. And it was a lie. I knew that it was. This was a sim. The Erudite simulation. Before he could stop me I reached up and punched him roughly in the face. He didn't stagger back and he didn't say anything more. He merely smiled at me before taking a step back and crumbling into dust.

I wanted to lunge forward and save him but it was too late. And it was just a sim. The real Eric was standing outside of the the sim and trying to fight back against the compliance serum. Once more I found myself in Dauntless but this time I was closer to the Chasm. The breeze seemed a little warmer than it normally was. I was walking the halls with my hands shoved down in my pockets and smiling off into the distance.

My friends were nowhere to be seen and Eric was nowhere in sight either. I turned another corner to walk past the highest part of the Chasm, the same area where I had once almost fallen to my death, to see two figures on the ground. They were both bloody and barely moving, each one of them crying out for help in soft and pathetic voices. I ran over them and flipped over the two bodies, immediately stumbling back.

It was Damien and Colt, two of my least favorite people. And here they were, bleeding from nearly every crevice on their bodies. They were both crying and pleading, trying desperately to get to the infirmary. But they were too far. The infirmary was all the way on the other end of Dauntless. It would take them at least ten minutes to get there. They would never make it. They would die long before they got there. I could kick them over the edge for everything that they had ever done for me. No one would ever know. Colt had tried to kill me on more than one occasion. So had Damien. I hated them both. I hated them more than anything. I wanted them dead. They deserved to die. And with Colt shot in the stomach and Damien shot in the eye, I knew that they would both be dead in a matter of minutes.

Every little bit of me wanted nothing more than to let them die. They would deserve it. Not a damn
bit of me would make me feel bad. But I knew that I couldn't. That was the point of this simulation. It was the test for Abnegation. Whether or not I could be selfless and save these men's lives, even after everything that they had done to me. As much as I wanted to leave them there I couldn't bring myself to do it. So I grabbed them both under the arms, barely able to hold them up. They were both walking weakly and hardly helping me.

"Why are you helping us?" Colt asked, in something just over a whisper.

I hadn't been expecting him to talk. I had just been expecting to bring them to the infirmary and be done with it. I turned to him and gave a steady stare. "Because I'm better than you," I told him softly.

The world shifted again and I stared at the world that was now surrounding me. Since the first time that I had started this simulation I found myself somewhere other than Dauntless. I was in the tops of one of the skyscrapers that had been long abandoned. No one was around me. Instead it was only myself and a mirror. But the moment that I took a step off to the side I realized that it wasn't a mirror. It was just another image of myself.

I was wearing Dauntless clothes in the other version on me. I was dressed in Amity clothes. The same ones that I had been wearing on the day of the Choosing Ceremony. It sent a strange pang through my chest. The Dauntless version of me shifted so that she walked around me in a circle and I stared at her, nervous for what she was doing. I knew the look that was on my face and it was not a look that I was fond of in the slightest.

"I bet you know why you're here. Why you're looking at me. Because you hate yourself. Right? You hate me. You hate everything. You know that all of this wouldn't be happening if you weren't here, in this world. Everything would be better if you weren't here. You might as well die. No one would miss you. Not Eric. Not Four. Certainly not your parents or friends. No one," she sneered.

And it was then that it clicked. I was fighting my destiny. I always had been. Ever since I had first found out what I was I had been fighting what I was. I had been fighting to deny that I wasn't the monster that everyone was making me out to be. So I looked at myself and smiled. I wasn't angry about it anymore. I was sick of being angry. I just wanted to accept it.

"You're right. Everything would be better if I died. Everything would be easier. It's time for me to accept my fate. I have. If I die, I die. And if I don't, well, I'm going to show you that I am Amity. And I'm so much more too," I told her.

The other me smiled and nodded, lighting up in flames before disappearing. The flames went down with her and I watched as the world faded back into view. This was the last Faction. The only one that I hadn't scored. Candor. I was back in the Dauntless halls and in Eric's room. He was standing on the other end of the room watching me. I took a few steps towards him and hissed under my breath when he pressed me back into the kitchen counter, the same way that he had done a million times before.

Just one last one to go. If I did this then I could still win the war. Jeanine would never be able to beat me. I stood in front of him and let out a deep breath as his eyes pierced mine. He didn't look angry. He didn't look mean. He just looked curious. His hands traveled up my arms as he leaned back from me slightly.

"Admit it," he said in a voice that sounded rather unlike his own.

"What?" I asked.

"Admit it," he repeated.
But what was it that he wanted me to admit? I couldn't figure it out. I had no idea what it was that he wanted me to admit. I wanted to say something to him but the words weren't coming out the way that I wanted them too. Instead they came out in a completely different way.

"I've always cared for you," I said, grabbing his hands.

He smiled and nodded at me. "Keep going," he said.

"From the moment I first saw you it was more than an attraction. I didn't know it at the time but now I do. I knew that I always cared for you. Every time you insulted me, from little incidents at training, to calling me names, to shooting me before Capture the Flag, to telling me that you didn't care about me have hurt me. I would give my own life to ensure that you lived. I think that you're a good man. I know that you're a good man," I admitted to him.

It was everything that I had never bothered saying out loud before. It was everything that I felt about him. Hopefully that was everything that I would ever need to tell him. Eric smirked and took another step towards me, shaking his head. Clearly that wasn't what he wanted me to admit. So what was it?

"You're leaving something out," he said, with a little smirk.

And that was when it hit me. The little itch in the back of my mind. I knew what he was talking about. But I couldn't tell him. I wasn't sure that I could admit it just yet. Especially not now of all times. My eyes were watering as I stared at him. I shook my head. I wasn't ready to tell him yet. Not now. Hell, maybe not ever. Especially not if I was going to die.

"It - it," I stuttered a few times, not quite sure what it was that I wanted to tell him. "It was my Divergence that ruined our relationship. Sometimes I wish that I was dead so that no one would be dead because of me. Things would be so much easier. Maybe we would have been able to work out."

Tears were lingering at the edge of my eyes. All because I knew what he wanted me to say and I couldn't bring myself to say it. The smile had never once faded from Eric's face. Rarely did he grin at me like that. And when he did most of the time it was a smirk. This was probably the first time that I had seen him smile at me like this. Almost like he was telling me a joke that only he knew the punch line to. He took another step forward and I took a tiny one back.

"That wasn't the truth that I was looking for," Eric said, a teasing lilt to his voice.

It hit me like a train speeding into Dauntless. Although that would have been a little less painful than having to stand here and being unable to say it. I had never said it before and I wasn't sure that I would ever be able to say it. Not to him or to anyone else. I knew exactly what it was that he wanted me to admit. It had been scratching at the back of my head for a few days now. I had been wondering if it was the truth.

It couldn't have been the truth. I wasn't that type of person. But I had wanted to tell him for a while. I could never find the right words though. No matter what I could ever think there was nothing that told me otherwise. And I knew that it was the one thing that he wanted me to admit. This was Candor. I had to tell him the truth. No matter how much I felt like I couldn't. So I opened my mouth and spit out the one thing that I had known for a while was the truth.

"I love you, Eric," I told him.

A sharp shiver rolled through my spine as Eric grinned at me. I knew that as he took a step back the Box simulation was about to end. I had completed it. And now I knew what I had to do. I could just
only hope that the compliance serum was still under affect. And I could only pray that Eric hadn't seen it. Even with everything that happened, I didn't want Eric to know that I was in love with him. So I watched as the simulation finally came to an end.

As the simulation Eric backed out of the room my eyes shot open to see that I was still attached to the silver tubes. I had done it. The Box was completely lit up with blue lights and seemed to be in the process of opening. I had actually managed to unlock it. Jeanine was walking over to it with a greedy smile.

"Eric! Destroy the Box!" I screamed.

Jeanine clearly hadn't been expecting me to be awake and alert from the sim yet. As Eric marched over to the Box, grabbing it in his hands, Jeanine looked over to me. "No!" she shouted.

Without giving her a second to gather her thoughts I ripped my arm away from one of the silver tubes and howled in pain as the needles yanked against my skin. "The gun!" I screamed at Eric.

As he threw the Box to the ground, smashing it, Jeanine rounded on me, her gun still in her hand. The only thing that I had to do was kill her before she could make another move. Just as she raised the gun I caught the one that Eric had thrown. And I was faster to the punch. Thankfully Eric had been cruel to me during gun training. I might have hated it at the time, but he had taught me to become a perfect Dauntless soldier.

Almost blindly I raised my arm and aimed quickly before shooting. The bang was horrifyingly loud and the concussion from the shot was louder than I had ever heard before. Jeanine fell to the ground at the same time as I dropped the gun, making it clatter loudly on the ground. The bullet hole that accented Jeanine's face looked more final than anything I had ever seen, her cold blue eyes matching her lips as oxygen fled from her system.

With that final shot I realized that Jeanine Matthews was dead. I had killed her. And I couldn't bring myself to look away from her body. Her eyes were already losing the life that had been in them, her skin was turning slightly gray, and the blood was bow pooling around her head. I was staring at her corpse as I turned back to see that Four and Eric were smashing any remaining pieces of the Box.

As the tubes released me back to my feet, the boys both turned over to look at me. I could just hear the echo of a female voice coming from the Box but it was too late. Whatever was in that Box was nothing good. And now no one would ever have to fight over it again. I turned back to Jeanine to see that her lips were now turning a pale blue and blood was spreading across the floor.

"Alex..." Eric muttered.

"Oh..." I whispered, unable to say anything else.

Tears were forming in my eyes as I tore my gaze away from Jeanine's corpse and went to walk over to the two men. I could deal with her later. Right now I just wanted to be with the two men that meant the most to me. I wanted to pretend that I hadn't just actually murdered a human being - no matter how awful that human being was.

Just before I could take my first step a searing pain shot through my side. I glanced down to see what it was but nothing seemed wrong with me. My hand trailed down to my rib-cage, right below my chest and I felt another searing pain. And something sticky. Something extremely sticky. I pulled my hand away and my eyes widened when I saw that my hand was coated in something thick and red. Blood. Jeanine shot me before she died. The concussion that I'd heard was another gunshot.
"Eric... Four..." I muttered.

My feet were swaying under me as the pain hit me full force. I stumbled back as Four and Eric's eyes followed my hand, seeing the blood. The horror dawned in their eyes but they didn't quite seem to understand it yet. I didn't really understand it either. It didn't quite feel like I had just been shot. They each took a step forward, slow at first. They probably weren't convinced that it had really happened. I wasn't sure that I believed it yet either.

"Oh, no. You're shot," Four muttered, seemingly forgetting about his own gunshot wound.

"Uh-huh," I muttered weakly.

My eyes rolled back and I lost my balance, collapsing onto the floor. "Alex!" Four yelled.

That seemed to kick the boys into high gear. They both came sprinting after me, Eric reaching me first. My head hit the stone floor and I groaned, rolling over slightly. Eric immediately picked up my head. He leaned down next to me and grabbed my head in his hands, trying to pull it into my lap. My vision was already going blurry.

"Alex, look at me. You're going to be alright. The bullet wound isn't that deep," he insisted.

But I could tell that he was lying. "Don't lie to me," I whispered.

He knew that the wound was deep. So did I. I could feel it grating against a rib. "We can get you to the Dauntless medics. You'll be fine. We just need to get you up," he said, speaking faster than I had ever heard him.

"Eric, she doesn't have time," Four told him.

I could tell that he was trying to keep his voice soft so that I couldn't hear him. But I already knew. I was close to death. We would need a miracle at this point. "She does," Eric muttered, not looking away from me.

"Be realistic about this. She doesn't have time."

"She has to," Eric said, sounding like he was trying to convince himself more than anything else.

"We can't wait. We need to get her to the Erudite Medical Center."

I nearly laughed. No one in Erudite was going to be willing to help me. Not after what I had just done to Jeanine. Not when they could get repentance. I was about to join Jeanine. At least she had gotten her final wish. They might not have really liked Jeanine or what she did, but they did have some respect for her.

"She just killed Erudite's leader!" Eric yelled, never one to hide the truth.

"She can't wait," Four growled, enunciating every word.

It made me smile one last time. They would always fight. "We can't exactly bring her to them. They won't help us. Our only chance is to get her back to Dauntless," Eric said.

As heartbreaking as it was, I could see the desperation in his face. It wasn't something that I wanted to see in his face. I never wanted him to look like that. If these were going to be my last moments I wanted him to smile. I wanted to see that smile one last time. The smile that I had seen so much over the past few months. The smile that I only saw aimed at me.
"Hey... It's - It's alright. It really is alright. I - I - I promise," I told him.

My throat was dry and my breaths were coming in ragged gasps. "It's not alright. We're getting you help," Four promised.

"We'll figure it out," Eric added.

"Did - Did you see t-the Box sim-sim-ulation?" I asked.

The look on his face was something horrifying. He looked like he was about to keel over and die with me. I probably shouldn't have asked him that, but I really wanted to know the answer. There was just one last thing that I wanted to know. Eric stared at me for a moment, looking somewhat horrified. Before he said anything I knew the answer. But he said it anyways.

"Yes," Eric responded slowly.

He looked like he was at a loss for words and I knew that he was. Eric didn't want to say it back. Maybe it was because he was uncomfortable. Maybe it was because he didn't mean it. Maybe it was just because he had never said it before. It didn't matter. He didn't need to say it. I just wanted him to know that it was how I felt.

"You don't have to say it back. I'm just glad that I got to tell you before -" I started before Eric cut me off.

"Shut the hell up. You'll be fine," Eric snapped.

Blood was coating my teeth as I coughed some of it up and spit it out. Even through the pain I nearly smiled. It was something that Eric would say, no matter what the circumstances were. That was Eric for you. He was always determined that everything was going to be alright. But just this once he might be wrong.

"Four, grab her. Now!" he shouted when Four didn't move.

That time Four moved, standing up quickly, Eric following a moment later. "Keep her steady," Four instructed.

"Come on, up."

They were half instructing me and half instructing the other. Eric grabbed under one arm and Four grabbed me under the other. The moment that he lifted me I screamed higher pitched than anything that I had ever heard myself do. Their grip on me wasn't enough as I fell back and hit the ground roughly, the bullet wound feeling like it was ripping me apart. My chest was rising and falling rapidly. Out of he corner of my eyes I could see my face paling in the reflection of Four's and Eric's watery eyes.

"We can't move her," Eric muttered.

"To hell we can," Four snapped back at Eric.

For once Eric didn't snap back, he just continued to stare at me. "We'll make it worse," Eric muttered.

"Grab her torso. I got her feet," Four said.

But it wouldn't work. I was smart enough to know that there was no real ending to this. No ending
where I made it out. I wanted to tell them that it wasn't worth it, to leave me be, but I said nothing. I just nodded at them, my head spinning. The pain was so unbearable that I was sure that I couldn't take it anymore. I just wanted to sleep. I couldn't handle it. It wasn't worth it. My eyes fluttered for a moment before closing weakly.

"Alex!" Four yelled.

After that the yells all blended together as I peeled my eyes open again. I could just barely make out Eric's face. Everything else was so badly blurred that even Four was hard to make out. I could just see that for once, Eric looked panicked, trying desperately to keep me awake. I smiled weakly at him and raised my hands to his face. I barely touched him for a moment before my hand dropped, leaving a bloody trail on his face. And as my hand dropped back to my side, there was nothing.

Eric's P.O.V.

It hadn't been long since the showdown in Erudite and Eric still couldn't believe what had happened. Alex had shown up. She had lied to him. It was her that was coming. He saw now why it was that she hadn't scored Candor. She was a liar. But then again, so was he. He had no room to say anything. And he could see why she had lied. He was sure that if he were in the same spot that she was, he would have done the exact same thing.

There was nothing that could be done. Not for her. She knew it and so did he. He wanted to hate her. He wanted to be furious with her. But he couldn't. He never could. Not even when he hadn't liked her, he knew that he could never hate her. He had always wanted her. And here he was. He had her. Or he did have her. Not anymore. Not right now.

He was still in Erudite, as were Four and Alex. Alex was already in surgery. She had been for about twenty minutes. He was watching as the doctors fought to get the bullet out of her rib-cage. That was the problem. The bullet was trapped between two ribs. Her lung and heart had been punctured too. She was bleeding from multiple spots internally. Eric watched her through the windows of the surgery room. No one was sure that Alex was going to live. Except for him. He knew her. She was strong. She was going to live. She had to. He wasn't going to let her die.

It turned out that Erudite was more than happy to help. They hated Jeanine almost as much as he did. Almost as much as she did. They were all thrilled to hear that she was gone but there were going to be repercussions. There were still many that supported Jeanine and her cause. Now the truth about everyone was going to come out. This was going to be a disaster once her situation had been sorted. Everyone was being respectful as Alex was treated. The real problems would start once she was done with, one way or another.

At this point everyone had been alerted to the situation. Both Jeanine's death and Alex's current state. Eric had managed to get Max placed under arrest for the time being with him awaiting trial. Eric knew that once Alex was situated, Eric himself would have to go on trial. He would lose. He knew that. A few Erudite guards were also under arrest and Jack Kang was in for questioning about his use of the compliance serum. Everything had gone to shit in a matter of minutes. All of Chicago was in chaos as they tried to figure out what happened. But Eric couldn't care less. The only thing that he cared about was the girl laying on that table.

While most of Chicago was reeling over Jeanine's death - who had always seemed so untouchable - there were others that only cared about her. All of her friends and family had been notified of her current state. Eric could imagine that things were awful with all of them. He hadn't seen them yet but he could imagine that they weren't reacting well to the news. The minute that Chicago decided to reopen trans-Faction travel Eric knew that all of her friends would be here. The ones back home in Dauntless, the two in Candor, and probably a few from Amity.
Johanna was already here, waiting on news of her old Faction member. Eric knew that they were all in a state of panic. He knew how they felt. Her parents were already here. They were out in the hall. Eric could hear her mother sobbing. Cameron was on his way with the other leaders. Four was here too but he was in surgery. He had wanted to stay for her but the Erudite members had refused to let him stay. He had lost too much blood to stand any longer.

Eric could hear boots pounding in the hallway but he didn't bother to turn. He knew who was coming. He recognized the running. It only made Eric want to turn and leave. He didn't want to speak to anyone right now. Not until he knew that she was alright. A figure came up next to Eric but he didn't bother looking over.

"How is she?" Cameron asked.

He was out of breath as he leaned against the window and looked in curiously. "Almost dead," Eric answered heartlessly.

His voice was completely void of emotion and Eric didn't miss the flicker of emotion shoot across Cameron's face. This was exactly why he never cared for anyone. He had never found anyone to care for. Not until her. This was also why he wished that he hadn't seen the Box simulation. He'd known that she loved him. Or at least he had been pretty sure. But he didn't want to hear it. He hadn't said it back. He couldn't. Even if he did love her he wasn't sure that he would ever be able to say it. He wasn't that type.

A hand laid on Eric's shoulder and he felt his temper rise. The only person that he wanted touching him was her. "Eric -" Cameron started.

"Don't!" Eric howled, louder than he had thought was possible.

His voice cracked slightly at the volume and he knew that a vein was bulging in his neck. He could feel it stretching against the skin. The pity in Cameron's eyes only made things worse. Eric hated having people look at him like that. He wasn't the type that needed to be taken care of. He didn't need help from anyone. He just needed her. Cameron backed off of Eric and stared at him for a minute. He had never seen Eric so lost.

Cameron opened his mouth to say something but he was cut off by a commotion from behind the glass. The machine that was reading off her vitals had gone from its slow drone to a fast pace. Her eyes were rolling back into her head as the doctors began to rush back and forth. A moment later Eric watched as her eyes opened slightly and she began to seize roughly. Eric moved to try and run after her, desperate to do something to be able to save her but Cameron held him back.

In the meantime, doctors were rolling her onto her side to try and save her life. Once more a hand laid itself on Eric's shoulder as Cameron tugged at him. Eric knew that he should walk away from her but he couldn't. He had to see her. He had to see it all. No matter what. Even if these were her last moments.

"Maybe we should leave. Eric, man, you don't have to watch this," Cameron tried to reason with Eric.

But the other man refused to leave. He had to watch her. "Come on, Amity. Come on," Eric half-begged.

His hand laid itself gently against the glass. He wanted to be there with her. He wanted to touch her. Just one last time. Just as he finished muttering to himself, Alex's eyes darted open and met Eric's. He perked up, stiffening, wanting to run in and grab her. It was only for a moment before the machine
ceased its high pitched whine and slowed to a dull, long, drone and the life in Alex's eyes faded. She was now staring at Eric with a blank face. The doctors were doing everything. Pumping on her chest, CPR, and even the defibrillator. Eric knew that it was too late.

Her lips were turning blue as she stared at Eric with an accusing stare, the machine letting out a drone of finality. They were still working on bringing her back when Eric finally turned away. He had sworn to himself that he would watch until the end, no matter what, but he couldn't. He couldn't watch her. He couldn't watch this happen to the only person he'd ever cared about.

Cameron went to say something to Eric, his eyes glistening with unshed tears, but Eric walked past him. No one could say anything to him right now. As Eric walked down the hall he pulled his hand back and hit the wall so hard that he broke the skin, blood leaving its mark on the slick blue wall. Eric was sure that he's broken a finger or two too. He didn't care. He merely turned to walk out into the hallway but turned back before the door could close.

The doctors were already slowing down, clearly losing hope that they could save her. Her lips were the same pale blue that Jeanine's had been and her skin was turning a gentle gray. Eric turned away from her, trying to remember her with her soft pink lips and lightly tanned skin, a bright smile, and piercing green eyes. He tried to remember her without blood covering her. He tried to remember her laugh and touch. He tried to remember the ferocity that she fought with. But as fast as she was fading, so were his memories. He didn't deserve to remember her. He never had.

As he walked into the hall he saw everyone perk up. Even the people that weren't waiting on news of her. Rumors of the fight had spread fast and everyone knew who she was now. Everyone was waiting to hear how she was. Her parents were the first to look up. They were looking up at Eric like he was the only hope in their life and Eric couldn't bring himself to end that hope. Cameron walked up behind Eric and shook his head for him. It sent her mother into a fit of tearful hysterics, her father not far behind her.

Eric couldn't stand to be out there and listen to her. He walked past them, moving out into a secluded hallway. Cameron followed him a moment later, grabbing Eric into a tight hug. Despite having known each other for years, it was the first time that they had ever hugged. Silent sobs wracked Eric's body but he never cried. He was used to this. Like everything else, his Amity had been taken away from him. But losing something had never hurt this badly.
Eric's P.O.V.

Eric hadn't moved in hours. He found himself standing in the hallway waiting. He wanted nothing more than to leave and forget everything. He wanted to forget everything that he had ever done for Jeanine. He wanted to forget all of the lives that he had taken for her. He wanted to forget all of the times that he had simply nodded and done what she wanted. He wanted to forget how weak he had been around her. He wanted to forget the ways that he had let Max run all over him. He wanted to forget it all.

But he wanted none of those things as badly as he wanted to forget one specific thing. He wanted to forget her. His Amity. Alex. He wanted her out of his head. He wanted to forget ever laying eyes on her during her Choosing Ceremony. He wanted to forget watching her jump off of the roof on her first day. He wanted to forget tripping her on the track on her first day of training. He wanted to forget making the bet with her. He wanted to forget the time that she had thrown a knife at him. He wanted to forget pushing her off of the Chasm. He wanted to forget shooting her before Capture the Flag. He wanted to forget losing to her.

He wanted to forget the night that he'd found her bloodied and beaten by the Roberts boys. He wanted to forget the first kiss they had shared. He wanted to forget the feeling of her on him. He wanted to forget how soft her skin was and how her nails felt on him. He wanted to forget the way that she said his name. He wanted to forget all of the nights that they had spent together. He wanted to forget the way that she always got to him. He wanted to forget that one of her fears was his death at her hand.

He wanted to ignore that one of his only fears had just come true. He wanted to forget that she was laying on a table with no heartbeat just a few meters from where he was standing. He wanted to forget her blue lips and dead eyes. He wanted to forget the bullet wound that shrieked at him that her death was his fault. He wanted to take back everything. He wanted her to have never come to Dauntless. He wanted her to have a happy life with her parents. He wanted her to meet her sister.

He was the one that deserved a brutal death. He was the one that deserved to be on that table. She should have been the one standing here. He didn't want to have to live without her. He didn't want to deal with the death. He didn't want to remember her. He wanted to drink himself into oblivion. He wanted to forget everything that she had ever done to him. He wanted to imagine that he had never cared for anyone. He should have never even spoken to her. He just wished that she wasn't there. He wished that he didn't care for her. He wished that he didn't love her.

Everything in him had wanted to say it back when she had essentially told him that she loved him. She hadn't said it again in reality and he was glad that she didn't. He wasn't sure that he would have been able to tolerate hearing it. He knew that for the rest of his life he would hate himself for not telling her how he really felt. He wished that she had never asked him if he had seen the Box simulations. He would never stop wondering if she had died hating him. Hating that he didn't feel the same.

If he could turn the clocks back he knew that he still wouldn't be able to admit it to her. They could have spent their entire lives together and he wasn't sure that he would ever be able to tell her. It just wasn't the type of man that he was. But in reality, he knew that he'd always felt it for her. He loved watching how easy she was to rile up, he loved hearing her laugh, and he loved watching her smile. There was a reason that he had told her so much about himself. There was a reason that he had always protected her. There was a reason that he kept the picture of her in the red dress. There was a
reason that he had always hated Damien Roberts and her friend from Amity. But he would never get to tell her any of that.

Eric's body gave a slight waver and he groaned. He wasn't sure how long he had been standing out here but he knew that he needed to sit down. He hadn't been injured in the attack but he had lost everything. His energy, his standing in Dauntless, and his resolve to do anything. And her. This was not the first time that Eric had ever been inside of the Erudite Medical Center. He had been here a few times before; once when he was injured and a few other times when members on his teams had been injured.

He had always known it to be loud and bustling in the large hospital. He had never once heard the hospital as silent as it was right now. There wasn't a damn sound anywhere to be heard. The only thing that Eric had been able to hear was her mother's shrieking cries over the loss of her child. He assumed that her father had escorted her out of the building by now, judging by the way the lobby was once more silent. He was grateful that she was gone. Her sobs were driving Eric mad with grief.

Her friends weren't here yet. He assumed that they were being brought here soon. As in Dauntless tradition friends and family would be allowed to see her body before it was to be finished. He wasn't sure what they would do with her. He wasn't sure if they would take her back to Amity and bury her behind the flower fields or cremate her and throw her ashes into the Chasm. She hadn't been old enough to leave behind a will for what she wanted. He wasn't sure which one he wanted. He wanted her family to get to be with her and that meant taking her back to Amity. It might be easier on him that way. He could try and forget the Amity transfer. But he knew in the back of his mind he never would.

There was nothing that he could do to make things right. He wanted to go out and say something to her parents. He wanted to tell them that he had tried to save her; that he had done everything that she had asked of him until the end. He wanted to tell them that he had loved their daughter. He wanted to tell them that when he had discovered what she was he had vowed to protect her. He wanted to tell them that it was his fault that she was dead. Without his help Jeanine would have been too weak to act. He was the reason that she laid on that table.

He was sure that he would never forget the sight of her, alive. Her brilliant green eyes were something that he had never seen before. They always held some hint of emotion. She always looked proud and determined. She always had some hint of challenge buried in the back of her eyes. There was always something there. Her cheeks were almost always turned up into some type of smile or quirk. The way that he had seen her when the tones on the machine had gone weak was so different. Her eyes were dead, an almost vomit looking green. They held no life and not a hint of emotion. Her normally puckered lips were broken and bleeding. Her face held no emotion. The only thing that he had seen from her was death.

His hand was balled in a fist against the wall as a man walked into the room. He knew him immediately. He was one of the other leaders in Dauntless; his name was Jason. He was the second youngest leader, just behind Eric. He was in his late twenties. His bright red hair stood out painfully in the dull contrast of the stark white room. He wanted to scream at Jason to leave. The red of his hair only reminded him of the red that coated her body. Jason walked up to Eric slowly, seemingly not wanting to upset the already disturbed young leader.

Everyone knew that Eric was an easy man to make angry. But Eric wasn't angry, as much as he wanted to be. He was heartbroken. And no one had ever seen him like that before. As Jason came closer to Eric, Eric himself wanted nothing more than to turn and leave. He didn't want to talk to anyone. He didn't want to pretend that anyone could change what he was going through. He knew that he would never go back to the way that he had been. Not after having her.
"Eric. We need you over in Dauntless. After everything with Jeanine... something has to be done," Jason started slowly.

"Leave," Eric snarled, not wanting to hear his voice for a moment more.

There was nothing that Jason or anyone else could say that would make Eric leave. For right now all he wanted was to be left in peace. He didn't want to see anyone and he didn't want to hear about what he had just witnessed. As much as he didn't want to see her again he knew that he had to see her one last time. He needed to see her once more. He just had to see her and tell her that he was sorry. He knew that somewhere out there she was listening to him.

"I'll deal with it later," Eric added.

In truth Eric was sure that he would never deal with it. He knew as well as anyone else that things had changed today. With Jeanine dead, it meant that one of the leaders of Chicago was dead. She had held the city under her iron thumb for years. No one would know what to do with her gone. And no one would know how to handle the Divergent situation. They had always been something more of a rumor. Most people either hadn't known what they were or hadn't been aware that they really existed. She had made sure that everyone would know that they were real.

As Eric made his way back to the main sitting area Jason stuck his arm out to stop the other leader. Eric stopped in his tracks but his hands twitched dangerously. He found that his hands were shaking slightly. He was furious, but it had been at bay for most of the day. Eric wasn't sure how much longer he could contain himself. If Jason dared to lay a hand on him Eric would ensure that he hit Jason as hard as possible. And he wasn't sure if he would ever stop.

"Eric, something needs to be done. I don't know what happened out there. There are only a few videos. Almost everyone in Dauntless is under suspicion. Max is being put on trial. All of the leaders are. So are you. Eric, they're putting you on a criminal trial," Jason tried to warn.

Jason had always been a reasonable friend to Eric. The men weren't overly fond of each other but they went on many missions together throughout the years and had become reasonably good friends. They always looked out for each other. Right now Eric knew that Jason was trying to look out for him. He was trying to get him to see the danger of what was happening. But Eric said nothing. He merely nodded. He had figured that they would put him on trial. They might even execute him. He didn't care. At least he might be with her that way.

Knowing that he needed to at least try and get to work, Eric nodded slowly and turned towards the main area. A disturbing thought hit him before he'd even made it ten feet. She was right out there. Her body would already be cold. Her lips would be blue and her skin would be turning a horrid gray. He needed to say goodbye to her. He had never said goodbye to her. He had never said goodbye to her before. He had always thought that there might be one last chance. He had never thought for a moment that she might be taken from him.

When she had first come to Dauntless he had been so convinced that she would never be able to make it out of there alive. He had always thought that she would be kicked out after Phase One. He had never thought that she would prove him as wrong as she did. He had never thought for a moment that he might actually find himself attached to her. And he had never really thought that she would die. He had never thought that she would be laying on the table, cold and dead, while he stood a few meters away mourning her.

He had never thought that he would mourn anyone. Not his parents once they both bit it. Not anyone in Dauntless; he had quickly found that he didn't care for them in the slightest. He had figured that he would mourn for Cameron, but he would know that he had done everything that he wanted to in this
life once he went. He would celebrate his life rather than mourn it. He had never thought that he
would mourn a silly little girl from Amity. He had never thought that she would ever affect him this
way.

Realizing that Jason was waiting for an answer Eric took in another breath. His voice was scratchy
from pleading with her to stay with him. "I figured that they would," he finally answered.

"We'll all be there," Jason said, obviously unsure of what else he could say.

Eric nodded blankly. He knew that they would put him on a criminal trial for what he had done to
the citizens of Chicago. He had done a number of terrible things to people over the years. All of them
had been innocent. For the first time he felt like he might deserve to be there. He was sure that she
would agree. She had always believed that he was better than what he had been. Maybe this was his
chance to prove them right.

"What time is the trial?" he asked.

"It's tonight," Jason said.

Jason shifted on his feet awkwardly. He had always considered Eric a friend. Not a good friend but a
friend nonetheless. He didn't want to watch his friend condemn himself to death, which was exactly
where he was headed if he stood the trial the way that he was right now. Jason knew well enough
that if Eric walked into the trial right now, or in the same mindset, he was sure to essentially give
himself the guilty verdict. He would live out his life at the Fence if he was lucky.

"It's only six in the morning right now, Eric. The trial isn't until eight o'clock tonight. You have time
to prepare. You have time to figure out what you want to tell everyone. You have time to prove that
you're innocent," Jason pleaded.

"I'm not," Eric said softly.

It was the truth. He wasn't innocent. Everything that they were going to accuse him of was the truth.
"It doesn't matter. You can say something to make things a little better for yourself," Jason said.

"I won't beg them for my life. Whatever they want to do; they can do it."

Jason didn't say anything else to Eric. He knew more than anyone else that if Eric had settled on
something there was nothing that could be done to change his mind. So Jason set his hand on Eric's
shoulder, feeling him tense up underneath him. He knew that he should stop touching the younger
man so he let his hand drop and warned Eric that they would come and get him when it was time to
go back to Dauntless. He knew that Eric wouldn't leave her side until it was time.

Even though she didn't know that he was still here, mourning the woman that he had so frequently
said meant nothing to him, Eric couldn't bring himself to leave her. Not until she was really gone.
Not until he couldn't see her anymore. Eric heard Jason's boot heels click as he walked out of the
narrow hallway. He was glad that the man had left. The only thing that he wanted right now was to
be alone. He didn't want anyone to be near him. Eric still hadn't found the motivation to move.

He leaned up against the wall, listening to the noise level in the main sitting area rise again. He heard
a few whispers. Jeanine. Amity. Divergent. He knew that they were all talking about her. They were
all talking about everything that had happened. He knew that in a matter of hours everyone would
know about what had happened to the little girl from Amity. Almost everyone already knew. Word
had spread like wildfire in the night. He already knew that all of the higher ups in every Faction were
in Dauntless, trying to smooth over what had happened.
The thought almost made him want to smile. The thought of everything that had happened. She was always so determined to make sure that people knew who she was. She never wanted to be the little Amity girl. She always wanted to be Alex. She had wanted people to know her name. Now everyone would know her name. He just wished that she was here to see it. He wished that he could yank on her hair one more time. He wished that he could trip her or smack her in the ass with a towel one more time. He wished that he could hear her laugh.

More than anything he wished that he could forget her. He didn't want to remember her. For once in his life he wished that he had never gone to Dauntless. He could have stayed in Erudite and never met the little Amity transfer. He could have never met her. He would have never had to deal with the pain of losing her. He had heard before that it felt like having your heart ripped out of your chest. He had heard that it felt like every single day you were dying all over again. He had never thought that it was the truth. Right now he knew that it was.

Pounding steps came through the hallway but Eric stayed facing away from the person. He didn't want to have to deal with someone else. He had dealt with enough people for the day. He had dealt with enough feelings. He didn't want to have to deal with anyone or anything else. The only thing that he wanted was to go back to his apartment and tear the place apart. There were traces of her all over it.

Everything in his apartment had something to do with her. He could always smell the soap that she used on his pillows. The sheets always smelled of her too. The perfume that she wore lingered in his apartment. There were little bobby pins and hair ties that were sitting on his counters and forgotten in the bathroom. There would always be one blanket that was in a messy pile. It was the blanket that she would use to wrap around her right leg as she slept. He had never really liked the blankets before - he preferred to sleep with just a sheet - but he had an extra comforter and two blankets on his bed just because she loved them.

Her clothes were always hidden in the corners of the rooms or tucked under the bed. It was hysterical the way that she always lost them. Her favorite foods were in his refrigerator. Apples from Amity sat on his counter. And her picture... The picture of her in the red dress was pinned to the refrigerator. He wasn't sure that he would ever be able to get rid of it. As much as he wanted to erase her from every bit of his life he wasn't sure that he could part with it. He wasn't sure that he could actually leave her in the past.

She had changed him. As much as he hated to admit it she had changed him. He would have never thought twice about another dead initiate. Another dead member. It was always sad. They held a funeral and said their goodbyes. The body would then be burned and their ashes would be thrown over the Chasm. One way or another that was the way that everyone ended up. He had never thought twice about any of them. But he would never be able to stop thinking about her.

The footsteps came to a stop at Eric's right but he still jumped when a hand laid itself on Eric's arm. He went to throw off Jason's arm and tell the man that he would be at Dauntless later, but when he turned he found that it was not Jason at all. It was Cameron. He hadn't seen the man in hours. He had figured that he was off doing damage control. But he was here right now and he looked more frantic than Eric had ever seen him.

A curious glance was the first emotion that had flashed through his eyes in a long time. It almost felt strange to forget about her for even the briefest of seconds. He looked at Cameron curiously and glared darkly. He just wanted to mourn her in peace. He didn't want to think about anything else. He didn't even care if Dauntless was burning to the ground. He didn't want to be here anymore but he didn't want to leave either. He didn't like the way that this place made him feel.
"Eric... We need you. Come on," Cameron said desperately.

He grabbed onto Eric's arm and Eric yanked his arm away from his friend roughly. He didn't want to be touched right now. "What do you want?" Eric snarled at the man that had always been there for him.

Surprisingly Cameron didn't let a hint of emotion flicker across his face. He knew that his best friend was hurting. And that was exactly why Cameron needed him to walk with him. "Eric, it's Alex," Cameron said quickly and carefully.

He knew that his friend was fragile right now. "I know," Eric muttered.

"Come with me," Cameron said.

The first true emotion that Eric had felt since watching her heartbeat flat-line shot through him like the bullet that had torn through her chest earlier. What was it that Cameron wanted him to see that he hadn't seen already? He didn't want to see her corpse. Not yet. He would. But not yet. He wasn't ready. Just for a few more minutes he wanted to pretend that tonight he would find her perched in his bed just as he had become so accustomed to.

"I'll go say goodbye soon," Eric muttered, shocked at how soft his voice was.

He had never heard it like that and Cameron hadn't either. It pained him to hear the man that was his brother speaking like that. He had never heard Eric in such a moment of weakness. "Eric," Cameron said.

His voice was still soft and it drove Eric insane. "I'll go soon," Eric growled, getting upset.

Cameron could sense his irritation. He knew that he had to tread carefully with Eric. It was the only time that he ever had. "I really think you need to come with me," Cameron repeated.

It took Eric a moment to finally look over at Cameron and nod. If they really wanted him back to Dauntless right now he had to go and say goodbye to her now. He was never going to get another chance. And this wouldn't be like when he hadn't told her that he loved her. This was his last chance to say goodbye. So he nodded at Cameron and followed the man out of the hallway. As they walked back into the main room Eric kept his gaze at the ground. He didn't want to see their faces.

He could hear her mother still sobbing softly. It made Eric cringe and clamp his jaws shut. He couldn't imagine that his own family would have ever cared if he had died. Hers were heartbroken. It should have been Eric that had died. Her father was trying to whisper soothing words into her ear. They weren't working. He could hear Dauntless and Erudite guards trying to explain to her parents the process that was to come. Eric wanted nothing more than to rip the guards away from her family. He wanted some of them to mourn in peace.

There were Dauntless guards that Eric noticed were standing close to him and he knew that it was so that he didn't run when it was time for his trial. He wouldn't. He knew that it was his time to face what he had done. Zeke was standing in the corner leaning on a chair that held another one of the leaders, Clara. Clara was staring at her tablet, mindlessly flipping through the pages. Zeke himself was staring at his shoes. Eric noticed a few tears slipping out of his eyes. He knew that the two of them had been close.

There were others standing in the hallway as well. It seemed that a number more people had come since Eric had last been out in the lobby of the hospital. Johanna, the leader of Amity, was in the corner and crying softly. He knew that she had been extremely fond of Alex. He knew that she was
so proud of her for joining Dauntless and for going where she truly belonged. It made Eric cringe. He had never seen Johanna show that much emotion.

One of the Amity truck drivers; the one that had brought Johanna here, was sitting in a chair crying softly. It was the same one that had brought them on their trip to Amity months ago. He knew that she had been good friends with him. He couldn't remember his name. Her two friends from Amity - now Candor - were here as well. Iris and Florian. The pair were both in hysterics. They were sobbing loudly and each were leaning into the other. There was also Jack Kang. He was sitting in silence, presumably still reeling from everything that had happened. There were a few other Amity members there and none of them looked anything short of horrified.

There were a few government officials in the room as well; each speaking in hushed tones. Eric knew that everything that had happened had quickly spread around Chicago. No one knew what to do. No one knew what to say. Four had finally seemed to come out of the surgeon's room and seemed alright. Physically, at least. He was in the corner and sitting on his knees. Eric could see that he was crying. He knew why. Four had sworn that he would keep her safe. He had told Eric that. He knew that it killed him that he had lost her. He knew exactly how Four felt. For once, he didn't hate him. He sympathized with him.

As Eric walked through the halls the soft conversations ceased. The crying was still echoing through the halls loudly though. It sounded like screams more than crying. Her mother looked up to Eric and he felt his lip give a soft quiver. Her face was bright red as were her eyes. She looked awful. Her face was sunken slightly and she looked absolutely heartbroken. She was sobbing hysterically as she looked up at him. It was like she was asking him to do something, to save her child. He wished that he could do something.

But he knew that there was nothing that could be done. She was gone. He was going to say her final goodbye and that would be it. He was going to appreciate the last few minutes that he had with her. Glancing away from her mother, Eric followed blindly. Cameron pushed open the door to the hallway that held the operating room. As expected there was no one inside. Eric braced himself to see her still body once more as he looked up past the glass. It was not the sight that he had expected. She looked like something awful. He had never seen her look worse before. Her hair was matted to the side of her face and it was covered in blood. It looked more like an ugly brownish-red than it did her natural blonde. Her eyes were horrible. They looked like the color of the vomit that he had seen once after a night when she had drank too much. They were watery and the once white irises were now somewhere in between red and purple. Her eyes were sunken into the back of her head and there were dark gray circles underneath. Her cheeks seemed to be hollowed out and her lips had turned purple. Her entire torso was slicked with blood and her clothes were torn from the doctors operating on her.

But it wasn't any of that which had thrown Eric off. It was the fact that she was sitting upright. Her eyes were rolling back in her head and her torso was sitting straight up. It was horrifying to see as an off white foam came out of her mouth. She was convulsing as the doctors laid her down on her side. Her entire body was shaking and as much as Eric wanted to look away as only the whites of her eyes were visible he couldn't. She was somewhat awake. The last time that he had seen her the monitor was completely still and letting out a drone of finality.

Now she was awake. Her heart was beating at a horribly rapid pace and her blood pressure was spiking through the roof. All of her vitals were awful. But they were there. She wasn't dead. She wasn't. She was alive. They had done it. Somehow they had brought her back. Her heart rate had skyrocketed to just over two hundred and Eric watched as the doctors pushed her onto her side trying to desperately push the strange foam out of her mouth. Eric watched on with a bubbling desperation.
in his chest. She could come back to him. She had to come back to him. There was no other way. He needed her back.

Cameron's hand laid itself on his shoulder and Eric leaned against the glass watching her closely. Her heart rate had dropped slightly but it was still hovering near two hundred. His head was against the cold glass and Eric pushed back the feeling of desperation. He wanted to go in there and do something. He wanted to save her. But he knew that there was nothing that he could do to help. He would only make things worse.

"What's happening?" Eric asked quietly.

He had never been good with medical things. Cameron had always been good with it. "She's fighting hard," he muttered.

She always had been a fighter. It had just taken Eric a long time to figure that out. Suddenly she stopped seizing and Eric watched in horror as her eyes rolled back in her head and she dropped against the pillows. The foam was rushing out of her mouth and the doctors washed it away with what he assumed was warm water. They brushed the hair off of her forehead and Eric watched her vitals rock back and forth for a moment before seemingly leveling out.

"Heart rate stabilizing," one doctor called out.

"Blood pressure and pulse stabilizing," a second doctor added.

Eric watched her closely. She was laying in the bed with the sheets around her. He could see her chest rising and falling slowly but it looked like she might slip away from him again at any minute. Another doctor walked over to her and looked over her a few times. He scanned a small pad over her, something that Eric knew was a newer invention. It was an almost poetic justice that it was something that Jeanine had helped invent.

"Patient is stable," the first doctor said, after what felt like a lifetime.

It felt like someone had punched Eric in the gut. She was safe. She was alive. He wasn't sure what the doctors had done but he felt like he could have kissed them all. They had saved his Amity. He could see it in the reflection of the glass. There was a shred of happiness in his face. Something that he had never thought that he would see again. Tears were building in the corner of his eyes but they didn't fall. He wouldn't let them. This wasn't a time for him to cry. He wasn't going to cry over her. She was alive.

Just like he had once told her, she was his and she always would be. The doctors walked out of the room and informed the two men that in a few hours - once she was awake - she would be cleared for high-profile visitors. Being a leader of Dauntless and one of the only two men that had been there during the attack on Jeanine he was considered high profile. Very few others would be allowed to see her. Cameron wouldn't, but Eric promised to give her his best.

He knew the there were a few others that would be allowed in. Her parents would be the second people allowed in. Hell, they might be the first. Even with everything that had happened, Alex was a dependent up until about a day ago. She really had to see her parents. Four would be allowed in as well, mostly only considering that he had been there during the attack. So would Zeke and the other leaders so that they could hear the story of what had happened.

That probably included Johanna and Jack Kang too. The other high profile members of Chicago would all be allowed in to see her. Eventually the authorities would want to bring her away to discuss what was going to happen with her and Max. Eric. Four. All of them. He hadn't bothered to
think that if she woke up she would have all of this to deal with. He hadn't thought that even if she lived she would potentially end up being sentenced to death anyways. But he would not let that happen. Not after she had come back to her. She was his.

There was no way that he was going to let anything else bad ever happen to her. Something had changed in him. He would never tell her about it, but she would know. Because she could always see right through him. Eric could see the reflection of Cameron in the glass and he saw that the other man was smiling. He was presumably happy that Eric had realized that she was in fact alive. She was not doing well but she was alive. He turned and placed a hand on Eric's shoulder, smiling up at the man who was his brother.

"How long has she been like that?" Eric asked.

"She's been like that for a few hours now. This is the first time that they've had a feeling that she might be able to live through this. They're confident that she'll make it. She's alive, Eric," Cameron whispered.

Eric couldn't believe it. She was alive. His Amity had come back to him. Just like he knew that she always would. She had told him that she would never leave him. For once she hadn't lied to him. He gave a small grin and collapsed to the ground. Cameron fell with him and smiled at his best friend. He had never seen Eric smile like that before. But he knew that it was because of her. He knew that it was because Eric had gotten her back. As Cameron glanced over at his friend he couldn't help but to wonder if maybe he would finally admit just what she meant to him. Cameron made himself a silent vow that if Eric didn't tell her, he would.

Neither man knew how long they sat outside of the door that held her. Eric didn't have a clue as to whether or not her parents knew. He kept telling himself that he had to go and say something to them but he couldn't bring himself to move. He couldn't bring himself to leave her. So they sat and waited. A few times he could hear something happen on the other side of the room. There would be a panic and a few minutes later something else would happen and they would calm down again. It happened at least ten times before the clock finally rang out three o'clock in the afternoon. Almost an entire twenty-four hours after everything had happened with Jeanine.

A doctor that seemed unfamiliar to Eric or Cameron came through the hallway doors and gave the two men a stern look. Eric knew that he hadn't been in the room with her before. He assumed that the doctor was one of the ones that had been sent in to monitor her mental state. Physical was one thing, now they had to see if she had any lasting mental issues. Eric assumed that the man was not fond of Dauntless, especially since they were saving one that had just killed their leader.

"Gentlemen. Miss Freesia is ready for a visitor. Only one. She is still very weak. She just woke up. She requested a man. I believe she said Eric. She's hard to understand right now."

Eric nodded at the man and stood. "Thank you," Eric said.

The doctor motioned for Cameron to leave the hallway, which he did without complaint. "Please wait outside," the doctor instructed Cameron.

"Of course. Tell her I said I'm glad she's alright," Cameron told Eric.

"I will."

The doctor led Eric through the halls to the back door where he knew he would be able to get to her. "Wait here for a moment while I prepare her for her visitors," the doctor said.
"Okay."

Through something that he had learned was a one-way mirror he looked in at her. She was awake and still looked horrible, but she was awake. She was alive. His Amity was alive. She nodded at the doctor as he spoke and Eric noticed her head rotating weakly on her shoulders. The doctor said something else and her head suddenly stiffened as her hand rose to her mouth. Eric grinned as the doctor motioned for her patience and turned back outwards, heading back to Eric. He smirked and advanced towards the door. He was going to get his Amity back and once he had her he would never let go again.

Alex's P.O.V.

Everything felt like it was on fire. My entire being hurt. It wasn't just physical. It felt like my entire soul was dying. If this was what death felt like I understood why some people feared it. The whole thing was awful. I wanted nothing more than for it to end. I wanted to see the white light. I wanted to be gone from this world. It wouldn't have bothered me. I had made my peace.

Nothing was clear to me from the past few... hours? Minutes? Days? Weeks? I couldn't have been able to tell when it was that I had passed out. The last thing that I remembered was sticking Eric with the compliance serum. Nothing came through to me after that. I had no clue what had happened to Eric, Jeanine, or Four. The only thing that made any sense was that something had happened to me. It must have been to reason that I wanted to rip my hair out of my scalp. I wanted to do anything to distract myself from the pain that was shooting through my chest.

My head was rolling around loosely on my shoulder and I had to fight to keep my eyes from rolling in the back of my head. All I wanted to do was sleep for a year or so. Anything to get rid of the way that I was feeling. It was like the worst hangover that I had ever experienced, multiplied by about one hundred. What the hell had happened to me?

It felt like someone had stuffed my mouth with foam. There was a terrible taste on my tongue. It tasted something like metal mixed with blood and vomit. My eyes felt like they were glued together. Considering the reddish tinge that was on my cheeks I assumed that it was blood. Was it mine? Probably. My head felt like it had been stuffed with cotton and my stomach felt like someone had turned it inside out and then ripped it apart. My spine felt like it was snapping in half. Everything felt wrong. It made me sure that something serious had happened to me.

I could only pray that Eric and Four were alright. I would never forgive myself if something happened to them. And Eric... Could he ever forgive me? Would he be able to find it in himself to forgive me for lying to him? For making him look like an ass? All I knew was that I had to move and I had to try and get to him. There was no way that I could stay here. Wherever here was.

This place wasn't familiar to me. I knew that it wasn't Dauntless. The Dauntless medical unit was all white and there were sheets hanging up that separated all of the beds. It looked more like a pop-up tent. Wherever I was now, it had to be somewhere with a more advanced medical unit. I was in my own room here. It wasn't Amity either. They didn't have a medical area. The one area that they did use as a medical station was only a small room with a few beds lining the room. It couldn't have been Abnegation. They mostly worked out of their homes.

So I assumed that this was either Erudite or Candor. I had a feeling that I was in Erudite and that only made me wonder even more what had happened to me. Maybe Jeanine had captured me. Maybe I was her prisoner now. There was no way that Erudite was helping me. Not after what I had done. I must have been a prisoner. But why would she put me in the hospital? To save me from something? From what? What had happened to me?
My legs felt like jelly and I knew that the moment that I tried to stand from the bed I would fall back to the ground. But I didn't care. I had to get up and I had to get to Four and Eric. I had to know what had happened to them. My entire side was on fire as I moved to try and leave. My movements ceased and I nervously shifted as a man - clearly a doctor - walked into the room. He placed a hand on my shoulder and I reached out to hit him but I was too weak.

My hand only dropped back down to my side pathetically as the doctor pushed me back into my spot. I was ashamed that there was nothing that I could do to fight back against him. I simply let myself fall back into the white sheets, pain searing over every inch of me. The man leaned over me and I reached up to him. He was tall with broad shoulders. It looked like he might have been smiling at me but now I could see that he wasn't. He merely stared at me.

"Wh-Where a - a - am I - I?" I asked him weakly.

My voice was cracking pathetically as my entire body was wracked with sobs. Horrible images of everything that could have happened were popping into my head. I wanted desperately to know what had happened. The way that the man was looking at me told me that something very bad had happened. The man looked over me for a moment before muttering a few nonsensical words to himself.

"You're in the Erudite Medical Center, Miss Freesia. Can you tell me what the last thing is that you remember?" the man asked.

I shifted nervously, not sure what I could tell the man. I didn't know what had happened. "I don't remember much," I half-lied.

"Alright. Can you tell me your name?"


The man nodded at me and jotted a few notes down on his pad. "Good. You've been through quite something in the past day, Miss Freesia. Like you said, I assumed that you wouldn't remember much of it," the doctor explained.

I merely nodded at him. "It's all pretty fuzzy," I admitted.

"I don't know what happened. Most people don't know what happened. I could give you the gist but I wasn't there. The only visitors you're allowed right now are government officials. No lower class citizens allowed in. Your parents have been alerted. They are here," he said.

My head perked up. My parents must have been beside themselves. "They are?" I asked.

That was wonderful, but it also meant that nothing good had happened tonight if only government officials were allowed to see me right now. "Yes. They will be allowed to see you soon," he said.

"Thank you."

"You have a visitor. No more than fifteen minutes. Many people wish to speak with you. I'll send them in," the man instructed.

"Okay," I said weakly.

Nodding at him I watched as he turned and left the room. I was plunged back into the disturbing silence of the room. My hands twisted nervously around in my lap as I waited for the door to open. I could hear voices outside and I looked at my reflection in the mirror on the far corner of the room. I
looked absolutely horrible. There was blood coating me and a shiver wracked over my spine. Was it mine? Was there a chance that it was Eric's? Please, no. I couldn't stand the thought of something happening to Eric because of something that I had done.

I should have asked the doctor if he was alright. Four, too. He had been shot. I remembered that much. The handle on the door jiggled slightly before it parted. I watched as the door slid open and I stared curiously at the figure that walked through the room. My jaw dropped at the sight of him and tears rose to my eyes. This time it was not tears of confusion or horror. It was tears of joy. The first of them fell and I saw that a familiar look was on his face. There were no tears but relief was clear.

"Eric..." I muttered so softly that I wasn't sure that he had heard it.

For a moment I wasn't really sure if it was even him or a figment of my imagination. Thankfully I got my answer quickly. Eric walked up to me faster than I had been expecting; it was almost like if he walked too slow I would vanish before his eyes. Just seconds after he had entered the room, he came over and dropped at my bedside. I could feel him shaking the entire frame. Something that had happened had made, or still was making, him nervous.

"Hey, Amity," he whispered.

It was the softest that I'd ever heard him speak. There was something weak about the way that he was speaking. It made my heart warm. I liked realizing that he wasn't the strong and emotionless leader that I had once thought that he was. Another tear fell from my eyes and I raised a hand to my mouth as a pathetic sob escaped me. Eric's hands came up to my face as he pulled me in for a kiss. Our mouths ran together and I felt my tears drop onto his cheeks. Eric finally pulled away from me and smiled.

"Sorry. I haven't brushed my teeth in a while," I said softly, laughing under my breath.

"It's alright," Eric muttered, brushing my hair off of my forehead.

"I can't believe you're here."

"I'm here. So are you. I told you once before, Amity. You're brave. But you're a damned moron."

My laughter was mixed in with more fresh tears as I smiled up at him. This was definitely the softest that I had ever seen him before. My hands were shaking on his cheeks and I smiled softly at him. He was alive. Whatever had happened tonight didn't matter. All that mattered was that Eric was here and he was alive. He wasn't in danger. Not anymore. I wouldn't put him in a position like that again.

"I know," I said with a small laugh.

"Are you going to start listening to me?" Eric asked.

"Never," I teased.

Eric placed himself in the seat next to my bed, never once letting go of my hand. I smiled at him softly as he pushed me back into the bed. As he started to move me I felt the pain radiate all throughout my body. Had I taken a bad fall? My heart was lumped in my throat as I stared at him. He had looked perfectly happy for a while and now he looked disturbed. What the hell had I done? Was it something that had happened to Four?

"Alex," Eric started slowly.

It was already a shock that he knew my name. "What is it?" I asked weakly.
"What do you remember about last night? We need to know. Things are... odd, right now, to say the least."

My stomach lurched painfully as I thought about what I did remember from last night. It wasn't much. Most of my memories from last night were gone. "I don't remember a lot. I remember getting on the train to Erudite at six with Four. We got to Erudite and invaded the room where Jeanine had those... things. We killed the guards," I whispered.

There would be hell for me to pay for that. "It's fine. Guards die all the time. That's what they're for," Eric said.

He was so flippant about it that it shocked me. "I remember speaking with her. She was talking about some kind of box. She wanted me to do something to open it so that I would release instructions. Something to destroy the Divergent's. I remember giving you the compliance serum. That's the last thing that I remember," I said softly.

I truly was sorry that there wasn't more that I could tell him. But it was like the last few hours had been taken away from me. "Yes. You went through trials to open the Box. Do you remember anything that happened in them? They were like sims," Eric said.

I shook my head slowly. "No. I remember jabbing you with the needle. Sorry about that." Eric almost smiled. "That's the last thing that I remember," I said.

"I'll forgive you," he said teasingly.

There wasn't a damn thing that I remembered afterwards. A strange emotion flitted through Eric's eyes but it was gone as soon as it appeared. "Is everything okay?" I asked.

The strange look was gone as fast as it had come. "Depends on how you define it. You had sims to go through to prove that you could be each of the five Factions. If you failed you died. You were the only person to successfully unlock all five Factions," he said.

"Wow," I muttered.

"That was what Jeanine was looking for."

"And that was me?"

"It was. You came back to but just before the Box could show us the secrets it had you ordered me to destroy the Box. Four and I both did. He was shot in the shoulder."

Panic settled into my chest. "I need to -"

"He's alive," Eric interrupted me.

My heart rate slowed and I breathed out a sigh of relief. "He's okay?" I asked weakly.

"He'll be fine. It'll leave an ugly scar but he'll live. Afterwards I tossed you a gun. You killed Jeanine," he said slowly.

You killed Jeanine. You killed Jeanine. You killed Jeanine. The words kept echoing in my head as he said them. I killed her. I must have been sitting for at least ten minutes thinking about what he had said to me. I'd killed her. After everything that she had put me through and all of the planning that had gone into tonight I had killed her. I had done exactly what I had wanted to do after everything. But now the thought almost made me sick. I was glad that Eric let me process it in my own time.
"I... I killed her?" I asked Eric softly.

He nodded at me slowly and grabbed my hand. "We'll figure it out," Eric muttered.

I stared at him sidelong and sucked in a deep breath. I had done it. I had killed Jeanine. "How did I do it?" I asked weakly.

"You shot her in the forehead. She died on site. Jeanine shot you before she died, Alex. Right there."

My eyebrows shot to my forehead. I hadn't taken a bad fall or anything like that. I had taken a bullet wound. Just the same way that Four had. That was why I'd felt so terrible since waking up. Eric lifted the sheets up and pulled them back to show me the wound. I sucked in a breath as he pulled the sheet up over my torso. Right where he had said there was a pad that was soaked in blood. I stared at it in shock. I had been shot. Jeanine had shot me. Right before I killed her.

"Son of a bitch," I growled.

"Don't move. It'll make the pain worse."

"I can't believe that I killed her," I said softly.

It wasn't like it wasn't something that I didn't want to do. I had wanted her dead for as long as I could remember. Ever since the first time that I had laid eyes on her during the Choosing Ceremony and long before that. But I hadn't ever thought that I would really kill her. My hands were shaking as Eric grabbed me around the waist and pulled me into him. He kissed me gently on the lips before backing away, probably knowing that he was putting strain on the wound.

"Don't think about it right now. She needed to die. You were right to do what you did," Eric said.

But that didn't change things. I had killed her and that wasn't something that I would soon be able to forget. Despite everything I nodded at him slowly and smiled weakly as he leaned down to kiss me. His lips were soft against my chapped and bloodied ones. His tongue slowly ran across my bottom lip and I grinned, keeping my mouth closed. He would thank me later. He hadn't gotten the full blast from earlier. I tasted like something awful. His hands wound into my hair to keep me close as our mouths finally separated.

"What?" I asked, knowing that something was wrong.

"I thought that you were dead. You were dead. I watched you die," he muttered.

"But I'm not."

"You were."

My hands traced up the side of his face to brush his mussed hair back off of his face. I had never seen Eric as calm and demure as he was right now. "I'm not going anywhere, Eric," I promised.

"That so?" he asked.

"You taught me better than that. You were a pain in my ass but you made sure that I was strong. And I was. I am."

"I know you are."

"Plus you can't honestly think that a little bullet wound would get rid of me that easily?" I teased.
Eric laughed at me softly before leaning in to kiss me again. It was nice. Everything was out in the open between the two of us. We were finally confronting each other with no more secrets. The air felt almost strange. This time our lips stayed locked together and we both ignored the sound of a commotion in the halls. Someone was yelling at the top of their lungs. Of course I could only ignore it for so long before I realized that I recognized the voice.

"Is that my Mom?" I asked.

Eric looked surprised. "Is it?" he asked.

"Get out of my way! Get out of my way right this instant, you buffoons!"

It was a high-pitched female voice that sounded like it was bordering on hysterical. It was a new tone of a voice that I had heard a thousand times before. But it was never a voice that I had heard this hysterical. It was always calm and always loving. Of course I supposed that hearing your daughter was shot during an attack was enough to turn any mother into a wreck. A doctor tried to keep my mother back but as the door to the room that I was in was flung open Eric and I jumped apart to see that Mom was shoving the doctor away from her, trying to rush to my bedside. Dad was following her, ensuring that no one was going to lay a hand on his wife.

"Yep. That's my Mom."

"Let me see my baby!" Mom shouted as another man grabbed onto her arm.

She ripped her arm back and shoved the doctor away. "Let me help," Eric said, getting up but not leaving my side.

"Just let them," I said.

I'd never heard Mom yell in my entire life. The closest that I had come to hearing her yell was her calling up to me from downstairs to come down when I was younger. "Mom!" I shouted over the commotion on the other end of the room.

Like I had been hoping, they all calmed down and stared straight at me. Eric's hand was still on my wrist. "Move!" Mom shouted again.

"Let her in. Please. I want to talk to them," I told the doctors.

"We can't," one doctor said.

"Let her in. Direct order," Eric demanded.

Even though it wasn't Dauntless, leaders were supposed to have jurisdiction in other Factions. The doctors all stared back and forth between my parents and I for a moment before nodding and warning me that they would only have a few minutes to speak to me. I nodded at them and watched as they released my parents, letting them run over to me. Eric let go of my arm and moved away to give my parents room to drop into the chairs at my side. Mom leaned into me, tears running down her pretty face.

Her hands were on my face and I smiled weakly at her, grabbing her hands and pulling them up to my heart. Eric's words were still racking through my skull. You were dead. I watched you die. Was there a chance that my mother and father had watched me die too? It didn't matter. I was here and that was the only thing that mattered. It was half of the reason that I had placed her hand on my heart. Just to show her that I was still here and I wasn't leaving any time soon. I would never scare them like I had tonight again.
Mom brushed the hair back off of my head with her free hand and I felt some sweat go with it. They must not have bathed me after everything that had happened. Not if they thought that I was going to die. I knew that I looked horrible after everything that had happened to me and the air in the room was stifling. It was making me sweat under the blankets. Dad leaned over me and pressed a kiss to my forehead where Mom had just cleared the hair away.

"I don't think I've ever heard you yell before. You sounded almost Dauntless," I teased her.

Her hands fell over my side to where the bullet wound was and I stared at it curiously. I had never seen a bullet wound. I had never thought that I would have one. As far as I knew, neither Eric nor Four had one. Not until now, at least. The skin was broken apart and sunken in slightly. The skin around it seemed to be an almost burned blackish color. The whole thing looked like it belonged in a horror movie. Not on me. But I supposed that it would make me look more Dauntless.

"When something happens to her baby, every mother becomes Dauntless," Mom said.

I laughed softly and nodded my head. She was right. "I was impressed," I said honestly.

"What happened in there, sweetheart? What did you do?" Mom asked.

My heart was pounding as I opened my mouth and closed it immediately, flapping my jaws like an idiot. I didn't know what to say. I didn't really know what had happened. And I really didn't want to have to tell him that I had killed Jeanine Matthews and would now likely be put up on trial or something of the likes. My parents seemed to be waiting for an answer but I was having a hard time giving them one. What could I tell them that didn't make me sound horrible?

"Mr. and Mrs. Freesia," Eric cut in.

Every head in the room, including my own, turned to look at him. "Eric..." Mom trailed off, seemingly having just noticed himself. "Sorry. We barely even noticed that you were here."

"That's alright. You're a little preoccupied. Alex is having a hard time remembering everything that happened last night. She's been through a tough time. But I was there as well. I can try to answer what happened to the best of my abilities. Are you aware of what a Divergent is?" he asked.

Dad immediately shook his head but Mom hesitated for a moment. "I've heard the word before. My mother once said it and when I repeated it she told me to never say it again," Mom admitted.

Eric nodded his head. "Divergent is simply a word for someone who scores more than one Faction in their Aptitude Test."

"That can happen?" Dad asked, looking shocked.

Eric nodded again. "It's rare. Every year we might see two or three Divergent's. Up to five on a rare year. Usually a Divergent has two or three aptitudes. I suppose you never knew that your daughter was one too."

Both of my parents heads turned to look at me. "He's not kidding," I said.

"She scored four of the five Factions. The only one that she was lacking was Candor."
"You shouldn't be angry with her. You have to hide the truth of what you are. Or at least, you did. Before Jeanine Matthews was killed. She was trying to start a war on Divergent's. She believed that they were a danger to the Faction system. She was in the midst of planning a war. Alex found out about it. With the assistance of Four, a trainer in Dauntless, Alex was able to stop Jeanine," Eric continued.

Both of my parents were staring at Eric and nodding slowly. They looked haunted at the thought that a war was so close. And they seemed horrified that I was the one to stupidly stand in to stop it. "He's telling you the truth," I said.

"What happened to Jeanine? No one has heard a word from her since," Dad said.

It was the first time that I had seen Eric at a loss for words. Eric had mentioned that she had been killed but he hadn't said anything more on the matter. I knew that I had to say something but I found myself unsure of what I could say. They were Amity. They wouldn't understand. Eric knew the truth of what he had to say but I was sure that he didn't want to have to tell my parents that I had murdered Jeanine Matthews. So I held up a hand to silence him and spoke quickly.

"She was going to kill me. There was nothing that I could do. She was going to start a war against the Divergent. Against me. So I did what I had to do. I - I killed her. She shot me before she died. That's how I got the bullet wound," I said, jamming my words together.

"You - You killed her?" Dad asked, stuttering over his words.

Tears formed in my eyes at the looks that my parents were giving me. They were afraid of me and I couldn't blame them in the slightest. Maybe it wasn't even fear. Maybe they were ashamed of me. I wouldn't have blamed them for that either. We were Dauntless but we were supposed to be protectors. Not killers. I had killed someone. Part of me knew that I was never going to be able to go back to the way that I was before. Killing someone changed you. I already knew that.

"Mr. Freesia, you must understand. She had no choice," Eric told them.

I gave him a thankful nod before turning back to my parents. They still looked unnerved but they nodded at me anyways. "No choice?" Dad asked.

"She would have killed me. She tried."

"It was one of them or the other," Eric explained.

My parents nodded again. They were slow and doubtful nods but at least they hadn't gone running. "And what about you, Eric? We heard that you were there as well," Mom said.

A stony glance fell over Eric's face and I knew that he was searching for the right words. Maybe he didn't love me but he did care for me. He didn't want my parents thinking that the man that their baby girl was with had been working to start a war only to keep his position in Dauntless. I knew that he was looking for some way to tell my parents that he was working for the same woman that had shot their daughter. He was looking for a way to tell them that we were not on the same side. So I opened my mouth before he could.

"He saved my life."

"Really?" Mom asked.
I immediately cut over him. "Eric stepped in and pretended to be on Jeanine's side to gain her trust. When the time came he turned on her and helped me. He's the reason that I'm still alive," I told them.

So maybe it was a lie but they had to believe me. They had to believe that Eric was not the bad guy. "Alex, I didn't -" Eric tried again before I cut him off.

"He's being humble," I told my parents with a smile. I laid my hand over his and brought it over my stomach, feeling the pain from the stitched over the bullet wound. "Eric is the reason that I'm alive. Eric and Four. I'd introduce you but I don't know where he is."

"He's in the other room. I'll bring you by a little later," Eric offered.

Mom waved me off and brushed a few more strands of hair off of my forehead. "No matter, we'll thank him later. Eric," Mom started.

I glanced over at her and watched as she stared at Eric carefully. Dad had a straight look on his face as he looked to Eric as well. "Ma'am?" Eric asked.

"I don't know what happened tonight. I don't know if I really want to know everything that happened tonight. But the one thing that I do know is that no matter what happened, you've been here for my daughter. Thank you. For everything that you've done for her, thank you. If there's ever anything that we can do for you, just name it. And if you're ever in Amity just come by for dinner."

My jaw dropped open at her words and I smiled softly. Eric looked a little nervous as Mom pulled him in for a hug but he hugged her back anyways. Dad leaned over afterwards and shook Eric's hand tightly. "I'll always be there to look out for her," Eric said.

A small blush rose to my face and I giggled softly as both of my parents kissed me on the forehead. Eric watched with a smirk on his face as we talked amicably back and forth. He had never really seen me with my parents before. He must have been shocked to see us together. I explained to my parents what had happened during my Aptitude Test and told Eric all about how I had hidden myself during Stage Two of training. Of course it wasn't long before we were interrupted by the same doctor that had tried to keep my parents out earlier.

"Mr. and Mrs. Freesia," the doctor greeted. "I hate to interrupt the reunion but you will have time to speak with your daughter tomorrow. Right now we need you both to fill out some paperwork."

My parents both nodded, promising me that they would come back tonight and check on me before I fell asleep. I kissed them both goodbye and watched as they left, Mom keeping her eyes on me until she no longer could. I waved them off happily. It was the first time in a long time that I'd felt like I was actually able to talk to them without feeling like I was hiding some huge part of myself. Once they had disappeared from the halls Eric turned to me, a hard look on his face.

"What?" I asked.

"Why did you lie to them? I didn't save your life," he said.

I shook my head and grabbed his hand, pulling him into me. "You did. Believe it or not, you did. I would have never done the things that I did had you not convinced me to. You didn't tell me anything directly but you did make sure that I was strong. You made sure that I would never give up. You saved my life. Thank you, Eric," I told him.

"Don't thank me, Amity. Never thank me."
But I did have to thank him. He'd done more for me than he could imagine. He didn't seem to believe me but I left no room for argument. I leaned into him but barely made it more than an inch. My stitches began to stretch and I hissed in pain. Eric seemed to notice it as he pushed me back against the bed. He didn't bother backing away before leaning down to me and kissing me deeply. I smiled into the kiss and wrapped my arms around his neck. Somehow I hadn't lost Eric during everything. Somehow we were going to be able to stay together.

"Alex?" an absolutely stunned voice called.

I turned back to see that Buck was standing at the door with his jaws hanging open. The rest of my Dauntless friends were with them and I smirked lightly, a blush coloring my cheeks. Why the hell were they the people that the doctor hadn't announced? I supposed that it would be easier than having to explain everything later. Heather was somewhere in between smiling like she was about to burst and smirking so hard that her lips looked like they were about to split. Oh yeah, she was happy that we were caught.

"Eric?" Buck continued.

His voice was completely horrified and I smiled to myself. Eric looked towards the Dauntless members and I was sure that he was about to explode. "Well, duh," Heather snapped.

Every head turned to her and jaws dropped again. Heather had just given away the fact that she had always known about Eric and me. "You knew?" Buck asked her. He still sounded horrified.

"Of course I knew," Heather huffed proudly. "She told me first. I'm honestly surprised you dingbats didn't figure it out."

Shouts immediately started echoing through the room. Obviously they hadn't seen this one coming. I rolled my eyes and watched as Eric stood from the edge of the bed. My friends were all watching him with close eyes and I saw that his jaws were clenched. He liked people looking at him but only because they were afraid of him. Not because they were curious. He stood quickly and shoved the people standing closest to my bed away from him. The rest jumped out of his way quickly.

"Move it, initiates!" Eric snarled.

All of my friends jumped away from him in fear and I smirked at them. They were no longer initiates but I was sure that Eric would never see them that way. They would always be the pathetic little initiates in his mind. Draven took a step forwards and I smiled as he grabbed my hand. Heather grabbed my other and leaned to kiss me on the cheek. She had tears in her eyes and I smiled up at her.

We all sat together and talked quietly, sometimes joking and other times being serious. They never asked what had happened last night and didn't pressure me to tell them more than I was comfortable with. They were all good people. They were all going to be here for me no matter what. Heather was loud in saying that she was thrilled that I was alive and strong. Dante had told me that it was cool that I was the first one to get shot. He had earned a good punch in the stomach for that one from Lisa. Buck had wanted to see the scar. Serena had hit him for that one.

And of course we had spent most of the time together with me getting raked over the coals for not telling them about Eric. I had been forced to tell them how we had gotten together and when. Cole had commented that I was nuts for jumping into bed with Eric. No one had hit him for that. I would have but it still hurt to move. We had all sat together and laughed, pretending that nothing had happened, pretending that we were still the happy initiates we always had been. It was nearly half an hour before a man in a suit pushed my friends out of the room, each of them promising to see me
again once I came back to Dauntless

I smiled and waved at them all, calling back goodbye's to them. It wasn't long before they all disappeared out of the room and I was left with the man in the suit. He made me a little bit nervous. I would have rather been dealing with Johanna or Jack Kang. Someone that I was at least familiar with. He walked up to my bedside but kept a fair amount of distance from me. It was something that I was grateful for.

"Good afternoon, Miss Freesia."

"Hello," I greeted awkwardly.

"I'm glad to see that you're awake and moving around. My name is Niles."

Nodding at the man, I shifted awkwardly in the bed. I wasn't sure what to say. "I would introduce myself but I somehow think that you already know who I am," I said.

He nodded at me and I got the chance to look him over. He had dark hair that was slicked back and his suit was a starch white with plain black dress pants. It was obvious enough that he was from Candor. I wondered if maybe Iris and Florian had told him who I was. They were here, I knew that they were, but they were yet to be allowed in. It seemed that I wouldn't be allowed anymore visits from friends or family for a while. The man nodded at me and I watched him closely.

"Yes, I do know you. No need for formalities, Miss Freesia."

I had been referred to as that rather than my real name more times today than I had been in my entire life. The man was snappy and I watched him curiously. "I don't know what you mean," I admitted.

"Unsurprising. I'm only here to deliver you some news. In three days' time you will stand trial," Niles said, looking the least bit impressed with having to take the time out of his day to speak to me.

Thankfully I managed not to let my jaw drop. It came very close. I wasn't quite sure that I'd heard him right. No one else had mentioned anything like that. Not even Eric, who wouldn't have hidden any bad news from me. Maybe he didn't know or maybe he didn't remember. I merely stared at him with a blank face. I was supposed to stand trial in three days. What the hell were they having me stand trial for? I wasn't aware that anyone in Chicago even had trials.

"Trial?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Trial for what?" I asked, once my head wrapped around the thought that I was being put on trial only a few hours after I had been shot.

Despite the look of steel that was on my face my hands were shaking. They were putting me on trial. I'd heard that there were trials in individual Factions for crimes that were committed there. But I wasn't aware that we had trials for large crimes like the one that I had committed. Would it even be a trial or an execution? Even though we didn't have them I was smart enough to know what happened to people that ended up on a trial. They were usually marked as guilty. And I didn't want to know what would come of that.

"Multiple charges. The murder of government official Jeanine Matthews," he said. I was definitely guilty of that. "Hiding and acclaiming your Divergence." Also guilty. "Stealing a newly developed serum and using it on a leader of the Dauntless Faction." Eric. I had done that. I was guilty of everything.
But what they weren't taking into account was the reason that I had done all of these things. They didn't realize that I had put my life on the line just so that I could avoid a war. "So you're putting me on trial for trying to save this city?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Will I get my chance to say my piece?"

"I assume so," Niles said carelessly.

"I tried to stop a war. I did stop a war! And you're putting me on trial for it?" I snarled at Niles.

He merely shrugged. He didn't care because he wasn't involved. He was Candor. He stayed out of arguments that weren't his. He was just here because he had to deliver the news. "You can argue your point in three days. You will stand trial in front of the government officials from every Faction. The trial will occur in Dauntless," he said.

And suddenly being alive didn't seem like such a good thing. Not when there was a chance that I could be dead again in three days. But this time not at my hand. "Everyone will be there?" I asked.

"More than likely. You will be under supervision until the trial," Niles added, drawing my attention back to him.

I wasn't sure why he had even worded it like that. I was no fool. I had Erudite in me. Supervision did not mean that people would be watching over me. It meant that I was going to be a prisoner. "You mean I'll be under arrest," I growled.

"If that's what you'd like to call it."

"So what happens now? If I'm considered guilty or innocent?" I asked Niles.

Niles shrugged again. I could tell that this was not the first time that he had been forced to do this. "If you're deemed innocent you will be allowed back into the folds of Dauntless. However you will be stripped of your number one ranking. More than likely you'll be on Fence duty for the rest of your life. It's the best case scenario," he said.

Bile built in my throat. I had fought so hard for that spot and I was going to lose it because I had stopped a war. And that was my best case. "What's my worst case?" I asked.

"If you are deemed guilty you will be executed. Hanged, more than likely." The thought was sickening. "Do take care during your recovery. We look forward to seeing you in Dauntless in three days," Niles said, before leaving the room. I was fucked. Fucked in every single way. I was guilty. And everyone knew it.

Three Days Later...

My dilemma had gotten no better over the last few days. I had thought of every single thing that I could do to avoid the trial but nothing worked. I had even confided in all of my friends to see if there was any way to get out of it. To see if there was any way that the people might realize that I was innocent of any wrongdoing. So far we had come up with nothing. And it was even harder to make progress with the trial considering that no one was allowed into my room without a guard standing in the corner.

Eric had been the first person to come and see me once Niles had left. He had confided in me that he was to be on trial too after I went through mine. Unfortunately he was not going to be able to help
They weren't going to listen to his words. Four was in the same boat. But at least I had seen that he was healthy and alive. My friends in Candor, Amity, and Dauntless were all too young and low in ranking to do anything. The other Dauntless leaders didn't know me well enough to stick up for me. Cameron and Zeke had thankfully promised to stand up for me. So far they were the only two that I trusted to stand with me. I had a feeling that I might get a vote from Johanna as well but that might get passed over considering I had come from Amity.

So far there was nothing that I could do. I was going to have to go through the trial and try to convince everyone that what I had done was for the good of everyone else. Everyone that I loved was already back in their homes as I prepared to make my way into the Pit for the trial. I had been deemed strong enough to stand trial this morning and that had gotten me a one way ticket onto a train back to Dauntless. It had felt like I was walking into the Faction for the first time. Although this time there was no excitement. Only nerves.

Currently I found myself standing behind the stage that had been set up on the top of the Pit. I was listening to all of the voices down below me and my heart was pounding. Although it still wasn't as bad as when I had gone into Erudite a few days ago. But there had been a calmness washing over me. I hadn't been thinking about what would happen if I was successful. I had never thought about how my actions might fall back on me at some point. Not just me, plenty of others. Everyone was here to watch me and judge me on my trial.

The leaders were all here. Max, Eric, and the others; Jason, Cora, and Rick. There was also the other higher up Dauntless members. Among them, Zeke, Four, Lauren, and Cameron. Tori was there as well with some that I had never seen before. Harrison, Shauna, and Gus. They were the only ones whose names I had learned. There weren't many people here from Amity considering my close connection to them. Johanna was really the only Amity here. From Candor was Jack Kang - who was being closely watched - and Niles. Abnegation had sent a few members as well. Marcus Eaton was the only one that I cared enough to watch. Erudite had also sent people; none of them were familiar to me.

The voices all cut themselves off as I was pushed myself up onto the small stage that had been set up. My friends were in the audience and each one gave me a small smile, nodding at me as if to tell me it was going to be okay. I wanted to tell them not to lie to me. I knew that it wasn't going to be okay. For the most part everyone was just looking at me with curiosity. Only those from Erudite seemed angry with me. And even some of them looked bored.

As I walked into the center of the stage I heard Niles clear his throat. He moved to the side and I watched as another man, Jason I was pretty sure that his name was, walked out onto the side with him. They were each standing on the other edge of the platform that I was perched on. Niles still looking like he didn't care about what happened to me. I wondered if he ever showed any form of emotion.

"Alex Freesia. Are you aware of what you stand here accused of?" Jason asked.

I nodded weakly. "Yes," I said, not trusting myself to say anything else.

"And how do you plea?" Jason continued.

"To which one?" I snarled, slightly louder than I had meant to.

If my question had caught Jason off-guard he didn't make it clear. Instead he coughed once before opening a small letter. "To any and all crimes you have been accused of. Murdering - excuse me - assassinating Jeanine Matthews, hiding Divergence - a crime in itself, and stealing a newly developed serum only to use it on a leader without permission," Jason explained.
My legs were shaking as my mouth flapped open and closed for a moment. I couldn't deny it. I was guilty. They all knew that I was guilty. But I couldn't just say it either. They would hang me. "Can I get a chance to speak for myself? After I plea?" I asked Jason.

He looked to the others that were sitting on the panel and I watched as one by one they all nodded. "You still have rights. You may speak as long as you feel the need," Jason said.

It gave me a chance to do something about this. It gave me a chance to show that while I wasn't innocent, I wasn't guilty either. "I plead guilty to all charged crimes," I said softly.

Of course the room was so silent that there was no need to speak up. I saw Heather squirm in her seat, clearly wanting to say something, but Cole held her down. Eric and Four were both nodding at me. They already knew my plan. They had both agreed to it. And it had better work. Because I was about to drag them both into it. All of the government officials began to nod to each other and I heard a few of them begin to question what to do with me. But with the raise of a hand Jack Kang silenced them all. I knew that he had already been on trial but they had confirmed that Jack had no idea as to what was going on.

"You mentioned wanting to say something. Would you care to speak on your behalf?" Jack Kang asked.

I nodded slowly and proceeded to pace on the stage. "I want to tell you all my story. I know that you all know what I am. You all think that Divergent is - is a dirty word," I said awkwardly, feeling incredibly stupid. I was no diplomat. "I'm here to tell you that while I am guilty of the crimes that you've called me out on I am not guilty of any wrongdoing. So I ask that you all give me a chance to let you know my side of the story. The story that shows that we, Divergent's, are no different than you."

I looked towards the government table and took a slow breath in as I saw that some of them were shaking their heads. I'd had a terrible feeling that some of them may not care about what I had to say to them. "We've already determined that she's guilty. She admitted to it. We need to find a suitable -" Marcus Eaton began before being cut off by Johanna.

"Let the girl speak."

Glancing towards my former Faction leader I smiled at her and nodded, grateful that she had given me a chance. "Thank you. As many of you know I'm from Amity. This year I took the Aptitude Test. Just as we're all supposed to. I had no clue where it was going to put me. Everyone seemed so confident. My best friends knew where they were going. My neighbors all knew where they were going. People even thought that they knew where I was going. But I didn't have a clue. I just knew that I didn't want to stay in Amity. Is that so wrong? Is it so wrong that I didn't know where I belonged? Did any of you never feel like you knew where you belonged?" I asked.

At first no one answered me. But slowly nods were spread throughout the crowd until over three quarters of the crowd were nodding. At that I took it as a sign to continue speaking. "I took the Aptitude Test and was told something that I didn't think was possible. I scored four of the five Factions. Erudite, Amity, Abnegation, and Dauntless. I was terrified. The woman who administered my test told me how dangerous it was. She told me that I would have to lie to everyone. To never let anyone know what I was. So I didn't. I kept it a secret. I lied to everyone. I lied to my family. I lied to my friends. I lied to all of Dauntless and Amity. To everyone. Just to keep a secret that I didn't fully understand. I lied to myself, telling myself that I was something dangerous. Have I ever seemed dangerous to any of you?" I asked.

Some people began to shake their heads no. My friends, some higher-up Dauntless members, Eric
and Four. But no one on the government council made a move. So I continued to speak. "Being here in Dauntless was the best time of my life. I fought for the spot that I had here. All of you watched me go from a girl that could barely do a push-up to someone that was at the top of the Dauntless leaderboard. I did that without help. I did it without the Divergence. I did it because I wanted to be here. Because I was desperate to be here. Because this is my home. Like all of you have found homes in your Factions, I've found my home here."

Certain members of the Faction were smiling at me and I even caught some nods from nameless members that I had seen wandering the halls before. Maybe I wasn't alone here. "But like everything else my happiness wasn't to always be there. On my way to training one day I overheard a conversation between Max - the old Dauntless leader, and Jeanine Matthews." I knew that Max was currently awaiting his punishment. They had already considered him guilty of crimes against Factions. "They were plotting to start a war. I wanted to say something to all of you, to any of you, but that would have meant exposing myself. Exposing myself as a criminal, despite the fact that I hadn't committed any crimes other than being something that people don't understand."

They had to know the truth of everything that had happened. "They were planning on starting a war in between the Factions. She was planning on using the compliance serum, that I'm accused of using against a leader here in Dauntless, to control an army of Dauntless." Murmurs escaped through the crowd. "She was planning on using this army to attack Abnegation. She believed that they were the only ones that would risk hiding Divergent's. Candor would have supplied the serums so they would have been partially at fault.

"As far as Amity, she was planning another small attack there to ensure that they would not stand in the way of her revolution. She was planning on faulting the Dauntless for the attack, leaving Erudite to swoop in and save the day. With all of the Factions in utter disarray it would have left her open as the sole leader of Chicago. She had lists of every known Divergent in the city. She had my name in the file as well. She made it clear that she knew who I was. An attack on Amity from the Factionless told her that I was one," I explained.

This time when the chattering started it didn't stop. Everyone was speaking loudly back and forth between themselves all asking if what I was saying was the truth. "Enough!" Marcus Eaton shouted, silencing the room.

I noticed Four stiffen from where he was standing in the far corner. "Please, be quiet," Johanna said.

The room slowly quieted itself. "Why should we believe you? There's no proof. You killed Jeanine. Do you think that if indeed Max is guilty of this he will tell us the truth? You have no proof that there was ever going to be an attack," Marcus said.

For a moment my head spun. I wasn't quite sure what I could say or do that would prove that I wasn't insane and hadn't just dreamed up the entire attack. That was when I remembered. The file. The file was all of the proof that I needed. The only problem was that I had no clue where it was. Since I had seen it in Erudite last I knew that it had been moved. But its location had more than likely gone with Jeanine to the grave. Once more I had nothing.

"There's a file. I've seen it. I know where it is. I could bring you to it," Eric said, making everyone turn towards him.

"He's telling the truth. It's how I found out about these plans," I said.

"I'll get it now. Let her continue with her story in the meantime," Eric said.

He thought a lot faster on his feet than I did. I nodded my thanks to him as he turned and left the
room, followed by two other Dauntless men. I watched them go for a moment, thankful for Eric but also well aware of the fact that I would now have to defend why he had known where the file was. Honestly I was more concerned with himself than with me. I was the one that had accidentally dragged all of these people into this.

"Alex, please continue with your story," Johanna said, startling me back into the present.

"Oh. Of course," I muttered stupidly. "Time went on here in Dauntless. Things went back to normal as I continued to hide my Divergence, praying that what happened with Jeanine was just a lie. But I knew that it would come back to bite me. And it did. Just a month before Phase Three ended Jeanine and Max called me in. They told me that I was to show up to Erudite on the day of the final test to do something for them. I was afraid of it for weeks. It kept me up all hours of the night. I was terrified of what was going to happen. Finally I confided in Four," I said, feeling horrible for selling him out.

All eyes turned to look at the trainer but he merely nodded at me, letting me know that it was okay to continue speaking. "Four was there for me. He is a Divergent as well. He helped me along and we came up with a plan. A terrible plan, but it was something. So the night of the final test we went to Erudite. It was supposed to be only me but Four came too. We killed six of Jeanine's guards. And then it was only us. I don't remember much of what happened after that. Eric had to tell me. There was something called the Box. Inside was a way to destroy Divergent's. It could only be opened by a Divergent. One that was able to show that they could have the Aptitude for all five Factions. Many had tried. All had failed. A failure meant death. Jeanine was sure that I would be able to do it," I said slowly.

Instead of chattering starting up again the people in the room simply stared at me. "I went through each of the Faction simulations. I passed all of them, unlocking the Box. I was the only person to do so. The Box could never be opened. Jeanine couldn't get what she wanted. That was why I gave Eric the compliance serum. When I came to I ordered him to destroy the Box. He did. Because I told him to. In a fight I shot Jeanine. Before she died, she was able to shoot me. I lived. She didn't. I killed her not because I wanted to but because it was for the best of Chicago. I knew what I was doing when I walked in there. I knew that I was risking my life. I knew that I would end up on trial. But I did it because I wanted to save this city. Even if it meant my own safety and my own life I knew that I had to do it," I said proudly.

Smiles were being exchanged between my friends as they all looked up to me with grins. Everyone seemed proud of me. Even Zeke and Cameron were grinning up at me. Four seemed proud as well. It made my heart warm slightly. Maybe there was a chance that I could get out of this thing relatively unscathed. Maybe I would be able to make the impossible happen. The moment that Marcus opened his mouth to speak Eric walked into the room, the file in his hands.

"Let's see this," Marcus said with a scoff, grabbing the file.

Minutes passed as they all read over the file, everyone from the government. Sometimes there were little cries of shock and other times there were soft mutterings in between them. One by one they all sat back in their chairs, each looking at me with a look of something in between belief and fear. Fear of knowing just how close they were to a war and just how little they had known of it. Maybe if I was lucky they would actually take pity on me. Although they all looked stunned out of words. With the exception of Marcus Eaton, that is.

"So the file was the truth. It really did exist. Maybe that clears you for reasoning behind your crimes. We understand that you killed Jeanine for the good of the city. But that still doesn't excuse you or your one true crime. Being a Divergent. There's nothing that you can do to clear that," Marcus said.

It seemed that a few people were trying to speak to Marcus but I held my hand up, silencing them.
There was still one last trick that I had up my sleeve. "Tell me, how many of you actually knew what a Divergent was before all of this?" I asked. Less than ten hands went up in the crowd of over five hundred. "How many of you think that someone will more than one Aptitude is actually a crime?" A few hands went up but as the minutes of silence passed most of the hands went down. Marcus Eaton was the only hand that remained up. "This should be something that helps the Factions come together. Not tear them apart."

"It doesn't matter," Marcus said.

"It always matters," I interrupted.

"You are a Divergent. The punishment for this crime is death."

"We don't have to kill each other. We can be better than this. We can learn to work together and grow. This city has been so segregated since it was built. Maybe it's time that we change this."

"It doesn't matter. You are a Divergent and you will die. You know this. There is nothing that can be done. You may choose -" Marcus continued before he was cut off.

"Marcus, might I have the floor for a moment?" Cameron asked.

Marcus scowled and snarled under his breath before finally nodded. "Be brief," Marcus instructed.

"Alex, I haven't known you the entire time you've been in Dauntless but for the time I have known you, you have been nothing but the exemplary Dauntless character. You are everything that Dauntless values. You are brave beyond a doubt, to a fault maybe," he said, with a small laugh. "I don't believe that she is a monster because she's different. She's right. This is something that can be used to our favor. Relations between Factions have been strained since the beginning. I know this because I am an Ambassador for Dauntless. I've seen how terrible things are. People like Alex, they can help."

No matter what happened to me I would always be grateful for Cameron. I smiled at him and nodded. I was slightly surprised when someone else spoke up. "I would like to call all charges towards Alex Freesia to be dropped," Zeke said.

My eyes shot over to him and I smiled. Marcus looked infuriated but I knew that this was a part of the trial. If someone called forth a test of innocence it was up to the majority to clear the accused of all crimes. If the majority of everyone in the room called for my innocence then I would be cleared of all crimes. I would probably sent to the Fence for the rest of my life but I supposed it was better than being dead, I supposed. I might still be able to see Eric from time to time.

"All who support charges against Alex Freesia to be dropped say I," Marcus growled.

"I!" Heather was the first to chirp.

Everyone turned to her. I laughed and smiled and her, listening with a small grin as the rest of my friends followed suit. Not a moment later both Zeke and Cameron said it. Four and Eric followed quickly after. Tori, Lauren, and the remaining leaders of Dauntless followed them. In the next thirty seconds it seemed like the rest of the room had all finally said I. Within a minute I realized that everyone in the room, including on the government panel had said it. The only person that hadn't was Marcus.

He sighed before standing and silencing the rest of the room. "Thank you for your votes. Alex Freesia, you have been reinstated as a Dauntless member. However that does not mean that you have regained your spot as the number one ranked initiate -" Marcus began before being cut off by Cora,
one of the other Dauntless leaders.

"Marcus, thank you for officiating this trial," she said.

It was the first time that I had ever heard her speak. It was nice that the first time that she would speak would be to defend me from whatever Marcus wanted to do to me. Cora was an older red-haired woman and everyone glanced back at her. She wore a sweet smile as she strode forward towards us. It was only a moment before she stepped up onto the stage with me and smiled, grabbing my hand and turning us back towards Marcus.

"The trial is over. Not just for Alex. For everyone. Four and Eric, you've both been cleared of any wrongdoings by the grace of the leaders of Dauntless. Max's fate will be decided soon. From here on out the decision of what to do with Alex lies in the hands of Dauntless. And I for one would like to allow her to regain her place as the top ranked initiate," Cora said.

Grinning at her, I said, "Thank you," softly and shook her hand.

"I would like to second that," Jason said.

"Thank you," I repeated.

"There is one other thing that I would like to say. We are now short one leader. A head leader. I would like to nominate a new one," Jason continued.

All eyes turned to him in curiosity. Mine did as well. I didn't think that it worked like that. I thought that they were just chosen by the Head Leader. Actually I wasn't really sure how it worked. I thought that it was something that I would never learn. I always thought that I would be too low-ranked to ever hear about new leader nominations. I figured that he would either nominate Cora or himself but the name that spilled from his lips nearly made me keel over.

"Alex Freesia."

Murmurs arose at the sound of my name as all eyes turned back and forth between the two of us. Some people were smiling and others looked thrown off. I wasn't sure what to do. I simply stared as Jason like he was insane. I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to do now? Was I supposed to say something in response to the nomination or was I just supposed to stand here and wait for them to figure out what to do?

"I agree to the nomination," Cora added.

"I second the nomination," Eric put on.

This time Marcus spoke up he wasn't cut off. "As much as I'm sure you'd love to see Miss Freesia on the leadership you have a personal connection with her. Votes by members with personal connections cannot be deemed valid," Marcus said, making me scowl at him.

"No matter," Cameron spoke up, moving through the crowd. "I second the nomination."

At least someone else thought that I was worthy. I smiled softly as member after member added onto the nominations that would make me the Head Leader of Dauntless. It wasn't long before everyone had called out an affirmative and I blushed softly. I had never thought that they were all going to look at me like this. I had thought that they were going to make me out to be some monster. Eric grinned up at me and I blushed as all members of Dauntless stood. It only took a few moments for the rest of the Factions to line up and leave, letting Dauntless settle the rest of its issues in peace. Eric walked up onto the stage with me and after a few moments of receiving congratulations from friends
were finally left in peace. Only the Dauntless remained.

"There's one last thing we must deal with. Max," Jason said, pulling him out into the open, up onto the stage on my side. "Max, you have been a good leader to us for years. But we have a new leader now. You tried to cripple the Faction system and kill one of our own. These crimes are worthy of death."

"Please don't kill me. I don't want to die," Max said, trying to remain composed.

The rest of the Faction began to shout their agreements and I felt a small bit of bile rise in my throat as I thought about what had happened to Jeanine just a few days prior. As much as I hated Max for what he had done to me earlier, I knew that we couldn't. It would just put us right back to where we were beforehand. With me in charge, I wanted to make the changes that I thought would make Dauntless the home that I knew it could be. We couldn't kill Max. So as much as I hated myself for it I stepped forwards.

"Stop! We can't kill Max," I said.

Murmurs escaped through the crowd. "Thank you," Max muttered. I ignored him.

"What he has done is heinous. He cannot be trusted. But to kill him would make us just like him. We must show that we are better than that. Dauntless is brave. And sometimes to be brave is not the easy choice. To take the easy way out would be to kill Max. But that makes us just the same as him. To be brave is to forgive, but not to forget. I say that Max, you can live out your days in peace. But you will live them out as either a Factionless man or on Full-Time Fence Duty. The choice is yours," I told him.

He looked shocked that someone who had only been an initiate a few days ago was now giving him a choice between being Factionless and living at the Fence for the rest of his life. It didn't surprise me. What did surprise me was how authoritative I sounded. I'd never heard myself sound like that before. Max stuttered over his words for a few moment before finally spitting out his answer quietly.

"F - Fence Duty," he answered softly.

I nodded and motioned for a few Dauntless men to come up onto the stage. "Take him away. See to it that he is not harmed on his way to the Fence," I instructed them.

They both nodded at me and I watched as they moved Max off of the stage and towards the trains. "Good choice," Cameron muttered to me.

"There's one other thing that I wanted to say. Head Leader... it's an honor. But it's too much power for one person. So here's what I have to say. No more Head Leader. We can have leadership still but I believe that we don't work under a dictatorship. That's what we had while Max ruled. The leaders, we will still be. But no one will just be another worker. Everyone deserves a say in what happens. Even someone who just works at a store. If Dauntless wants to stay a Faction... a family, we need to work together. We do that by ending the rule we had here before. We work together. If you'll have it, I'd like to offer some suggestions," I said softly.

"But we'll still have the leaders?" Tori asked.

I nodded at her and smiled, stepping down off of the platform to stand next to Eric. "Yes. We still need someone to speak with the other Factions, people to be a voice for Dauntless. But that doesn't mean that they have to rule everything. I want to see a Dauntless where even a simple Control Room worker has a say in what happens," I said, shooting a smile over to Four. "Dauntless is a Faction of
the brave. But being brave doesn't mean cruel. I think that some of us have forgotten this." I shot Eric a quick smirk. He merely stomped on my foot. "If you'll still have me as a leader, I'd like to make Dauntless what I've always thought that it could be."

The air in the room was so much different from when I'd first walked in. The tense air was gone and replaced with something lighter. It seemed like something akin to happiness. "I think we can at least give it a try. Welcome to Dauntless, Alex," Eric said.

"No more calling me Amity?" I asked.

"Oh, no. You'll always be Amity."

The rest of the Faction erupted into cheers as people began to swing around the room, all laughing and cheering among themselves. My friends each came up to give me a hug and lift me into their arms. Zeke and Cameron followed after and Tori made sure to hug me as well. Even Lauren and Four along with the other leaders had hugged me tightly. It seemed that I had finally found my place. Maybe they weren't all fond of what I was, since no one had said anything about what I was, but it didn't matter. Rome wasn't built in a day.

The only thing that mattered was that things were going to change today. I knew that things were going to change. It would take some time. There was no way that we were going to make Dauntless the way that I had always imagined in just a few weeks, but today was the start. It made me happier than I had been in a long time. Eric was the last person to greet me and when he did it was not with words. He grabbed the back of my head and pulled me into him with his bone-crushing grip. The bullet wound stretched painfully but I wasn't going to tell him to leave. So I raised my lips to his and kissed him deeply, praying that this moment wouldn't end.

Our lips moved together and I soaked up the sound of the wolf-whistles from my friends around me. No one seemed keen on leaving my side anytime soon. I had never thought that the day would come when I could kiss Eric in front of them. Hell, I had never thought that anyone would know what I was. I had never thought that I would be a leader set out on a mission to change Dauntless. The whole thing seemed almost like a dream, but even if it was, it was a damn good one. So maybe this wasn't the way that I had thought that my life in Dauntless would work out, but it was the way that it had. And I would never want it any other way.
Chapter Twenty-Five

16 Months Later...

The alarm sitting on the edge of Eric's bed went off loudly and I groaned, rolling over into the pillows. How could it have already been morning? There was no way. I guessed that it was because we were supposed to be awake much earlier today than we normally were. We were here again. Choosing Day. It was the one day of the year where everyone in the compound had to wake up at an ungodly hour just so that we could welcome the newbies. And for the leaders it was even worse.

There were few others that actually had to be awake this early. I knew that Heather would be up around six so she could go and check over the files of the newest additions to Dauntless. The ones that had chosen a year ago today. She had to make sure that they all knew what to do today. The first Choosing Day for recruits in their first year was always the strangest. Three hundred and sixty-five days prior it had been them jumping into the net. Now it was someone else's turn.

For me it had been an entire seven hundred and thirty days since I had made the jump into Dauntless. In Amity I hadn't been able to sleep since I had been so concerned about where I would be going. Now I just wanted to sleep since I knew exactly what I was to be doing. Not that I wanted to do anything that I should have been. This was one of the busiest days of the year for the leaders. Eric in particular, since he had to go and retrieve them. At least I got to stay here all day.

Glancing over to the alarm I saw that it was now blinking at two past five. Eric seemed to finally have gotten sick of the blaring alarm as he smashed the snooze button and rolled back over. I smirked to myself as he rolled over towards me and grabbed me tightly. His grip was crushing around my waist but I didn't mind. It wasn't too often that Eric or I got to sleep in so we enjoyed the few minutes of peace while we could. Typically I was the one that had to wake up first. Eric was an early riser as well though. He normally woke up with me.

Despite the fact that sixteen months ago we had decided that there would be no such thing as a Head Leader, I knew that I was the one that everyone called on to do everything. I had Max's old office, which had been given to me a few weeks after I had taken over my position. The first thing that I had done was trash all of Max's things. I replaced the desk that he'd had with my whitewashed wooden one from Amity. There were some paintings from the Factionless men and women who had sold them to me when I'd been looking to decorate. I barely recognized it as the one Max had once threatened me in.

Not that I spent much time in my office. I liked to be out and about in Dauntless. I was one of the few women that were allowed upstairs in the Wolf's Den. Actually, I was the only one. With the exception of when I dragged Heather, Lisa, and Serena with me. Although they usually didn't stay long as I got rude comments from the men that were actually allowed to be up there.

Dauntless had changed a good bit since I had taken my spot as a leader. And it had all had something to do with Divergent's being exposed to the public. It wasn't just that. It was the fact that a Divergent was now the leader of Dauntless. Or at least one of them.

The change hadn't gone over well at first. Not with the first meeting that had gone on between the five Factions. Everyone hated the thought that a Divergent was now leading one of the Factions. Especially because that same Divergent had killed Jeanine Matthews. It hadn't just been the one trial
that I had been through. It had been quite a few. More than I could count. The first one or two months that I had been a leader here in Dauntless had been full of me being brought to different Factions to try and sort out everything that had happened that night.

It had taken my use of the Candor machine that utilized the truth serums for my story to finally be believable. Of course that meant that I had been forced to admit everything. I had been forced to tell people that Tori and Four were hiding my secret, as was Eric. That hadn't gone over well. But I had managed to take all of the blame for myself. It just felt right. I had been forced to restructure the Factions system. Between myself and the other leaders we figured that the only way to avoid another incident like the one that Jeanine had caused would be to destroy the Faction system that we knew and create a new one.

It had mostly been my job to restructure the system. Not that it bothered me. It meant that I could do whatever I wanted. Within reason, of course. Everything had to be approved by the others on the city counsel. The first thing that I had done was work on inter-Faction relations. They had been terrible for the near one hundred years that we'd been living in the Faction system. It was the life that we all knew and it was something that I knew had to be fixed. It would be the only way that we could live in peace.

Erudite had been the hardest to get on board. Half of them were angry that I had killed Jeanine Matthews and the other half hated that a Divergent was running the show in Dauntless. It had taken a few visits from the leaders of the other Factions to get them to even hear me out. The first thing I'd had to do was recount everything that had happened between Jeanine and I since I'd come to Dauntless. I'd been forced to explain to them how Divergence really didn't make me that much different from them.

 Needless to say they really didn't believe that. It had been nearly impossible for me to make them believe that I was just like them. They thought that since I had scored Erudite as well on my Aptitude Test I should be forced to show them that I was just like any other Erudite. I had been forced to take the test that they gave their members. It was like an IQ test. I took it and failed miserably. I was on par with a kid in Erudite. After the Faction had gotten a good laugh at me they'd been finally willing to hear me out.

Of course they had laughed a few more times while I was giving my suggestions. The first thing that I had requested was more open communication between the Factions. It all meant that there could be no more secrets. It was half of what had made Jeanine so powerful. No one knew everything about her plans. It was not something that sat well with the Factions, not being able to hide things from each other, but people had taken to it better than I had thought that they would.

There were a few things that I had wanted everyone to do. We had no secrets between Factions. All projects were authorized in pieces by each Faction. It would go through Candor first. They would determine whether or not the project was ethically correct. Then the project went through Erudite. They would consider how much the project would cost and whether or not it was even worth the money or time. We then sent the project to Amity and Abnegation. They constantly had people overseeing the project, since they were the best peacekeepers without their own motivations. Dauntless would protect the project as it was underway and until it was completed.

It was a good system. Despite doubts in the beginning people ended up liking it. Everyone was able to work together and things weren't too high-stress for any one Faction. No one Faction had to handle everything. It also gave everyone a job in each of the Factions. It created more work for people. It was better than everyone who didn't fit in one particular place having to go to either the Factionless or work somewhere like in a store or the dining rooms.
Abnegation had been one of the easiest Factions to teach our new ways. They liked the thought that not one Faction controlled any one thing. And they were the one Faction that didn't seem to mind having a Divergent leading a Faction. They were the most curious about it. They had been the ones to ask what it was like to be Divergent. I'd had the easiest time with them in changing the ways that the Factions related to each other. I'd also met a few members there. One of which I was sure was going to defer. Beatrice, I was pretty sure that her name was. She was like me. She was good at pretending to be Abnegation, but deep down she wasn't.

Amity had been easy to get on board too. Maybe it was because Divergence didn't make them uncomfortable. Or maybe it was because it was my home Faction. Johanna had been good with working with me on almost everything. There were very few plans that she didn't like. I had become quite fond of her over the past few months. She had become something like a second mother to me. She seemed much less intimidating now because I no longer had to pretend that I liked her Faction. She was just fine with me being Dauntless, as long as what I was doing what I loved.

Candor seemed so-so on the change. I was sure that they always would think that the other Factions were liars, simply because we hadn't been placed in Candor. Jack Kang had been good with the changes. I had a feeling that it was because I was one of the people that had kept him out of prison. Although I knew that he wasn't overly fond of the Divergence. Most of their Faction wasn't. I assumed that it was because they thought that hiding my Divergence had been one big lie. They weren't wrong. Although they worked with me well on the changes so I really didn't have that much to complain about.

Dauntless took the new changes with a grain of salt. They weren't overly fond of the changes at first but I was sure that everyone was glad to see Max out of the way. No one had been overly fond of him. And Eric had certainly been nicer to people with Max and Jeanine out of the picture. It made life easier for everyone. Although that didn't mean that he didn't snap at people when they irritated him. And that was a lot. But things were good here in Dauntless. This was my home and these were my people. No matter how upset that they made me.

And they had all managed to make me upset at least once over the past year and a half. My transfer friends had all been almost perfect with the changes, but there had been a brief period of adjustment. They were so used to me being their equal. It was a little strange to adapt to me being in charge and their having to listen to me. We had all walked around on eggshells for a while before finally learning the difference between being an asshole and giving some tough love.

But we were still all best friends, so that was all that mattered. And they had stood behind me when I'd made the demand that no Factions would be in charge of any one thing anymore. I had made sure of that. It was part of why I thought that Jeanine had become so powerful. Because Erudite were the only Faction that knew everything about their own Faction and everything about the others. Instead of Abnegation being the only Faction to run the government, it was now split. They agreed that it was for the best.

The first thing that I had done with assisting in organizing the new government was open a case on Marcus Eaton for domestic and child abuse. The domestic abuse could never be proven, as his wife had died long ago, but the child abuse could. Four stepped up with stories of his own, admitting that it was why he had left Abnegation and defected to Dauntless. Over the next few weeks more people had come forward and expressed knowledge of the abuse towards Tobias Eaton by Marcus Eaton. About six weeks after the case had first been opened Marcus Eaton was convicted. I had left sentencing up to Four.

Not very surprisingly, Four had not wanted his father executed. Instead he was imprisoned in the cells in Erudite. He would live out his life there. Plenty of others ended up there too. A few more
members of the government and quite a few from Erudite. There had apparently been more people privy to the knowledge of Jeanine's plans than we had originally expected. There were even a few members of Dauntless convicted that had been convicted. However most of them had been forced to stay on Permanent Fence Duty.

The new government was split between the Factions. Everyone had something that they needed to do and we all had to work together to ensure that we would never fall back to the way that we had been during Jeanine's reign over Chicago. We had made sure that none of the Factions were strictly government. They were all workers as well as government officials. Government officials were now normal workers that the individual Factions decided were the best suited to help run the city.

We had three government officials per Faction. The officials from Erudite were all elderly members. Abnegation was comprised of a man and woman that I had never heard of as well as Andrew Prior. His two children would be Choosing this year. Candor comprised of a two men and a woman. We had offered Jack Kang the position but he had denied, saying that he felt he had enough to do as a representative of Candor. I didn't blame him. Amity was comprised of Johanna, Iris's father, and Florian's mother.

The Dauntless officials had been up to myself and the other leaders. It was a choice that had taken us some time. Being from Dauntless we were prone to being loud and expressive. That wasn't always the best thing when it came to being a government official. It was what had led us to deciding that transfers into Dauntless or older members would probably be for the better. We had all talked about making three of the leaders government officials but after a good amount of deliberation we had decided that it would be too much. So we thought about the others that we could pick from.

My first choice had been Cameron. He had such a good head on his shoulders and he always knew what was best for the Faction. We had taken almost no time in deciding that he would be one of our three. He was originally from Erudite. The next had been Four. He had very begrudgingly accepted. Only after a good berating from myself. He was, of course, from Abnegation. The last had gone to Zeke. He was a level-headed man that I knew could take a hit if he ever needed to. He was the only Dauntless-born on our government officials list.

The entire process of toppling the hierarchy of the Faction system and redoing the government had taken us well over four months. But the process had been worth it. We hadn't had any problems since. Of course there were always the occasional attacks or fights in the streets, but overall it could have been much worse. It was the most at peace that I had seen Chicago in my eighteen years.

Once the political system had been fixed I had turned my attention to internal issues. The other Factions were free to work out their problems on the inside. It was time for me to fix what was wrong here in Dauntless. The first thing that I had tried to eradicate was the expulsion of transfers that didn't rank high enough. I hadn't gotten exactly what I'd wanted, but it was better than nothing. The choice had come to a vote. It was majority rules. Unfortunately the majority wanted to keep the ranking system in place. I knew why. It was fair. Those who ranked higher had better job choices. So despite losing that choice we had worked to change the process. It was no longer those who were the weakest. Poor attitudes, bullying, and cruelty would get you dropped in points. Cameras were now placed all over Dauntless. If one of the men and women in surveillance caught one of the initiates doing something we deemed inappropriate, rankings were dropped.

It wasn't exactly what I wanted but it was better than nothing. I had also had a few people assist with me in changing how long training went over now. We had decided that eight months was simply too long. With all of the changes to the government we needed new workers. But we also needed the time to train them. We had changed physical initiation to four months. Mental and emotional were
two weeks each, totaling to five months. It was three months shorter than what I had been through.

I had also been successful in changing the rule that elderly members had to leave one way or another. The choice had been to kill themselves by jumping off of the Chasm or becoming Factionless. Almost all of the Faction had stood behind me when I had eradicated that rule. Once people could no longer do their jobs they moved to something easier. They would either work in the stores or something that required little physical movement, leaving the physical jobs to the younger and stronger workers. It was actually better than the original system that we’d had. It was one of the better changes.

After that we had moved to the Factionless. Something had to be done. They continued to grow restless and I had known that we'd be dealing with a revolt if I did nothing. I had come up with the idea that if someone who was Factionless married someone who lived in one of the Factions, they would be allowed to live with them. They would not be members and they would not be treated as such, but they would be allowed to live in the retrospective Faction. Their partners simply had to support them.

The idea hadn't gone over well at first. No one was sure how it was going to work. No one was sure that it would even be able to work. But the first people to try it were the Abnegation. And once three members had married Factionless, each of them working out, more had begun to follow the trend. A few months after its introduction I had seen Raven wandering the compound. Jet had asked her to marry him. We'd all been invited to the wedding. She couldn't really come to parties unless accompanied by Jet, and she really didn't get much of a chance to leave their apartment, but she did say that she was happier here.

I'd asked her whether or not she knew what was happening with Skylar. She had mentioned to me that lately Skylar had been getting close with a boy from Erudite. Apparently he was rather taken with her. Raven and I were both hoping for the best to come from that. I wanted to see Skylar happy, in a place that was an actual home to her. The Factionless district was nothing.

Although I had started a campaign with Amity and Abnegation to help clean up the Factionless sector. We had worked on building up some of the dilapidated skyscrapers to make places that were appropriate for people to live. That had been about six months ago. We currently had about half of one of the buildings updated. It wasn't great but it was better than living underground like they had been. We had about fifty-two people living in the building now. In two months were hoping to have about a hundred. The more people we could get off of the streets, the better off Chicago would be.

At some point I wanted to do something else with the Factionless. I hated the idea that the Abnegation were still taking care of them, or else they would have starved. I was slowly starting to work with Abnegation and Candor to give them jobs or something of the likes. We could have them working on sanitation throughout Chicago or something of the likes. I just wanted them to have a reason to live, rather than just kind of hanging around.

It wasn't long after that that I'd been forced to look into something else. It was something that had bothered me since I was a child. The fact that there was only a few hours a day for one day of the year where we got to see each other. Our friends and families that all lived in other Factions. I had decided to speak with the other Factions about opening up inter-Faction travel. I hadn't thought that it would go over well. It turned out that it did.

It turned out that I wasn't the only one that wanted to see their family and friends more often. The phrase 'Faction before blood' was still true but that didn't mean that we couldn't still love our families. Visiting Day was the one day of a year that no one had a job to perform. It was the one day where people could travel freely. But I had worked with everyone else in the government to start a new
It was simply called Visitation Rights. It was mostly for parents and children to be able to see each other. But friends also were able to see each other, as were siblings. Every person got one day a month to go and see a loved one. Four hour intervals once a month. It had to be signed off by a leader. If you were a leader it had to be signed off by another leader or a government official. Workers in offices made sure that people got their once a month visits and nothing more and nothing less.

No one had been surprised with the first thing that I had used my visitation for. I had gone to see my baby sister for the first time. Being one of the leaders of Chicago itself meant that I had only been there for a while to see her when she was born. She was about five months old the first time that I had actually been able to see her. Other than at the hospital when she was born. She was absolutely adorable. She was sprouting a little tuft of blonde hair. It was nearly white. My parents both told me that it was like mine was when I was born. She had the same devastatingly green eyes that we all did. Her name was Willow.

Willow was almost a year old. She was standing now and had said a few words. Well something akin to words. My mother was slightly upset that 'Dada' had come first. 'Aly' had come not long after that. It was Willow's nickname for me since Alex was too hard to pronounce. 'Mama' had finally come after that. During a visit to them just a few weeks ago I had brought Eric with me. Willow had said 'Eri' while we were there. I didn't care that Eric had chuckled softly and shaken his head. I knew that he had melted at Willow. He would just never admit it.

I was not the only one that had been enjoying the past few months. All of my friends had been working to have successful lives. Heather was still my best friend here in Dauntless. She had become an Ambassador. Actually, she was one of my many friends that had become an Ambassador. She worked in inter-Faction relations which meant that the two of us frequently worked together, much to our pleasure. We had debated on getting an apartment together but we both knew that we needed the privacy. So ours connected.

Cole and Heather were still together. Unlike Heather, Cole worked in Surveillance with Four. The two men worked on quite a few projects together. Four had been teaching Cole what to do and when to do it for the times when Four would need to be in government meetings. Cole had an apartment two levels below me. I knew that he had been batting around the idea of asking Heather to move in with him. I had been trying to convince him that it was a good idea. Everyone knew that they loved each other so much.

Buck had been enjoying his time in Dauntless as well. He was a weapons master. He used the guns and ensured that they were all in proper working condition. I knew that he enjoyed his job. Although when he used the faulty guns he had been burned by hot brass a few times. I liked to tell him that it made for cool scars. He liked to tell me to shut the hell up. We all enjoyed watching Buck strike out with a Dauntless girl named Mariah. She had bright purple hair and seemed to get on with everyone other than Buck.

Buck and Draven lived together, seeing as there was somewhat of a shortage in apartments right now. Especially with the rather large class we had just put through. There were over fifty transfers last year. Thirty-two were still here. Draven worked as a patrol guard. He typically went through the governmental sections of the City. They were on lock-down for almost everyone. He had to have special permission from me just to be there. I knew that as stressful as his job was, keeping the government officials safe, he enjoyed it.

Jade was one of my absolutely favorite 'success' stories. She had finished in one of the lower
rankings but not so low that she was stuck on Fence duty. Instead she had taken a position of a secretary assistant. That meant that she worked under one of the Ambassador's. Since I loved the way that Jade had gotten along with Heather and myself so much I assigned Jade to be Heather's secretary. Now she got to take orders from Heather and I all day long. She genuinely deserved everything that she had worked so hard for.

Dante worked as an Ambassador, just like Heather. The two worked closely together. He worked in the serum department in Dauntless. It meant that he spent a lot of time in both Erudite and Candor as well. I had been worried that he wouldn't like all of the travel but he was fond of it. He got to see his family and friends pretty frequently and he enjoyed the travel. He learned most of his trade from Cameron, who had been spending more time in politics and less with his Ambassador position. But I had told him that he would be allowed to do so.

Jax was something that we liked to call a body guard. It hadn't been his first choice. He had originally wanted to be a trainer. We allowed him to be a trainer during initiation as a part-time position. Most of the time he worked to protect high-up members of the Factions. I knew that it wasn't his favorite job. He liked working as a trainer better. But he didn't mind being a body guard. He did like the people that he got to work with and he liked knowing that he had gone through so much physical training for a reason.

Jet was the only one of us to become an official trainer. During the times of the year where we didn't have new recruits he taught refresher classes. He helped the older members stay in shape, the younger transfers remember what they had learned, and pushed the prime members to work to strive for excellence. During the time where we had new initiates, Jet worked as a trainer for them with Four and Lauren, both of whom were still trainers. He took over Four's spot with the transfers when he had government work to do.

Then there were the Dauntless born. Aaron, Jackson, Michael, and Greg were all working as Ambassador's. Some were working with weapons, others with the other Factions, and some were with the patrol guard. They all remained my friends as I tried to force them into relationships with other Dauntless girls. So far I'd only been successful with Greg. He was dating a Dauntless girl named Hale; their relationship was new. Lisa worked on the patrols and Serena worked in records. It was always useful to have a friend that could get me any information on anything that I needed.

Overall everyone was having a good time living their lives here in Dauntless. Even Eric and I. We were both doing better than I had thought either one of us were capable of. Eric still wasn't particularly friendly, but he was certainly better. He wasn't overly fond of Four but the men had definitely been getting along better than when I had known them at first. I assumed that it was partially because each one had a hand in saving my life. It was the one thing that they had in common. They both cared for me.

Eric and I hadn't moved in together or anything of the sorts but we still enjoyed spending most of our time together. We liked to screw with each other and make each other angry but that wasn't to say that we didn't care for each other. I was sure that we always would. We really did care for each other. He might not love me but that was okay. He didn't have to love me. I just knew that we wouldn't want to be without each other. And that was all that mattered. As long as we were together. And we actually spent very little time apart.

As for Iris and Florian, they were still enjoying life in Candor. I had visited them a few times over the past year or so. Each time they seemed happier to be together. The pair that had once barely been able to stand being in the same room together now seemed about ready to get married. They both insisted that they weren't ready for that though. I had told them that when the day came that they were ready I had better be the first one invited.
Eric's second alarm that sat over by the kitchen counter went off and I stood to turn it off. Eric was still dead asleep. He hadn't come in until late last night; work had kept him up. He always hated Choosing Day. I would be sure to not bother waking him up until he needed to go retrieve the new recruits. That wasn't until mid-afternoon. So I slowly slipped from the bed and shivered at the cold air that hit my bare skin. I walked over and pressed the off button on the alarm, smiling at the picture of me in the red dress.

It was sitting on Eric's bedside table now. It wasn't in a photo frame but it was leaning up against the stone wall. It made me smile every time that I saw it. It told me that he really did enjoy just the simple things like having a picture of me to look at when I was too busy to actually be around. Padding into the bathroom slowly I shut the door softly behind me, not bothering to throw the lock just in case Eric needed to use the bathroom while I was in here. We were always bad about shoving each other around in the morning to try and get ready.

I turned the water on and raised it to one of the warmest settings that it could go on. As the steam rose in the bathroom I turned to look at myself in the mirror. Not much about me had changed. I'd dyed a few of the strands of the underside of my hair a bright red. My tattoos were still the same. I had the Amity tree that had the Dauntless fire on my back, the quote that went across my hip and thigh, and the angel wing that went from my ribs to right over my hipbone.

Recently I had added another two to the collection. I had gotten a small heartbeat symbol on my chest. It was right over where the top of my bra laid. Right underneath was the reason that I had gotten it. The skin was bunched and slightly burned. It wasn't a huge mark but it was just enough that I could tell that something was wrong there. It was the bullet wound from Jeanine Matthews. I had once been ashamed of it. Now I flaunted it. I was proud that I had stood up and fought for something that I believed in. Maybe I'd taken a few wounds in the process, but I was proud of myself.

The other tattoo had come from when the bet between Eric and I had finally come to a head. Considering that we put tattoos on each other we had gone relatively easy on each other. To my surprise, I actually loved the tattoo that Eric had given me. The word 'protector' was tattooed across the top of my right foot. It had been extremely painful but I loved it. It turned out that my name meant protector of mankind. It had inspired me to give Eric a Celtic eternal knot symbol just below his Dauntless leadership tattoos. His name meant eternal ruler. He liked it, even though he'd only called it only decent.

As the water heated up to the point where I wouldn't be frozen I walked into the glass shower. There were a few dark bruises on my thighs and hips. I knew that it was from a sparring match that I'd had with Aaron yesterday when we were both bored. At least I could hide my bruises. Aaron had a fat lip that would not be so easily hidden. I had felt a little bad for the hit but he had deserved it. He had broken the skin on my thighs when he'd dragged me across the mats.

After a few minutes had passed and I'd washed out both my hair and body I placed everything back on the shelf. They were my things but they were small. They were some of the few things that I left in Eric's apartment. I walked out of the shower and wiped off the steam on the mirror. I brushed my wet hair off of my face and turned as the door opened and Eric stepped in. I sent him a small smile. He hadn't bothered putting on any clothes from last night.

He walked over to the mirror and bumped me out of the way. I laughed and grabbed my brush that was on the counter, brushing my hair down so that it fell straight down over my back. The red stood out strikingly against the light blonde. Once I had applied a tiny amount of makeup on my face, mascara, eyeliner, and cover-up (to cover a small bruise from a match with Eric a few days ago) I went to go grab my clothes that were scattered out in the living room.
Before I could leave the bathroom Eric stopped me. He looked exhausted. "Breakfast?" he asked. I didn't say anything as he pulled me in for a lingering kiss. His hands created goosebumps on my flesh. Of course neither one of us had time for that right now. I pushed him away and stepped backwards. "Please," I responded before turning to walk out of the bathroom.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Eggs."

"Anything else?"

I turned back and gave him a suggestive smile. "You," I said.

"Don't tempt me."

We both smiled. Before I made it to the doorway I felt a sharp pain on my butt, from where he had smacked me. "Asshole," I muttered.

Eric laughed at me as we both walked into the living room. I grabbed the spare set of clothing that I'd brought last night, knowing that I would have to head straight to work from here. It was rather annoying that I was never smart enough to leave a few spare sets of clothes in his apartment. I walked over to grab my clothes as Eric popped in a few pieces of bacon. It wasn't really like we had to actually do anything today. We would just be showing the new recruits around. It was them that would be stressed out today. We would just be showing the new recruits around. It was them that would be stressed out today, not us.

This was actually one of my easier days. I would be going to tour the compound with Four and the transfers. Maybe I'd manage to drag Heather with us too. I grabbed my clothes in my hand and laid them out on the couch, shivering slightly when Eric walked over to me with the food, his hand running across my bare back. I popped a piece of bacon into my mouth as I grabbed my bra and underwear, slipping them both on. I ran into Eric's laundry room and tossed my pants, shirt, and underwear into the basket. I would do the laundry this weekend at some point.

As I ran back into the living room I grabbed another piece of bacon before grabbing my clothes. I pulled on a low-cut tank top that was tight around me. It dipped just low enough to show the heartbeat tattoo. I pulled on a pair of black leather pants after that and fought to close the buttons for a moment. I could hear Eric laughing at my predicament. Once they were situated on my thighs I grabbed a third piece of bacon and ran over to retrieve my boots.

These were only a few of my cheaper clothes. I had worn them just because I would have to be doing a lot of running around today. Today was the one day of the year that I did whatever Four wanted me to do. Eric had once asked me to do the files - just as I had done during my own initiation - but I had laughed him off and ordered him to get Jason to do them. I grabbed my boots and nearly fell over a few times while I tried to put them on.

"Why don't you just move all of your things in here?" Eric asked.

I didn't bother answering him at first. I ran into the bathroom and popped my toothbrush into my mouth. I ran it back and forth for a few moments before walking back out into the living room. "What?" I asked.

"Why don't you just move your things in here?" Eric repeated.

"Are you asking me to move in?" I asked through a foamy mouth.
Eric shrugged his shoulders. "I've asked you before and you always say no," he said.

It was the truth. Eric had started asking me to move in a few months ago. "There's a reason why," I said pointedly.

"There's no point in you not moving in here. Half of your things are already in here. You spend almost all of your nights here. You've spent less than a month in your own room since moving into your own apartment," Eric argued.

He wasn't wrong about that. My own apartment looked like one of the staged ones that we used to allow people from other Factions to stay and spend the night. There was almost nothing in there and it looked like it hadn't even been lived in. Most of the nights that I spent in my own apartment were because Eric or I would be working well into the night and wouldn't want to disturb each other when we came back. But like I had said, there was a good reason that I hadn't moved in.

"You're right. I should move in with you," I said.

"So do it."

"You know exactly how to get me to do that. Come on Eric, I've told you this one before."

I saw him shift uncomfortably on the couch. "We're not playing this game," he snarled.

"It's not a game. Three words... eight letters. Say them and I'll move in," I told him.

I spat out the toothpaste and wiped my mouth before grabbing a bottle of water. I noticed that Eric had stood from the couch. There was something strange in his eyes. It made me curious as to what he was looking at me for. Was he going to say it? He walked over to me and I smiled. His hands wrapped around my waist and one of his hands traveled up to brush my hair back. He moved in to kiss me but at the last moment turned to put his mouth beside my ear.

"I gotta go," he whispered.

I stood, dumbfounded, as he walked towards the door and propped it open. He gave me a wink as he went to leave the apartment. "Wrong combination!" I yelled after him.

But to his credit that was actually a pretty good comeback. I supposed that I couldn't have been expecting anything else from Eric. As angry as he made me sometimes, I wouldn't want him any other way. He laughed loudly and walked out, letting the door shut behind him. I had a spare key to his apartment so I would be able to lock up after him. Despite his words I laughed softly and pulled my hair up into a high ponytail. I fixed his sheets slightly before turning to walk out of his apartment.

My feet led me straight to the main area of Dauntless. I stopped by the dining room first, taking up some of the food that they had set out. I could tell that everyone was in a rush, trying to get ready for the new recruits to come in. We tried to make them comfortable without hiding ourselves. While I ate a few of my friends came over to speak with me. I had asked where Heather was almost immediately; Cole told me that she was still in his apartment. She was apparently trying to work up the energy to get over a hangover and come do her job.

Once I had finished with breakfast I went to go check on a few of my projects. I had stopped by Serena's work area first to make sure that she had the raid paperwork that we needed. Sometime next week we needed to go down into the Factionless areas. They had something boiling down there and we had to put a stop to it. Once I was done with that I checked on our weapons production and testing facility, I went to go check on the in-progress projects, and made sure that all of the first-year members knew what their jobs were.
Thankfully they had all been paying attention during the meeting that we'd had with Four a week prior. A loud bell rang as I made my way to the lower levels, where the net was. The initiates this year were getting ready to come in. I sighed and ran my hands through my hair. They were almost here. As I walked in I saw that it was a similar set-up to last year and the year before. Four was standing at the net, waiting for someone to come through. Lauren was on the other side and a few other members were milling around. I went to stand next to Four.

He looked over and smiled at me. "Good morning," I greeted.

"It's almost one o'clock," Four pointed out.

"Whatever."

A moment later Heather came up to my side. "Morning," she greeted.

"Ready to see what we have to work with this year?" I asked the two.

Four smiled and shook his head. "They can't be any worse than the monsters that I had to train two years ago," he told us.

Funny," I snapped.

Heather and I both laughed loudly and shoved Four. We knew that he was just kidding. Although I could imagine that we had been rather nightmarish two years ago. Four didn't budge as the two of us took a step back. I could hear the shouting and laughter up on the roof. They had just jumped from the train. We waited as the voices came to near silence. I knew that Eric would be speaking to them all right now. And scaring them, more than likely.

"Do you think that there are going to be any Amity transfers this year?" I asked, after a beat of silence.

"No," Four immediately stepped in.

"Really?" Heather asked.

We both glanced up at him curiously. I wanted to know how he already knew that none of the transfers would be from Amity. "None of them are quite as stupid or suicidal as you are," Four added.


"There's no way that any Amity is following you into Dauntless," Heather put in.

"Why's that?" I asked.

"You set the bar too high."

The three of us all laughed and we looked up. The first one of them had to be coming down any second now. Eric didn't exactly like waiting for the first jumper to volunteer. He would only wait so long before I could imagine that he would throw one of the new initiates over himself. I could see a shadow standing on the edge of the roof. It looked like a girl. I could see a dress blowing in the breeze. That would mean that she was definitely a transfer. It made sense. Eric liked to watch the transfers go first. He had done the same thing during our initiation.

We all watched as she took a step off the edge of the building. She didn't yell but she did make a
loud gasping noise as she fell. I watched as she hit the net and bounced heavily a few times before coming to a stop. My eyebrows immediately shot to my forehead. She was from Abnegation. The girl had dark blonde hair that reached about the same length that mine did. Her face was slightly rounded and she was very thin. She looked like she had no muscle on her. Poor thing had no clue what she had done.

Four looked about as surprised at our new addition as I was. He looked just as confused at the sight of her as he had been at the sight of me two years ago. It was different from last year when the first jumper had been a boy from Candor. The girl's brown eyes were looking around the room nervously. I watched as Four grabbed her unexpectedly and pulled her off of the net. She looked petrified but calmed slightly as she looked at him.

"What, you get pushed?" he asked her.

My eyebrows furrowed. That was what he had said to me when I jumped two years ago. "Oh, he just loves saying that. He said the same thing to me when I came down two years ago," I told Heather, leaning over to her.

"Did he?" Heather asked.

"Yeah."

"Shocking."

We both chuckled as the girl took a moment to collect herself, stepping back slightly from Four. "No," she said meekly.

It was hard to imagine that she was from the same place that Four was. They were so different. Heather leaned closer to me and I turned slightly to face her, not taking my eyes off of Four and the Abnegation girl. "I wonder if she mouthed off to Eric too," Heather said.

I let out a loud snort. Maybe one day she would, but certainly not on the first day. Not the way that I had. It was the only reason that Eric had ever looked twice at me. "Look at her," I snapped.

"Put on some clothes from Amity and the two of you might have been the same person," Heather said.

"With two very different personalities. Amity tend to be louder and more outgoing. Abnegation are soft-spoken and withdrawn. She didn't mouth off to Eric. For now she's still a Stiff. She'll grow it of it though," I said confidently.

In some odd way she reminded me of myself. She wasn't as bold or brash but she did remind me of myself. Unsure and the only person like me in a large group of people all like each other. "Already taking an initiate under your wing?" Heather asked, an amused tone in her voice.

"I'm thinking about it," I told her.

My focus went back to Four and the Abnegation girl. "What's your name?" he asked her.

"It's..." she said before trailing off.

Four was not being patient with her. Just the way that he always was. "Is that a hard one?" he snapped.

I watched in slight amusement as she took a step back from him. She was afraid of Four. "Poor girl,"
Heather muttered.

"You can pick a new one if you want, but make it good. You don't get to pick again," Four warned her, slightly softer this time.

"Okay..." she said, trailing off and thinking. I was glad whoever was behind her was taking forever. "My name's Tris."

She said it so quickly that it almost surprised me. It must have been something that had come to her, just the way that Alex had once come to me. Just then it hit me. Tris... Abnegation... Transfer... Beatrice. This was Beatrice Prior. Even though I'd seen her not that long ago, she looked much different. When I had thought that she would defer I had thought that it would be to Erudite or Candor or something. Not Dauntless. But I was glad to see her here. Four's voice cut off my thoughts.

"First jumper, Tris!" he shouted.

People all began to cheer, Heather and I shouting loudly for the girl. She turned to me and jumped slightly. I gave her a small wink, to which she laughed. "Go, Tris!" I shouted.

"Welcome to Dauntless," Four told her with a strange look.

I walked over to him as Tris went to stand a couple of feet back from us. She was just far enough away that she wouldn't be able to hear us if we spoke. "Be careful, Four," I warned.

He stood and stared at me curiously, clearly wondering what I meant. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"No relationships with the initiates," I told him in a sing-songy voice.

Four snorted and shoved me roughly. I responded by grabbing his hand and twisting roughly. Four responded with a heavy kick to my shin. I cried out softly and dropped. I would have fallen had he not been holding onto me. We both smiled at each other and I noticed that Tris was watching with us in between looking concerned and amused. My concentration on Four was broken when I heard a boy screaming loudly as he fell to the net. He let out a loud grunt when he hit the net and was pulled off. His name was Peter.

"He looks like Colt," I whispered under my breath to Heather.

She growled in the back of her throat. He did look a little bit like Colt, only Peter had dark hair while Colt's was blonde. We watched as one by one the rest of the transfers and Dauntless born fell. The only one that I already knew was Uriah, Zeke's brother. I shouted as loudly as I could when he fell. I had seen most of the Dauntless born kids before but Zeke was the only one that I had actually spoken to before. I picked out the transfers, sorting them all away in my mind.

There was Christina, who had jumped third, a Candor transfer. She seemed to already be friends with Tris. I smiled. They reminded me of Heather and myself. Will was an Erudite. He seemed nice enough. Al was another Candor. I did not like him. Something seemed off. Molly, an ex-Candor, seemed to be a carbon-copy of Jade. However even Jade was at least pretty. Molly had nothing going for her. Drew, another ex-Candor, reminded me of Hunter. Although, unlike Hunter, Drew had a mouth on him. Edward was an extremely promising-looking ex-Erudite. His girlfriend Myra was much less impressive.

Overall the group was less than spectacular. I had seen much better initiates. I was slightly biased, but I knew that my group was stronger two years ago. Even the initiates last year had been better.
These kids were almost laughable. Of course I wasn't in the position to be judging just yet. They might surprise me. But that wasn't likely. I rarely found myself surprised these days.

Four's voice shattered my thoughts. "Dauntless-born, go with Lauren, transfers stay with me. Go," Four snapped when no one made to move.

As Zeke passed me he sent me a little wink. "Good luck!" I called after him.

"Thanks, Amity!"

I giggled under my breath and turned to see Lauren passing by me. She wasn't a leader but we did spend a lot of time together. "This way," Lauren called.

The Dauntless born followed her past the group of transfers. "Even the new Dauntless know you as Amity," Heather teased.

"I suppose I can thank Eric for that," I muttered.

"Hey, Alex. Heather," Lauren chirped at us as she walked by.

"Hi, Lauren," I greeted.

Heather said her own hello and watched as she walked them out of the main area. I assumed that she was going to bring them straight to the dorms. Not that they all really stayed in the dorms. With the exception of the period when we played War Games most of the Dauntless born stayed in their original homes. It was one of the many ways that they lucked out. I was still trying to think of a way to make Dauntless training a little more fair.

"Most of the time I work in Intelligence, but during your training, I'll be your instructor. My name's Four."

Four seemed to be about ready to introduce Heather and I when a Candor girl spoke up. "Four like the number?" she asked.

She was definitely small. She had deeply tanned skin with short, dark hair. She was the one that I had seen Tris with earlier. Other than Tris herself, the girl was probably the smallest of the transfers. The girls seemed so different. The girl, Christina, had said exactly the same thing that Heather had said two years ago. Thankfully other than a few snickers, no one had actually said anything last year.

"Exactly like the number," Four snarled.

Christina was very much like Heather. I had a feeling that the two girls would get along well. "What happened, one through three were taken?" Christina asked with a laugh.

"Oh look, it's you!" I chirped to Heather.

"Except I know what I'm doing," Heather replied.

"Sometimes," I shot back.

She turned to look at me and stomped down on my toe. Thankfully the boots that I was wearing were combat-ready. They had steel covers over the toes. Somehow her foot still hurt me a little bit. A few beats went by as Four walked up to the girl. I saw her shrink back slightly from him. At least Heather was tall. She was only about five inches shorter than Four. Christina, like me, was nearly a foot shorter than him.
"What's your name?" Four asked her.

I rolled my eyes. He was making a show of this just like he had two years ago. He knew her name. He had just asked her a few minutes ago. "Christina," she answered him.

He nodded at her and shifted. "Well, Christina. The first lesson you learn from me if you wanna survive here, is keep your mouth shut. Do you understand me?" he asked her.

It was not a question. It was a demand. I knew the difference. Especially when it came to Four. "Yes," Christina squeaked softly.

Tris looked concerned for her new friend. Four's face turned up in something akin to a pleased smile. "Good. Follow me," Four snapped.

That was enough to silence their little group. No one was expecting Dauntless to be tough right off of the bat, but we were. He walked past the group to pass by Heather and me. He threw an arm over my shoulder and I turned back long enough to see Tris look away with a slightly disappointed stare. Oh, yeah. I was gonna have fun with those two.

"Every damn year I get carbon copies of the two of you," Four told us.

We both laughed loudly and shook our heads. I knew that the kids behind us were trying to listen to our conversation. It didn't matter. We were being quiet enough so that they couldn't hear. "Come on, Four, you could never get someone quite like us. And don't pretend that you don't love us! We make your boring, pathetic life so much better," I told him brightly.

Even Heather snorted at my words. "You give me headache," Four said.

"Likewise," I shot back.

"And that's not totally fair. She's the nightmare," Heather told Four, pointing to me.

"I thought we were on the same side!" I barked.

"And you got me shot," Four added, pulling down his sleeve slightly.

It showed a scar similar to the one that I had on my stomach. "One time!" I shouted slightly louder than I had meant to. "And need I remind you that I got shot too. Hey, I died." Both Heather and Four flinched slightly at the reminder. Eric was the same way. He refused to even talk about that day. "You just got shot in the shoulder."

My teasing did not go over well. "Please don't remind me of that day. I saw you in there. Bloody and dead," Four said softly.

My body gave a soft shiver. I didn't know what I had looked like lying there on that table but I assumed that it wasn't a pretty sight. "I second that. Let's not talk about that day," Heather muttered.

"So who exactly are you two?" another voice called out.

We all turned back to see who was speaking to us. It was one of the transfers. I turned back to see that it was Peter, the transfer from Erudite. I stared at him curiously. He reminded me painfully of a less dangerous Colt. I didn't like the lingering look that he gave me. I didn't really like him at all. I had a feeling that I wouldn't like him much throughout initiation. Heather took my silence as a sign to speak up.
"My name is Heather. I'm one of the Ambassador's here in Dauntless. I work with inter-Faction relations. I make sure that the Factions are all able to communicate with each other effectively. To keep everything here in Chicago running smoothly," she told them.

I nodded at her with a little smile. "And what about you?" Peter asked me.

He was moving towards me with a raised eyebrow. "I'm out and about," I answered carelessly.

"What does that mean?" another initiate, Drew I thought, asked.

"It means that she doesn't do anything," a girl, Molly, said.

My eyes rolled so far back that I was sure that I could see my brain. I could feel that Four wanted to step in to tell Peter and Molly to back off but I placed my open palm against his thigh to stop him. I would handle this on my own. It wasn't a problem. Silly little boys and girls like them were never a problem. We just had to quickly squash the behavior.

"Do you run a shop? Do hair? Maybe you make coffee," Peter teased.

His lackeys, Drew and Molly, both laughed. No one else looked amused. Everyone simply stared at me in curiosity. Probably wondering what I was going to do. I noticed that Tris was sending the three of them an annoyed glare. She was from Abnegation. She didn't enjoy watching people be cruel like that to each other. I stepped forward and gave a sugary smile at the trio.

"What are your names?" I asked them.

Unsurprisingly it was Peter that spoke up first. "Peter," he said as he motioned to himself. "Molly." He motioned to the girl. She had chopped brown hair that hung limply around her shoulders. It wasn't exactly anything impressive. She had broad shoulders and a large stature. It didn't make her pretty but she would be strong. "Drew." Drew had bright orange hair and looked almost like he was in pain. They were a curious group.

"Tell me, Peter," I said, accentuating every syllable in his name, "Do you know the name Alex?"

I knew that he would know me. Everyone knew the name all over Chicago. I was relatively certain that they taught the kids about me in school. They all knew what she had done. I was curious if he knew what she looked like. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Eric walking into the side of the Pit with Cameron at his side. They walked up to Four's other side and the three men watched in curiosity. Peter looked nervous. By now both Drew and Molly had backed away.

"Yeah. Everyone knows her. She's the Amity transfer that ended up as a Divergent. She killed Jeanine Matthews because she was trying to start a war. She's a leader here. She's responsible for most of the changes that have happened here in the City," he told me, almost automatically.

"That's right," I said, nodding slowly at him and taking another step forward. Peter didn't back away but I knew that he was nervous. Everyone else was watching me happily. "What do you think about her?"

Peter's Adam's Apple bobbed in his throat. "She caused a whole lot of trouble. I'm from Erudite. She nearly collapsed the whole system -"

"Recreated," Heather interrupted.

Peter sent her an irritated glance. "She's insane. She destroyed most of what Jeanine worked for during her life. Jeanine was a bitch but at least she wasn't nuts. Not like Alex was. Is. She's
Divergent. I don't know why they even let her roam free in this place," Peter said.

With each of his words his confidence had gained slightly. "And what do you think about me?" I asked Peter after a pregnant pause.

"You're just some Dauntless girl that likes to pretend that she's tough. But she really isn't. I've met girls like you. You probably just made it through initiation by the skin of your teeth. I can't believe that you're actually here welcoming us. Although you are a welcome sight," he told me, giving me a once over.

Now there were a number of people gathered around to watch. Everyone enjoyed watching the new initiates get their asses handed to them. There was always one that mouthed off. I had been the one person that had done it in my own year. Even from here I could feel Eric's jaws grinding together and his entire body tightening. He was watching from a few feet back. I knew that he wanted to attack Peter, but I was already on it.

"I think one thing that you ought to know about me, Peter, is that I was a transfer. Just like you. I'm from Amity. Two years ago. My name there was Amarantha Freesia. My name here is Alex. I am a Divergent. I am a leader. And I took great pleasure in bringing down Jeanine Matthews. If you think that it was easy for me to kill her, because I'm insane, just imagine how easy it will be for me to hurt you," I told him scathingly.

It looked like Peter wanted to say something, but I never gave him the chance. I pulled back my fist before sending it into his eye. I felt his jaw crack and possibly dislocate for a minute. Peter's head snapped back and he looked like he might collapse. He staggered back and I watched as Drew and Molly caught him. They helped him stand back upright. Most of the initiates, and Dauntless members that were standing around, were laughing. The only one that wasn't was Tris. She was simply staring at me in shock.

"Now listen to me! All of you! Dauntless is not the place for you if you're going to act like this. We accept and encourage bravery, not stupidity. Not brashness. You will end up like Peter. You aren't the first initiate to speak out of line. You won't be the last. But I promise that if you do this again you will end up in the Factionless district. I am your leader. As is Eric. Four is your instructor. You will treat us with the respect that we've earned. If you do not, this was only a little taste of what I can do. After all... I'm insane."

There was nothing more to say after that. As I walked by Eric gave me a wink and I laughed. "You should have hit him harder," he said.

"He's going to have a hard enough time to get a date. If I hit him any harder I would have broken his nose and that would have been a tragedy," I said, smiling at Eric.

"If he keeps looking at you, I'm going to break his ribs," Eric growled.

Turning back I noticed that Peter was giving me a long look. I rolled my eyes and turned back to Eric, bringing him into a long kiss. "You're cute when you're jealous," I teased.

"Go do your damn job," Eric snapped.

"You know, technically I'm your boss," I reasoned.

Eric smirked at me. "We can wrestle and see who wins?" he offered.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?"
"I would."

He was giving me a very suggestive smirk. "Alex! Get over here!" Heather shouted.

They were trying to continue with the tour. "See you at dinner," I told Eric, walking off.

Four motioned for the rest of the initiates to walk with him. I noticed that Peter was still staggering from the hit. We walked into the Pit, which was buzzing with life, just as usual. "This is The Pit. The center of life here at Dauntless," Four said.

Everyone was cheering and laughing as we made our way out and to the dorms. We stopped at the Chasm so that the initiates could see it and take a good look, hearing the same speech that Four gave every year. I noticed that neither Tris nor Christina seemed fond of the place. Heather and I let out a little scoff as we moved on and entered the dorms. Neither one of us had ever been fond of this place. It looked no different than it had two years ago.

"You're gonna be sleeping here for the next five months," Four told them.

"Girls or boys?" Christina asked.

"Both," Four answered.

The room went dead silent as everyone processed the information. "Nice," I heard Molly say. I turned back to her and glared deeply. She backed off a few feet from me.

"That works," Peter added.

He had gotten over the incident in the Pit. Although he had a bruise forming on his cheeks. "If you like this, you're gonna love the bathroom," Four told Peter with a joking smile.

"Great," Christina said softly.

The others started walking around the room. They were all clearly disgusted by the place. Not that I blamed them. "Okay..." Will trailed off.

"Seriously?" Christina asked as she paced around the beds, poking at the one that Heather had used two years ago.

Al, I was pretty sure it was, was the next to speak up. "Is there no other area?" he asked. Will led Christina over to the bed that had once been Cole's.

I watched as Tris took the bed that had been mine. I couldn't help but to smile slightly. "Are you kidding?" Christina asked Four, Heather, and I.

Heather and I both nodded. "Welcome home," I said teasingly.

If we had been forced to go through this, so would they. Every single one of us had been forced to go through this. Four walked over to Christina and towered over her. "You should feel right at home, Candor. Everything out in the open," he teased.

The ex-Candor looked in between hitting him and throwing up. She knew that she was going to have a hard time here. "Is this a joke?" Al asked.

Four seemed to finally have grown tired of the game of laughing at the new initiates. He turned to them with a stern face. "Get changed," he snapped before motioning Heather and I out of the room.
"Right," Will said slowly. I could tell that he didn't quite believe what they were going to be living in. "Shower, anyone?"

It was the same joke that at least one initiate tried every year. Not that it ever worked. We all scoffed at him as Four, Heather, and I made our way out of the room to wait for them on the other side of the doors to take them to dinner and burn their clothes. The door slid shut behind us and we all stared at the door in disbelief. It certainly was not an overly impressive grouping that we had this year. Although maybe there was a chance that Heather and Four saw something that I didn't.

"So what do you guys think?" I asked them.

Four and Heather both snorted. I was glad that I wasn't the only one that knew these initiates wouldn't be good. "They'll be even worse than your class," Four told us.

"Hey!" Heather and I shouted.

Four smirked as we both sent him little smacks to the arms and stomach. He laughed at our futile attempts to injure him. "You're such an ass," I snapped at Four.

"And not wrong," Four pointed out.

"I don't know, some of them look like they might be able to show a little bit of promise," I said softly.

Both Heather and Four were looking at me like I was insane. "Like who?" Heather asked.

Honestly there could have been some potential with the new initiates. They didn't all look pathetic. "Christina doesn't look hopeless. Will looks like he might be able to fight. Peter and Drew are pathetic but they could be strong. Edward definitely looks like he could work," I said.

We were all silent as we thought about the potential in the new initiates. "And how many of those words did you really just believe?" Four asked.

"I'm serious about Edward," I said.

"And the girl he came with?" Four asked.

"Myra," Heather offered.

"There was a reason that I didn't mention her," I barked.

We all laughed loudly as the door screeched open and the new initiates began to pour out. The three of us continued to chuckle as we watched them leave. They had no idea that we really thought that they were going to be pathetic. They probably would be for the first few weeks at least. The transfers were all wearing the same clothes that I had worn when I had first gotten here. Just like we had two years ago they were all carrying their old clothing.

Four marched them into the fire pit and I watched as once more they burned their clothing. They all watched curiously. It seemed that Tris and Al were having the hardest time letting go. I gave them both a reassuring nod. It got easier, they just had to wait. Heather headed off to sit with Cole as we arrived at dinner and I waved her off. Most nights we all sat together but there were two nights a week that we all sat with our significant others or fellow friends. We would sit together on Friday's and as a large group we would find another night to sit together.

It was always nice for us to get a chance to sit together. But we had each made new friends in the
respective fields that we worked in. It was kind of nice that everyone was making new friends. Not that it mattered. No matter how many friends that we made as we continued our lives here in Dauntless, we all knew that we would still be best friends. I stopped to talk to Zeke and Uriah - asking how Zeke's first day in Dauntless had been as an independent - before moving on to go get my breakfast. I hadn't eaten much today and I was starving by now.

Tonight was one of the nights that we all went to spend with our fellow friends. Tonight I would sit with Four as we listened to the new recruits figure out their first night here in Dauntless. It was a good chance to see what they were like when they thought that no one else was listening in. We walked into the dining room and I watched from the corner as they all picked up food. I knew that Tris would have a hard time. Like Amity, they didn't eat meat. She was looking at her burger in horror.

I felt something came up beside me and I stared at it. Eric. He was staring at the new initiates like they were poison. "You look happy," I teased.

"Pathetic," he snarled.

I looked at him with a quirked eyebrow. "What are you talking about?" I asked.

"The new transfers. I didn't think I could see anything more depressing than watching you come in here like a fucking flower."

My eyebrow quirked as I stole a fry off of his plate. He stared down at me and the corner of his mouth quirked up. "Thanks. You really do know how to turn a girl on," I teased.

He took a step towards me and let his body press against mine. I placed my tray on the counter behind me. "You'll come back tonight. You always do," he told me.

"Shows my brilliant decision making."

"We all know that you make poor choices," Eric said.

"Are you counting yourself?" I asked.

He gave me a long look and I smiled. One day he was going to tell me those three little words. I knew that he would, but he would hold it off for as long as possible. I smirked and rolled my eyes as he pulled me in for a kiss. Our lips pressed together and Eric placed a hand on the bottom of my back and pulled me in tightly. I heard a chorus of disgusted noises and gagging. I turned back to see that my friends were all making funny faces at Eric and me. I laughed softly and rolled my eyes, leaning onto Eric's chest.

"I'll see you later. Come by after they celebrate the new arrivals," he said.

"Okay."

We shared another quick kiss as we walked out to the tables where everyone was sitting. Unlike I had on my first day they were sitting at a table near the edge of the dining room. I smiled at the fact that our classes were so different. Four was at the edge of the table and I walked over, chirping hello's to my friends and laughing as Mariah threw her cup of water in Buck's face. I had to stop for a moment to prevent dropping my tray. Once we had all sat together and talked for a while, cleaning Buck up in the process, I headed over to Four.

No one was with him and I frowned. Normally he had plenty of friends with him. I guess no one wanted to have to sit with the new transfers. Not until one of them became interesting. It normally
took them a little while to get interesting. Things would change after the first of the fights and once the initiates started to physically change. It would help once they started to get to know the Dauntless born and some of the members. War Games would help too.

"What did he say to her?" Four asked, referring to Buck and Mariah.

"He says nothing."

"And you say?"

"Judging by the look on her face, probably something along the lines of offering her another place to stay the night," I said, snorting under my breath.

Even the corner of Four's lips tilted upwards. "When will he give up?" Four asked.

"Probably never. So how are we enjoying the conversation of the new transfers?" I asked Four as I took a seat.

Peter turned to look at me and I saw him scowl before turning back to his food and returning to his conversation. "They're worse than you were," Four said, picking at his burger.

I laughed and stole the bottle of water off of his tray. He glared at me but didn't make a move to get it back. "Hey, I resent that!" I shouted.

Over the screams in the dining room I couldn't be heard. "You shouldn't," Four muttered.

"No one can be worse than I was. After all, I got you shot," I teased him.

Four rolled his eyes at me before turning to the transfers. I'd heard them all talking about their old Factions. It was just the way that we had been. There was just something about talking about your old Faction on the day that you Chose that made you a little happier. It was knowing that they were all in the same boat. They would get over their homes soon enough. I knew that Four didn't want them talking about their old homes. We had gotten chewed out on our first day for it. Four broke off our conversation to snap at the transfers.

"I don't want to hear about your old Factions. You're Dauntless now," he growled.

"Four, try and pretend that you can be nice," I whispered.

He ignored me. We could just barely hear him over the noise. It didn't matter that his voice was so low. It had scared them all. I could tell that they were all terrified of him. Tris especially. They began to awkwardly shift around in their seats. I almost felt a little bit bad for them. They were an underwhelming group already and I knew that Four was only making things worse. He could definitely be a little scary when he wanted to.

"Were you a transfer, too? Or Dauntless-born?" Tris asked, surprising me. I had thought that she would be silent. She didn't seem like much of a talker.

It seemed that Four shared my thoughts. "Are you kidding?" Four snarled at her.

She looked surprised at his actions. "No."

She was sitting next to him and he shifted so that he was facing her. They were close to each other and I smirked. They would be so cute together. I'd have them together by Christmas. I wondered if that was what people had once thought about Eric and me. Some of them had said that we would be
a funny couple before we had actually gotten together. Four's voice brought me out of my thoughts.

"What makes you think you can talk to me?" Four asked her.

Tris's answer nearly made me fall out of the back of my chair. "It... must be because you're so approachable," Tris told Four.

A loud snort escaped my mouth and I covered it with my hand. Four stared at her and I noticed a few people's jaw dropped. No one spoke to Four that way other than me. Just the way that no one had spoken to Eric that way other than me. Christina scoffed as we all stared at each other, curious who was going to speak next. Four stood from the table and I watched them stare down each other. He stood from the table and I watched as Tris shrunk away. She wasn't a large person, just a few inches taller than me.

"Careful," Four snapped at her before picking up his tray and walking away.

"Don't worry about him. He warms up to you, whether or not he wants to," I told Tris softly.

She awkwardly smiled at me. I gave Tris a tiny smile before standing up and running after Four. He was muttering under his breath. "Honestly, Four?" I asked.

"What?"

"That was really smooth. You know most guys, when they think a girl is attractive, they give her a compliment or try to make her laugh. I don't know what it is about you and Eric. For some reason you guys think that threatening a girl is the way to her heart," I told him.

Something about Tris really got to Four. His jaws tightened as he threaded his fingers together. "I am not attracted to her," he snapped.

He sounded like he was so desperately trying to convince himself that he wasn't. "Sure you're not," I muttered.

"I'm not."

"So you've said."

"She's an Abnegation. And an initiate," Four reasoned.

My lips quirked slightly. "So was I," I told him softly.

I wasn't an Abnegation but he knew what I was talking about. I was from a considered weak Faction and I had been an initiate when Eric and I had gotten together. Four looked like he was about to say something when the alarms started blaring. I heard a few shrieks from the transfers and I laughed. Four actually joined in on the laughter. Cups started clattering as people banged them against the tables and we all waited for it. Eric took a step up to the edge of the Wolf's Den, silencing the crowd.

"Initiates, stand," he ordered.

It wasn't a hesitant as when Max had been the leader. No one wanted to disobey Eric. "Five points says one of them gets dropped on me," I muttered to Four.

"I'm not making you that bet. You'll win."

We both smiled as Eric continued to speak. "You have chosen to join the warrior Faction tasked with the defense of this city and all its inhabitants. We believe in ordinary acts of bravery and the courage
that drives one person to stand up for another. Respect that. Do us proud," Eric said softly, but with an authoritative voice.

Cheering broke out in the dining room and I laughed as everyone else stood, moving to grab the initiates. They all looked freaked out for a moment as the members started to pick them up. I couldn't help but to smile. It was fun to watch them do what I had once loved so much. I looked up back towards the Wolf's Den and smiled when I saw that Eric was giving me a deep stare. I knew what it meant. He was telling me that it was time to go back to his apartment. I laughed and nodded.

Four had already passed by me but my friends were all at a table, waiting to see if I would join them. They were sitting away from the initiates. I had a feeling that they didn't really want to be involved in the festivities. We were all busy and nights like these we were all tired. As much as I loved them I knew that I would have time to see them later. So I smiled at them and waved. I saw that Heather and Cole were already leaving too. I couldn't help but to laugh. We were all so similar.

"Hey, I'm heading out. Goodnight!" I yelled to them.

They all stood and waved me off. Buck and Draven both threw arms over my shoulders before nudging me off. "Goodnight!" they all shouted.

Heather and Lisa blew me kisses as Serena tossed a wink in my direction. "Tell Eric we said hi," Serena teased.

"I'm sure he says it back," I said, making her laugh.

Exchanging a few hugs with the rest of my friends - who all seemed to be finding something to keep themselves occupied for the night - I headed towards Eric's apartment. My feet carried me out of the dining room towards the edge of the hallway with the member apartments. I was ready to head through the Chasm into the upper levels when something heavy hit me in the back. I turned around to throw a punch at whoever hit me when I saw that it was Tris. Someone had dropped her. I grabbed her before she could fall to the ground.

"Tris, you alright?" I asked her.

She straightened up and brushed some of her dark blonde hair that had fallen out of the ponytail out of her face. "Yeah. Thanks for catching me," she said.

"You're welcome."

"Sorry about that."

She looked very embarrassed so I smiled at her. "That's alright. I was yanked out of the arms of the members when I was an initiate," I explained.

"At least yours wasn't an accident. I thought that they had a better grip on me," Tris said.

I smiled at her and nodded, leading her over to the edge of the Pit. "Lesson number one here in Dauntless. Never trust anyone to catch you from a fall. It'll help in the long-run," I promised.

"That sounds foreboding," Tris said, making me smile.

She had a good sense of humor. "It is. Just remember that. Lesson number two, if you do trust someone, trust a girl friend. Boys come and go. Girls stay forever," I told her with a smile.

She nodded at me and a soft blush filled her face. Abnegation didn't like any type of attention. In a
relationship or even just as a friendship. "Thanks," Tris said.

"You're welcome."

I watched as her eyes traced every line and crevice in the Pit. "This place, it's incredible," she said softly.

I nodded at her and grinned. "I know. I thought so too when I came here for the first time. Amity is gorgeous but it's in the natural way. Dauntless is so intense," I said, glancing around.

"I've seen Amity. It's so pretty."

"It is. I know that it seems overwhelming right now but it will get better. Easier. With time," I told her.

A little breath escaped her and I noticed that she relaxed slightly. I knew that she was just nervous with this being her first day in Dauntless. "Doesn't seem like it," Tris laughed.

"I know. The first few days and even weeks are killer. But suddenly one day you realize that you're stronger. You're not so weak and suddenly things are easier. It'll come. Just don't give up," I said.

"I'll keep that in mind."

"What do you think of the people here?" I asked her after a beat of silence.

She was taking a moment to think of something to say. She didn't want to offend me. It was cute. "They're... scary," she finally admitted.

For a moment she must have thought that she had offended me. I stared at her for a second, wondering if she had really just said what I'd thought that she had. I had to say that I was impressed. She spoke more than the average Abnegation. We both laughed at her words after a minute. She wasn't wrong about the people in Dauntless being scary. Everyone was scary here. I probably was too. At least to people that weren't from Dauntless.

"Yeah. They are. I was somewhere in between amazed and terrified when I first got here. Of course I mouthed off to Eric my first day here and got a great punishment of making files all night long. Had to spar with him, got thrown off the Chasm by him... We had all sorts of fun punishments together," I told her.

Her eyes widened to the point where I thought that they were going to pop out of her eye sockets. It almost made me laugh. I would have laughed but I didn't want to embarrass her. Plus there was the fact that I knew that it didn't sound good. Especially not to those who hadn't been around to see Eric and my relationship grow and progress.

"Aren't you dating Eric?" Tris asked me carefully.

"I am," I told her.

She looked even more freaked out when she realized that we really were dating. "Oh..." she muttered.

"Trust me, he's not as bad as he seems. Just a little rough around the edges. Although I think he's a little too rough for most people. They aren't all so bad. Four is like Eric, but much calmer," I told her, gently prodding.
Just like I had expected a light blush filled Tris's face. Abnegation's were so easy. All you had to do was tell them something about someone that they had a thing for. "There isn't anything between you and Four?" She asked softly. She was so cute. "You guys seemed close earlier."

The insinuation made me slightly sick to my stomach. I loved Four but that was disgusting. "No!" I shouted.

Tris seemed slightly relieved. "Sorry," she said quickly.

"Don't apologize. Four is a wonderful guy, don't get me wrong. He deserves a good girl but that isn't me. He's basically like my brother. I consider him a brother," I told her.

"That's nice," she said.

It was obvious that she had grown up in Abnegation. She wasn't going to tell me anything that wasn't selfless. She wasn't going to admit that she thought that Four was attractive or whatever it was that she thought. I just knew what she meant. She was glad that he was single. She didn't know Four but he was definitely a looker. We all knew that. Before I wanted to take my leave I decided to say one last thing to her.

"Hey, Tris. I know that getting used to Dauntless is a hard go. Especially for someone that's either from Amity or Abnegation. So if you ever need some help, I'm here. I'll be around for most of your training. I came in top ranking so I'm sure that I'll be able to help in some way," I told her.

She smiled softly. Even by looking at her I could tell that she wouldn't be strong. She would have to be a defensive fighter. She wasn't strong enough to be offensive. "Thanks, Alex," she said.

"You're welcome."

"Seriously, that means a lot. I think I'll take you up on that. I can only imagine how hard things are going to get," she said.

"Extremely," I told her honestly.

"Sure you weren't a Candor?"

"In some ways," I joked.


"Lately I do too. It's all well worth it in the end. Try to get a good night's sleep. I know that it's hard, the first night away from home. But you'll figure it out. Have a good night, Tris. I'll see you around," I told her, before turning away.

Even from here I could feel her smiling at me. "Goodnight, Alex," she called back.

Walking away from her I decided that it was high time that I met Eric back at his apartment. He had probably already been there for a few minutes. As I walked through the halls I said my hello's and goodnight's to people that I knew well. They were all my friends now. It seemed like the people that I had once barely been able to speak to were my family. They weren't all the smartest or the nicest, but they were the family that I had. They were the family that I wouldn't trade for anything.

Coming down the overly familiar hallway I pushed into Eric's apartment and smiled at him. He was leaned up against the counter with a whiskey glass in his hands. As I walked up to him he handed it to me. I took it and downed it quickly. Once it was empty I placed it back on the counter and I
moved to kiss him. He tasted like alcohol that I was sure meant that he had been drinking with his friends all night long.

He walked me back so that I was pressed against the counter. His hands were tight on my waist and I smiled at him. "Someone's in a better mood," I teased.

"Now that you're here."

It made a small smile cross over my lips as he brought me into another kiss. After a moment he broke away from the kiss and stared at me. "What -" I started to ask him when I was cut off.

"I love you."

My jaw dropped and my knees buckled slightly. His hands were tight around my arms. He'd probably known that his words would stun me. If he'd really said that. Maybe I was hallucinating. Maybe I'd drank too much and I was really just hearing things. He was not serious. He couldn't be serious. There was no way that he had just said that. He didn't mean it. He never would. I had convinced myself that it was okay. That it would always be okay. I didn't mind that he wasn't in love with me.

"What did you just say?" I asked him.

He smirked and pushed me back so that I stumbled. I fell over the edge of the bed and laughed as he leaned over me. "Three words, eight letters," he repeated my words from earlier.

My cheeks had lit up a brilliant, and certainly embarrassing, red. I couldn't believe that he had really said it. I'd had a feeling for a long time that he loved me but I hadn't wanted to push him too much to say it. I hadn't wanted to make him too uncomfortable. But now he really said it. Unfortunately suddenly a harsh thought hit me. Did he mean it? I had to know. I had to know that it was more than something he had said just to get me to move in with him.

"Do you mean it?" I asked him.

He stared at me for a moment before nodding. He lowered himself so that his lips briefly traveled over my neck. "I do. You know me," Eric muttered.

"I do."

"Do you think that I would say it if I didn't mean it?" he asked.

"No," I said immediately.

Those few words had probably taken him a number of months to work up the courage to say. I knew that it had taken everything in him to say those three words. Honestly I hadn't thought that he would ever say it. Not for a long time. I knew that he wanted me to move in but I also knew that he wouldn't say it if he really didn't mean it. Eric wasn't that type of guy. It was hard enough for him to say it once. I wanted to see if I could push it just a little bit.

"Say it again," I said softly.

He smirked at me and pressed his hips into mine. "I love you," he repeated, pulling my torso up to take my shirt off and toss it into an open drawer.

"You knew that I would just move in?" I asked him with a soft chuckle.
"That was the one thing that you told me that I had to do. And I said it. And I meant it," Eric said softly as he nuzzled into my neck, nipping at the sensitive skin there. I let out a little gasp.

"Will you say it again?" I asked.

"Don't push it," Eric warned. I smiled at him. "I'll always mean it. Initiate."

A loud and rather unattractive laugh escaped my mouth. After a beat I forced Eric's face to look at me. "I love you too," I said softly.

"I know," he said.

It made me laugh again. I'd known for a long time that he knew how I felt about him. I'd just always refused to voice it until the time came that he admitted it to me himself. Eric gave me a sideways smile before moving in for another kiss. I slipped my hands underneath his shirt to pry it from his body. He moved his hands to tangle in my hair and move our mouths together. Eric looped his hands in my belt loops and made me laugh as he tugged me down towards him. A few minutes went by before we came up for air.

"You said it. Now show me," I whispered.

"Now that's not a problem," he said darkly. It made me laugh as he flipped us over into the middle of the bed and went to tugging at my pants to pop the button open.

Eric was not the type of guy that I'd ever thought that I would end up. He was the type of guy that would give my parents a heart attack if they knew what he was really like. My friends were all absolutely insane. My family and oldest friends were barely in my life anymore. But that didn't mean that I didn't love them. I did. I loved them all. My parents, Iris, Florian, Heather, Buck, Draven, Dante, Cole, Lisa, Serena, Aaron, Greg, Jackson, Jet, Jax, Four, Zeke, and Cameron. They weren't even them all. I loved everyone here in Dauntless. I loved my parents. I loved the people that I had come to care for in the other Factions.

My life in Dauntless was not what I thought that it would be but it wasn't a life that I would change for anything else. Sure, there were bottles of empty alcohol laying around the room, the underside of Eric's bed seemed to eat all of my clothes, and we fought like we actually might kill each other. But none of that mattered. This was the life that I wanted and it was perfect. For me.

And as Eric rolled me over in his - our - bed so that I was on top of his hips I smirked. My hands went down to the button on his pants and I smiled into the kiss. His teeth gently grazed over my lips and I shivered. I just realized that his balcony was open. The cool air was making me shiver slightly but it felt good against my overheated skin. Eric chuckled into my mouth as I let him tug my pants down and get them caught around my ankles. He grabbed them before reaching around me and yanking them roughly off of my frame.

The clothing was now bunched together in his hands and I watched as he tossed them across the room. It made me snort under my breath. Like the shirt, they landed in the drawer that Eric had cleared out for me. A small blush fell over my face. Even as my lips caught against Eric's again, I couldn't believe that I was actually going to move in with him. His shirt was pushed onto the floor as Eric flipped me over again. I was underneath him and I laughed softly. His chest was pressed against mine and I let my legs wrap around his waist.

His hips ground down into mine and I groaned at the feeling of him pressing against me. His entire body was like stone against mine as Eric dug his fingertips into my skin. I hissed in excitement, knowing that he wanted me to finish undressing us both. I fiddled with the button on his pants and...
finally popped them open. I went to shove them down over his hips but he grabbed me to stop. I looked up at him curiously, wondering what he had stopped me for. We always rushed it, neither one of us able to slow down the discarding of clothes.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

He brought up his face to push it into the sensitive spots on my neck. I groaned softly at the light pressure. "You said you wanted me to prove it to you. Let me," he growled.

Even though it was sweet and should have made me melt, it was Eric. His words always sounded rough. The way that he spoke made my eyes roll back into my head slightly. His voice did things to me that other people couldn't have done with their entire body. Maybe it was the reason that we worked together so well. It didn't matter, I just knew that we belonged together. Instead of making my heart warm, it made my toes curl and spine straighten.

Knowing that he wanted an answer, I nodded my approval at him and lay flat against the bed. He pulled off the undershirt that I had been wearing and I laughed as it revealed the bruise from my fight with him the other day. He had tossed me a little too hard during a sparring match and my stomach had gone straight into one of the stretching bars. It had left the nasty bruise and given Eric quite the laugh. That was, until his middle finger had been dislocated by yours truly. It had been rather funny that I was the only person to pop it back into place.

A soft breath escaped me as Eric traced his mouth down my torso. His tongue was slowly tracing every contour of my body, slowly driving me insane. He went through the valley of my chest, passing over the hook that was still done on my bra. He was sure not to actually disturb the placement of the fabric. His mouth made it to the edges of my bruise and I squirmed as he traced his tongue around it. The feeling was somewhere in between a soft pain and intense pleasure. It was just the way that Eric acted with me. I wouldn't have wanted him any other way.

And I knew that it meant that he could only be nice for so long. He would be slow for a limited amount of time before he wanted to speed things up. His hand came up to the edge of the bruise and I groaned in pain as he pressed down on it slightly. The pain slowly started to roll through my stomach. His movement earned him a nice knee to the chin. After we had both recovered I felt him hook his fingers into the waistband on my underwear. I lifted my hips so that he could pull them down my legs.

They were yanked down my legs almost immediately. His fingers were tight on my legs as he threw the offending underwear to the floor. Once they were clear of the bed I felt him start to trail kisses down my body. My eyes fluttered closed as my head tilted back towards the ceiling. His lips were soft over the bruise that covered the majority of my torso. His lips trailed softly over my thighs before they came back up to the apex of my thighs and core. He grabbed my thighs and I felt him push my legs apart slightly.

Gently placing them on either side of the bed I let out a soft sigh. I didn't need any more warning than that. I let him spread them as far as he wanted and sighed as he settled himself down in between them. His tongue traced the joint between my thigh and hip and I giggled softly. It was one of the few spots that I was ticklish. He had already known that. Eric smirked, flicking his tongue a few times, and I laughed again before he moved his tongue downwards.

Before actually placing his tongue against me I felt him take his fingers and spread my lips. I sighed softly as he moved his heads towards my core. He started all the way back and slowly made his way up towards my clit, licking directly around it, before going back down the other side. I sighed softly, wishing that he would go where I wanted him most. It didn't take him long to figure that out. His tongue finally landed right on the one spot that I wanted it more than anything else.
Using one finger to slowly rub circles around the center of my core, his tongue flicked over my clit gently making me groan in pleasure. It felt like it had been so long since I had experienced that. Even though he had only been doing the same thing just a few days ago. I supposed that it was because things felt a little different between us now because of what he'd said. This now seemed even more intimate. His teeth gently grazed over my clit and I let out a little gasp. In between the nips and licks he would gently graze his tongue over my entire length.

Each time he would do it my entire body would convulse. It took him a startlingly short amount of time to really get me going. He had no idea how much I wanted him. How much I needed him. One of his fingers slipped into me and I let out a loud gasp. I'd been thinking that he would just stick with his tongue. I was glad that I was wrong. He didn't take long before he pushed in another one. His tongue continued to trace over my clit slowly and gently as I moaned softly, letting it fill the room.

He continued to suck on it until it felt like I was about to fall apart. My body started to shake and I felt the knot in my stomach tighten to a point where I was sure that it was going to burst. It wasn't long after that that I felt it undo, Eric actually letting me find my release. My loud moans echoed over the stone wall and Eric kept a hand on my stomach to keep me from moving. It pressed into the bruise but I didn't care. I tried to wiggle freely but I couldn't. Eric's hand was too strong against me.

My body erupted into physical convulsions as I pushed my head back into the pillows. Once I finally completely let myself go I leaned back against the bed as a panting, sweating mess. Eric came up to lay over me as he pressed a heavy kiss on my lips. I could feel him pressing against my thigh. I moaned softly into his mouth as he popped open the clip on my bra. I wanted to lean over and go to bed but I knew that Eric wasn't done with me quite yet. Honestly, I was glad that he wasn't.

He tossed the bra off of the bed before grabbing me by the thighs. I laughed softly as he placed me over him. Our lips locked together and he grabbed me underneath the ass. I giggled into his mouth and tightened my thighs around him. He cocked an eyebrow as I twisted my body and pushed myself off of him. He laughed softly as I rolled us so that he was underneath me. He stared at me with dark eyes as I grabbed his pants and tugged them off, his underwear going with them. He sprung free and I smirked at him.

Part of me wanted to take him in my mouth but he didn't give me a chance. He threw me back over so that I was sitting on his lap. He lifted me up so that I was positioned over his lap and I immediately knew what he wanted. Without giving me a chance he dropped me onto him. A hiss escaped my lips as I was quickly forced to get used to him. For as many times as we had been together, it always took me a few seconds to get accustomed to him. I really was tiny compared to him. He stared deep into my eyes and our lips caught in a kiss as I began to move against him, our bare chests pressed together.

The bundle began to tighten in my core once more as Eric bounced me up and down on his lap. Our tongues mixed together and I bit down softly on his lip. It was the closest that we had ever really been together during sex. I liked it. His fingertips dug into my ass and I hissed at the feeling. One of them made their way up and over my shoulders to grab at my hair. He tugged the roots roughly and twined his fingers into the strands, keeping us together, and I groaned into his mouth as I bobbed up and down a few more times.

As I pushed up against my knees to bounce over him I threw my hair back off of my forehead, letting my hair rain down over my back and exposing my chest to him. Eric grunted as he pressed his hands against my chest, his fingers rubbing against my nipples. Eric moved his mouth into my neck and I sighed, rubbing our bodies together. Eric's hands moved down to his hips to push me up and down against himself. My hands went back to his shoulders and I was sure that my nails were digging somewhat painfully into his back.
Curses began to spill out from both mine and Eric's mouths after nearly twenty minutes. We were moaning together as our tongues mixed again. We were trying to wrestle for dominance without getting too heated. This was the first time that we had really almost been romantic. As we kissed I realized that he tasted like me. Eric threw me off of him and I groaned as he pinned me underneath him, thrusting into me a few more times. His name came from my mouth like a curse as he spilled himself into me. My head fell back and my back arched nearly painfully as stars burst behind my eyes.

My legs were erupting in spasms and I knew that I wouldn't be able to walk straight for hours. It was a good thing that we would be lying in bed all night. Eric pumped into me a few more times as I groaned in pleasure, riding out my last few waves. A minute later Eric pulled out and flopped onto the bed next to me. I let out a deep breath and rolled onto him. He grabbed me around the waist as he threw the sheets over us, shielding us from the chilly air of the room. He brushed some of my sweat soaked hair out of my face.

He pressed a lingering kiss against my mouth as my leg fell over his, grabbing it tightly and pulling it in between my own. "Say it again," I muttered softly, smiling up at him.

He grinned and pinned me down against the bed. "Go to bed, Amity," he said.

In all honesty I knew that he wouldn't tell me that he loved me again until he felt that he really needed to say it. And that was fine by me. At least I finally knew exactly how he felt about me. It didn't take me long to laugh as I realized that going to bed did not mean going to sleep. He didn't need to say it again anyways. Not right now, because I knew. As he moved himself back over me I knew it more than I ever had before. This wasn't normal and it wasn't nice, but it was my life. And I loved every second of it.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading everyone! I might write a sequel at some point so keep an eye out for it!
Hello everyone!

Long time, no chat. Well, I'm back because I wanted to get a few opinions on something. I did promise you all a sequel (and one is in the works) but quite frankly I've got too many stories in the works right now to genuinely focus on one. But I really do miss writing about Eric and Alex and all of the rest of the characters from Divergent.

So, I was wondering what you'd all think about me writing a series of one-shots? The basic premise would be that I'll take requests on anything you'd like to see. A few of my ideas are the first time Alex took Eric back to Amity, the first time Eric met Willow (Alex's little sister, for those who don't remember), Four and Eric's newfound kind-of friendship, or something having to do with Alex's acclimating to her new position as a leader in Dauntless.

I'd really love to know what you'd all think about this! One-shots would definitely give me (and maybe you) my Alex/Eric fix and they'll be a lot easier to write than a full-blown story.

Please let me know what you think! Thank you for continuing to follow and favorite and leave your reviews! They are always appreciated.

As always, much love -A

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!