The Little Dauntless Girl

by Diabolicael (Derpdevil)

Summary

Eric stopped in front of Honey, glaring down at her, his eyes wide and bright against the deep crimson that stained his skin. His chest and shoulders rose and fell with each heavy breath and she found herself matching his cadence.

Honey never ran from her fears. Foolish. Worse, she took a step towards him.

If Eric glaring at her from beneath a mask of blood had been terrifying, there wasn’t a word for how it looked when he smiled.

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Off a ledge fifteen stories up was the first step into the life she was meant to live. Honey has always known she belonged at Dauntless, but it's not that easy for the short, soft Erudite transfer. Her life at Dauntless will never be easy, especially when certain powerful people take an interest in her. Honey’s never conceded a fight and she’s not about to start now.

Kind of a mashup between the book and movieverse, w/ my own input here and there. Set a year before Divergent and WILL change parts of that story when it overlaps. I'm NOT breaking up Four and Tris, so don't worry.

Honey is NOT divergent; she’s just a normal person who has to deal with sims and serums.
the old fashioned way.
TONS of rough Eric smut, starting ch.19 for you impatient souls.

Notes

Just a reminder, lots of violence against a teen girl in this story, among other unsavory things. It's Eric/OC (no matter what she thinks about Four) but it's the SLOWEST of burns. Took alot longer than I'd planned.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Transfers

When it was her turn, there was no indecision, no internal struggle, and when her blood sizzled on the hot coals of Dauntless, it was the only outcome possible. Her parents and brothers would miss her, she would miss them, but they all knew this was inevitable. It had always been Dauntless for her. Always.

The train screeched along the tracks, grating her nerves, but music to her ears. It was the sound of hope, the sound of her future. In her initiate class, there had been fourteen transfers, but she was the only Erudite. She had gone to school with all of these other kids, but none of them knew her. No one knew her. She could start fresh easily, be who she truly was without a struggle. She would. She was already feeling more herself, somehow, sitting with her legs dangling out the open door. Surely that wasn't safe, but no one tried to stop her. The city scrolled by, like she was riding in one of the Erudite cars, but from so high up, she could see it all. It was glorious.

A building with a glass dome ceiling, which might have been beautiful if anyone bothered to clean it, slid into view and someone shouted for everyone to get ready. The Dauntless headquarters. She stood, leaning out the open door to get a better view, her hand securely gripping the railing. The train didn't seem to be slowing, which shouldn't have surprised her. The Dauntless students had always come pouring out of the cars as they passed the school, but that was on a grassy hill. This was more than a hundred feet in the air. She looked at the buildings passing her and did a quick estimate in her head. Anyone in her car would have to jump with a minimum of two car lengths of building left, or else they risked missing. There were nine other people in her car - most of them Dauntless, so they would go first, already familiar with this leap. Plenty of time.

Sure enough, the six Dauntless-born jumped off the train with a few half-hearted whoops. They were followed by the two Candors. All that remained was herself and an anxious Amity boy, who towered over her diminutive five foot self.

"You go first!" he shouted, far louder than he needed to for her to hear him over the train. "I'll go right after." The way his eyes were widened, darting around, the sweat dripping off him, despite the light clothing he wore and the wind whipping through the car told her otherwise.

"You need to jump, now!" she insisted. Either he would go too late or not at all and either way, his fate would be sealed. When they'd all rushed out of the school, after the Choosing Ceremony, two transfers (a round Amity girl and an too thin Abnegation boy) couldn't keep up and missed the train. Factionless. It wasn't her responsibility, but couldn't just let it happen again; not when she could stop it. She grabbed his arm, pulling him toward the door. Being Amity, he didn't fight her, which was fortunate or she'd never have been able to move him. "Go!"

She shoved him, but this time he resisted. In a few seconds, he might kill them both. She reached up a slapped him as hard as her small size and lack of reach could muster. Shocked, he cupped his cheek and blinked owlishly at her. It might have been funny under different circumstances. Funnier, anyway. She took the opportunity to grab the railing he'd just released, planted her foot on his backside, and shoved him with all her strength. It wasn't much, but it was enough. He fell out of the car, landing hard on the gravel rooftop and rolling several times before stopping. He wasn't going to feel great for a while, but he'd be alive and not Factionless.

She leapt from the train herself now, heart in her throat as the edge of the building raced towards her. Thankfully, her tendency to be generous with her measurements left her several feet from the precipice when she landed. She dropped to the gravel and scraped her knee. Her blue slacks were torn and blood was already staining the material. She grinned to herself, taking a moment to
appreciate the sight before carefully brushing away the bits of stone stuck to her wound. A few people were helping up the Amity boy, brushing him off, making sure nothing was broken. He looked over at her in a daze, as if he couldn't quite believe what she'd done. Well, you're welcome. Dumbass.

As the last of the initiates landed on the roof, a man's voice rose over the din. "Everyone over here! Let's go!" Quickly, they all complied, gathering around a tall, bulky man with light brown hair - buzzed on the sides, slicked back into a wave on top - and piercings above his right brow. He certainly cut an impressive figure, with twin tattoos boldly marking his throat above clothing black on black on black and his intensely dominant glare, standing on the foot wide ledge of the building as if it were a sidewalk. She instantly saw why they would have someone like him greeting the new initiates.

"Alright, listen up. I'm Eric, one of your leaders."

He couldn't be more than twenty and already a leader? He certainly acted the part; carelessly self-assured, confident in the deference of others.

"If you want to enter Dauntless, this is the way in." He turned, peering down over the edge. Jumping onto a building was one thing, but *off* of one? That was crazy! Anxious murmuring broke out amongst the initiates. Even the Dauntless-born seemed confused and afraid.

Her brow furrowed. It was obviously a test. But was it a test of bravery? Trust? A way to ferret out blind obedience? It seemed unlikely that they would intentionally kill their most daring initiate straight off, but she wasn't entirely certain. For all her certainty this was where she belonged, she knew frustratingly little about the initiation process. That was an intentional part of the faction system, a way to prove you belonged just as you were.

"What's at the bottom?" A Candor girl asked, her voice a high trill of fear.

"I guess you'll find out," Eric told her, then nodded his head to the side in afterthought. "Or you won't. If you're too scared to jump, you don't belong here."

Everyone looked at everyone else, but no one made a move. She licked her lips and tried to swallow, but her mouth and throat were as dry as the gravel rooftop. If she didn't belong here, she didn't belong anywhere, so it didn't matter what was at the bottom. Shaking like a leaf, she made her way through the crowd.

"C'mon, who's gonna go first?" Eric called, impatiently. She stepped forward, looking up at him. He smirked down at her, clearly unimpressed. Short, mousy, and soft, she wouldn't have been anyone's pick of first to jump off a building. Especially not as pale as she'd gone, shivering like she was.

"Need a boost?"

There were a few nervous laughs from the other initiates. She shook her head, unable to get any words passed the desert that was her trachea. He hopped down off the ledge easily, stepping out of her way. She knew better than to look over the edge, keeping her eyes glued to the ledging as she eased herself up onto it. It felt like an eternity. She faced the rooftop, rather than the fall, gripping the sides of her slacks because she didn't know what else to do with her sweaty, shaking hands.

"Any day now," Eric prompted, boredly, looking up at her now. They were all looking at her, waiting, anxious. Dauntless or death, this is what it had always been for her.

Throwing her arms wide, she tipped backwards. When there was nothing but air around her, she gasped, her heart stopped, time stopped. Then it started again, faster than before, and she was falling.
Her vision narrowed, blackness threatening to close in as she went down and down. A scream was clawing its way up from her lungs, fighting to be free. It never got the chance as a moment and an eternity later, she hit the ground. No, not the ground. Something firm cradled her body, taking the force of the fall and bouncing her back up the way she'd come. A net. Above her she could see the sky through a jagged hole broken in the street above. She'd done it. She belonged.

"This way, initiate," a gruff voice called from her right. The net dipped and she rolled that way, where another tall, brunette Dauntless man helped her to the ground. This one was leaner, with eyes no less intense than Eric's, but less oppressively dominating. "Never seen one go backwards before."

She nodded, breathless. Her heart felt like it would burst through her ribcage at any moment. "It's scary up there," she whispered in a rush. He chuckled, nodding back at her.

"Yeah, it is. What's your name?"

She licked her lips. "Honey."

He tilted his head, as if he thought he hadn't heard her properly. "Honey?"

"Yeah, Honey."

A drawn out hollering, male, faded into being as the second initiate dropped through the hole and into the net. It was the big Amity boy she'd shoved off the train. Guess he'd gotten over his fear of jumping. Unless someone else pushed him.

The Dauntless man motioned for her to move back. "First jumper, Honey!" he announced before going to help big Amity down from the net.

Stepping out of the way, she smiled to herself. Honey, the first jumper. She was Dauntless.

The first day passed in a blur. The transfer initiates were shown the compound after being separated from the Dauntless-born, led by Four, the man who'd pulled each of them from the net. He was apparently from the same class as Eric, but had gone into the security side of Dauntless, instead of leadership. He certainly wasn't trying to make friends with his short, brusque attitude. That was fine. Honey didn't need him to be her friend; she needed him to be her teacher. As the first in his class, she had to assumed there was much she could learn from him.

The transfers were informed they were competing against the Dauntless-born, but being trained separately, and their rankings would determine what sort of future they had with the faction. The higher you ranked, the more options you had. For tonight, they were all equals, but they were listed on the board in the order they had jumped - making Honey number one. She liked seeing her name in that slot.

After changing into their new Dauntless uniforms, they burned their old faction clothes. She might never wear blue again and she was fine with that. More than fine. Then it was into the mess hall for food. Hamburgers, baked potatoes, a few vegetables - it was far less refined that what the Erudite initiates would be eating tonight, but it suited Dauntless. Hearty and fortifying, tasty, but without frills and followed by the most decadent chocolate cake in existence. And no one clucking their tongue at you for adding too much salt, taking too large a portion, shoving too much in your mouth. It was the best meal she'd ever eaten.

Before going back to the initiate barracks, Honey slipped away for something she'd wanted to do for years. Most of the others were already asleep when she returned, too much excitement taking its toll. She knew the feeling. Anxious for tomorrow, but exhausted just the same, she dropped off to sleep
easily, feeling truly positive for the first time in so long she couldn't remember the last.

The first day of training began with the piercing shriek of a siren and the anguished groans of fourteen groggy teenagers. Most of them moved like zombies as they rolled off their cots and either trudged into the bathroom or started to dress. A tall, slim girl called Daisy bounced about her tasks, far too chipper for the early hour. Her long, straight hair waved around her like a golden flag. Honey scratched at her own head in disgust. Her scalp was dry, itchy, and her hair felt like straw. Big Amity sat on the cot across from her. He still seemed a bit dazed. There were several harsh scrapes on the left side of his face and a bruise running from his cheekbone to his jaw, which was slightly swollen. There were more abrasions on his hands and arms, bruises on his shoulders and back - deep wine stains on his milk chocolate skin. Thankfully, nothing had broken when he fell from the train; when Honey had pushed him out.

He looked over at her and blinked several times in confusion. "Your hair is white," he told her, as though she didn't know.

She fought back the urge to grin and nodded, eyes wide. "I know. From the fall."

His eyes rounded like saucers, one beefy hand coming up to touch his own hair, which was copper wool. "Really?"

She laughed, then, shaking her head. "No, I got it done last night. Clean slate, you know?"

The boy looked greatly relieved, letting out several deep whooshes of air. "Wow, you scared me."

He paused and offered a friendly smile, looking shy. "It looks nice, though."

"Thanks." She didn't know if he was sincere or just being nice, because he was Amity. Not that it mattered either way; she liked it. When Honey had arrived, her hair had been the color of marsh mud and hung well passed her shoulders in messy waves. Now, it barely reaching the nape of her neck, and, with the extra weight gone, it was a chaotic mass of curls and stark white. The stylist at the salon recommended she wait a week between the intense bleaching and putting a color into it. That was fine, because Honey couldn't decide on what color she wanted, anyway.

Big Amity offered her his hand. He didn't even need to stretch to reach across the gap between their cots. "I'm Calhoun, but everyone calls me Cal."

Honey shook his hand, warm and rough from working the fields, surprised at how gentle his grip was. "Do you prefer Cal?"

He shrugged. "They always called me Cal. I kinda like the sound of Calhoun, though. You think?"

She nodded. "It has a certain ring to it. I'm Honey."

"Like honey as in bees?"

"Honey as in badger," she grinned widely. His brow furrowed, incredulous. He thought she was joking. "I'm small, but fierce."

Calhoun laughed, standing to stretch his enormous frame. They raised 'em big on the farm. He scratched his stomach, looking around at the other initiates absently. "Honey Badger, huh?"

She got up herself, pushing her pants down. Under them she wore a pair of shorts, like the boys got. She wasn't prudish, exactly, but she was a sixteen year old girl and changing in front of a bunch of strangers was embarrassing. And maybe she was a little self conscious about her shape, which her
mother had always called, in the kindest criticism she was capable of, "a little curvy". "Yeah. Honey, cause I'm cute. Badger cause I'm mean."

"I believe that." She shrugged, pulling a tight spandex bra over her tank, followed by a black tshirt, then using girl magic to pull the tank off under them both. He hopped as he tugged his pants up his long legs.

"Yeah, how are those, by the way?" She couldn't help reaching out to touch the bruise on his shoulder. It could be construed as a nurturing kind of concern by anyone who didn't know better. He shrugged, waiting for her to pull her hand back before slipping his own black tee over his head, covering the marks.

"I'll live. I guess I should thank you."

"I just didn't want to see you splattered on the pavement," she insisted with a shrug, then headed off to the toilet. Someone had strung up their bedspreads to separate and conceal two of the toilets; probably the Abnegation transfers. So considerate.

There were three Abnegation, five Amity, and five Candor in her class. All of them were taller than her, stronger probably. But she was Erudite-born and, while she'd left that life behind, her brain had come with her.

After breakfast, they all trooped to the hand to hand combat training area where Four was waiting. It was a massive open space of concrete flooring broken up only by thick support columns at regular intervals. Large windows let in light, but were so dirty they may as well have been frosted glass. There was a weight training area and several sparring mats, a set of risers, and a raised fighting ring. After having everyone warm up with a few laps around the expansive room, stretches, and various calisthenics, their instructor started teaching them basic fighting stances and blocks. The entire first half of the day was just learning how to correctly stand and block and Honey was getting irritated in her eagerness to learn something more proactive.

At lunch, most of the transfers sat at the same long table, chattering about what they'd learned, what they hoped to learn, what life had been like in their birth factions.

"I like your hair," Daisy said. She sat across the table from Honey. Calhoun was on her right, a quiet Abnegation named Beth to her left. "I was thinking of getting pink streaks in mine, but I don't know."

She flipped her shining blonde tresses over her shoulder. In training, her hair had been pulled back into a high pony tail, but the moment they'd been released, she took it down again. Her lips drew together in a perfect pink mew of indecision. She was Amity, also; sun-kissed and lovely. Honey wondered what she would look like with a broken nose. The thought had no malice behind it, as she didn't dislike the other girl. They'd only just met. It was the same to Honey as wondering how Daisy would look with the pink streaks she'd mentioned.

"Should get blue, to match your eyes," Calhoun pointed his fork at her.

"Maybe." She shrugged gracefully. "Are you going to put color in yours?"

Honey shrugged, not nearly as graceful. "I dunno. It's kind of growing on me."

Beth gave a little titter of laughter and when they looked over at her, she shrugged with a silly smile. "Her hair is growing on her."

"Oh, that was bad," Calhoun chortled good-naturedly.
"Hey," a boy said, loudly, coming to sit beside Daisy. "Did I hear you tell the big guy your name was Honey Badger this morning?"

"If you're asking, I guess you did," she answered him with a smirk.

"Really?" He scoffed. "You could say anything and that's what you picked?"

"Shut up, August," Calhoun said.

"No, seriously," August insisted. "What's your real name? Is it something terrible, like Eunice?"

She decided to ignore him, going back to eating her hamburger. Thank God, she hadn't been born into Candor. She would have killed someone years ago.

"She says her name is Honey, so her name is Honey," Beth frowned at him.

"Oh, in that case, my name is Hotdog Sandwich," August announced grandly. Everyone around them erupted into laughter. Honey's bottom lip quivered between her teeth, beside her Calhoun was silent, but his shoulders were shaking. She made the mistake of looking at his face. His lips were pinched tightly together to hold in any sound. He was trying valiantly and she appreciated it. His cheeks suddenly bulged out and he snorted, which did her right in. Honey burst out laughing, immediately followed by Calhoun, who's guffaws practically shook the table.

"Friggin'… Hotdog…" was all she managed to squeak out. It was too random and ridiculous to be mad, even if he'd been trying to make fun of her.

Aside from never shutting up, it turned out August didn't seem like a bad guy, really. The rest of the conversation was idle banter and they all went back to the training room in a pretty good mood. Unfortunately, for Honey, they spent the rest of the day learning how to counter and recover from a hit. Apparently, Four was saving any actual offense until later. Not, too much later, she hoped.
Rude Remarks

The second day, they spent the morning reviewing what they had learned the day before and Honey was chomping at the bit. Finally, after lunch, Four began to teach them what she'd been waiting for - how to attack.

She wasn't strong or graceful, yet, but she was quick and eager to learn. She'd decided long before the aptitude test confirmed it - years before - that she would choose Dauntless. In Erudite, learning and study was life, and she'd been studying whatever she thought she would use once she finally started her actual life. But it was all theory, texts and pictures and videos, but no practice. No practice but what she could sneak here and there. She'd gotten into more trouble for neglecting her academic studies in favor of her personal interests than anything else. And considering the amount of times she'd been reprimanded for leaving the compound to escape from clucking tongues and get enough air to breathe, that was saying a lot. She was full of blueprints and needed Four to show her how to use her tools.

After making sure everyone had a reasonable grasp of the material and decent enough form, he let them go to practice on their own. Honey had been pummeling a dummy that was nearly a foot taller than her for almost an hour, without rest. Her knuckles were raw and she was dripping with sweat. When everyone started leaving for dinner, she stayed put.

"That's enough for today," Four said, suddenly beside her. She sniffed, wiping away sweat or whatever from her nose, and shook her head.

"I'm okay," she insisted breathlessly, throwing another forearm into her dummy opponent.

"Go to dinner," he said, firmly. "That's an order."

She paused, arms dropping to her sides, and looked up at him with a frown. "Why can't I stay?"

"If you don't pace yourself, you'll be worthless. Train when I say train, stop when I say stop."

She wiped the stinging sweat from her eyes, then gestured at herself widely. "In case you didn't notice, I'm working from a deficit. I need to do more, just to do the same."

He looked down at her, chewing it over. "I'll give you one extra hour," he finally conceded, holding up a finger. "Come in early, before breakfast. You quit at the same time as the others. And you don't skip meals."

"Two hours," she pressed.

"One," he repeated. There would be no discussion. "Take it or leave it."

Now that she had stopped moving, her body was starting to ache, but just the parts of her that weren't numb with fatigue. Maybe he had a point. She nodded. "I'll take it."

The next morning, Honey awoke in the dim, greenish-yellow glow that always flooded the initiate barracks after lights out/before wake-up. After dinner last night, she'd gone to the outfitter to get a small, personal alarm clock. It was basically a wrist watch, but the metal plate on the inside of the band conducted a small electric shock at the time the alarm was set for. It felt like being stabbed by a tiny knife and certainly did the trick.
After years of slipping away from the Erudite compound, creeping around the barracks in her socked feet was a piece of cake. A piece of Dauntless chocolate cake. She dressed and slipped out the door, ignoring the way her thighs and shoulders burned. It would get worse before it got better, she knew, as her body built muscle and became accustomed to all the physical activity she was subjecting it to.

A few people were moving around in the Pit, but most of Dauntless was still in bed. It was quieter now than it had been in the last two days, quiet enough she could hear the water rushing through the Chasm, and it was a respite Honey hadn't known she needed. In Erudite, there was always activity, busy blue ants toiling away, but there wasn't chaos and cacophony like Dauntless. Inside the training area, it was dead silent. Bliss. She enjoyed the solitude as she taped up her bruised and sore knuckles, then stretched and warmed up for a few minutes.

Four wasn't there to monitor her and she immediately wondered if she could get away with coming earlier than he had allowed. But if he caught her, he might revoke her new privilege outright. She weighed the risk versus the reward as she squared off against the same dummy as yesterday.

"We meet again," she muttered with a smirk. The sound of her striking the thick plastic shell of the dummy echoed in the vast, empty room, joined soon by her grunts of excursion. Since there was no one around to see, to laugh or stop her, she tried out a few of the moves she'd seen in videos back in Erudite. Her kicks were pitiful, but she thought her knees might at least have some effect in a fight. Her punches were feeble at best. She had to get stronger. The reality was, she had to everything-er: stronger, taller, faster, better. There had to be some way she could gain an advantage.

"What are you doing?"

Honey let out a clipped shriek, nearly jumping out of her skin. She also needed to work on her startle reflex. She whirled to face the voice and wished a hole would open up and swallow her. Eric - the youngest leader in Dauntless - stood less than ten feet away, gazing at her impassively, but still managing to convey a sense of derision. Any kind of positive first impression she might have made on him by stepping up as first jumper was no doubt instantly wiped away. Not only had he walked right up on her in a silent, empty room without her noticing, but she'd screamed like he'd come at her with a knife. Honey wished he had; then at least she would have an excuse.

"I-" She started, stopped, swallowed, then tried again. "Four said I could."

One brow went up nearly imperceptibly; only the glint of the silver studs set above it gave away the movement. "Four said you could what?"

"Have extra time to train," she clarified. Her heart was about to beat out of her chest.

"Did he? And why is that?" His tone blended disdain with genuine inquiry.

She wasn't sure if he didn't understand or if he was just toying with her by pretending he didn't. It felt like she was being toyed with. She looked down at herself, as if to draw his attention to her bite-sized proportions and found that she'd taken a defensive stance without realizing it. Despite Eric's intimidating presence and her own mortification, she was pleased with that little fact. Dropping her hands, she shrugged.

"Because I need it."

"Okay." He just stood there, looking at her.

His eyes were like steel, gray and hard, boring into her. When Four looked at the girl, he seemed to demand everything she had to offer Dauntless, judging harshly whether that was good enough. Eric's
gaze conveyed that he had already judged her and found her lacking. It took all Honey's self control not to fidget with his intense interest focused solely on her.

After a moment, he lifted a hand, gesturing at the dummy, and his eyebrows lifted expectantly. "Go on."

Oh, God, he was going to watch her. Haltingly, she turned back to the dummy. It was like standing in front of the class at school to give a report on the chapter she didn't read - only about a million times worse. Her eyes slid to Eric as she took the offensive stance she was most comfortable with and drew a shuddering breath. She tried to focus on the dummy, but she could feel his eyes on her like oppressive heat in summer. Her movements felt even clumsier than before, her blows more pathetic.

After an eternity of agonizing minutes, he spoke again. "I hope you like grass."

"What?" she turned to ask, but the word died on her tongue. He was already walking away. Grass? What the hell did that mean? It couldn't be anything good.

Honey puzzled over Eric's comment all through breakfast. For Erudite unanswered questions were either a challenge they took pleasure in or a maddening torture they desperately tried to relieve. She had always fallen into the second category. It wasn't as though she could just go ask him. Eric was unapproachable in so many ways - both practical and social. Even if she could, she wasn't entirely sure he would tell her. She couldn't ask any of the other initiates. They wouldn't know any better than her and on the off chance they did, she would be announcing her extra training time. That would put an end to her hopes of catching up pretty quickly.

She scowled mightily as she entered the training area for the second time that day. Four set them all to do their warm ups. She didn't need to warm up again, but she might as well. In the middle of a pretty good side stretch, she remembered that Four and Eric had been in the same class, so he must know him fairly well. Four already knew about her extra time, so there was no worry of revealing it. Eric might have already mentioned seeing her there to him. She abandoned her superfluous stretches and hurried over to her teacher.

"Four, why would it be important for someone to like grass?" She asked. He looked down at her like she was mildly insane.

"What?"

"Grass," she repeated. "Eric caught me training this morning-" He sighed in irritation, hands on his hips. "-and he watched me with the dummy, then said, 'I hope you like grass'."

Four's jaw tightened, his lips pinching in displeasure. "There's a lot of grass around the fence."

It took Honey a moment, then it was like he punched her in the gut. Guarding the fence was considered the least desirable position in Dauntless. Eric had basically told her she was the worst initiate in the class and would stay that way. That she was hopeless. She nodded and hurried away, jaw clenched, movements sharp and angry. She took out her humiliation and frustration on the dummy, angrily telling herself he was wrong, but a persistent voice inside her head worried he was right.

Honey could barely lift her arms at lunch, not that she had much appetite anyway. There was a big pit where her stomach should be and it was full of rocks, weighing her down.

"What's wrong with you?" Daisy asked, her head tilted to the side, concern on her fine features.
Honey shrugged, poking at the mashed potatoes on her tray. "My stomach hurts."

"I'm not surprised, with the way you were going after that dummy." Calhoun was talking around the half a sandwich he was stuffing into his mouth. "They can't feel pain, but I felt sorry for the thing."

"I feel sorry for any cow that gets within a hundred feet of you," Beth grinned at him, proud of another bad joke. Honey tried not to think that they were all somehow better than her. She tried not to hate them. She tried not to let Eric's words get to her. She tried and failed. She lagged behind everyone else as they left the mess hall, feeling despondent. If her mother were here, she'd tell her to look at the critique objectively and assess its merit; then formulate a plan of improvement to correct the flaws. Eric's critique had all kinds of merit. It was the plan she was lacking.

Four was standing outside the door to the hand to hand training area, which everyone was starting to call the gym, because it was faster. He ordered everyone to follow him, leading the group up several flights of stairs to the roof. Ahead of her, everyone started talking excitedly, pleased by whatever they had been taken to. Being last in line, she was the last to see. A shooting range. She thought her heart might burst.

Her eldest brother, Dexter, had been friends with a man who was working on an armed combat training simulation for Dauntless. Something between the kind of sim used for the aptitude tests and the real world. Because the full emersion serum sims didn't create memories the same way normal, real-world experiences did, the subjects didn't retain enough of the experience to be useful. The project was getting stuck on hardware. The headsets and motion recognition sensors were too bulky and distracting, according to the Dauntless leaders. They all had to be redesigned, which meant the current models were junked. Through his friend, her brother had gotten ahold of a set of scrapped hardware and given it to her. Normally, when a person leaves a faction, it's seen as defection, betrayal, but everyone knew she didn't fit in at Erudite and her brother was the most practical, logical person she'd ever known. He just wanted to make sure she had the best chance possible. She'd spent hours and hours in that rig.

She had not considered the possibility that the initiates would be given access to firearms. Who would give guns to a bunch of teenagers? Dauntless, apparently. She might have a chance, after all.

Four spent almost an hour going over the gun, its parts, its ammo, and how to handle it safely. Trigger discipline was the word of the day. Honey was shaking with anticipation by the time she finally got her hands on a rifle. It was heavier than she expected, solid and cool against her palms. She thought she might be in love. They lined up along the range, two people to a target - big, red, vaguely humanoid lumps set up every five feet. Taking her position beside an Amity transfer named Hannah, Honey lined up her shot. On Four's mark, she squeezed the trigger. The rifle kicked back and she nearly dropped it.

"Holy shit."

"No, it's okay, I got it," she insisted, gripping the gun tightly.

"I'll say," Hannah scoffed, shaking her head. She nodded to Jacob, the fourth Amity transfer, who was kneeling a few feet to her left. "Look at this."

"What?" Both he and Honey said it at the same time. She had full control of the gun, there was nothing to get all worked up about. Hannah nodded at their target. There was a chunk taken out of the neck, just below where the head began. Honey nearly squealed with glee.

Jacob scoffed. "Beginner's luck," he said dismissively. *He might be right. Better make sure.* She took aim again, adjusting her grip and angle, as the first shot had hit lower than she intended. She
squeezed off another round. Better. Then another and another. By the time she'd emptied her clip, the 
area where her target's face would have been was just a mess of pulverized gray foam. That training 
sim turned out to be pretty damned effective. Eric could keep his grass.

The small group she had started to think of as her friends - Calhoun, Beth, Daisy, and Hotdog 
August - were thrilled by her inexplicable marksmanship. They praised her, almost excessively at 
dinner; probably overcompensating for her foul mood that morning. It was nice, but also made 
Honey kind of uncomfortable. She'd never had anyone so concerned with how she felt. What she 
did, what she thought, how she thought - these were the things her parents were concerned with. She 
had plenty of study partners in school, but no real friends. Her personality clashed too hard with the 
other students in her class. She wasn't entirely sure how to act.

Unfortunately, while those four and a couple more besides were congratulatory towards her 
newfound skill, it had, ironically, painted a large target on her back. She'd done far better than any of 
the other initiates. When she went to sit down, Jacob bumped hard into her from behind. She pitched 
forward, cracking her elbow on the steel table.

"Watch what you're doing, nose," he snapped, as if it had been her fault.

"You watch it," Calhoun warned from where he stood on the other side of the table, towering over 
every head around him. Jacob blew out a puff of air dismissively and turned around, sitting at the 
table on the other side of the aisle, directly behind her.

"Are you okay?" Beth asked, watching Honey rub her elbow.

"I'm fine," she nodded, taking her seat properly. She ate with gusto. Even if she failed miserably at 
hand to hand combat, she was a whiz with guns, and that should put her somewhere in the middle of 
the rankings - at least for the first stage of initiation. Surely, with that score, she could find something 
she'd like to do when the time came.

As the meal wound down and she munched pleasantly away on the last of her carrot sticks, Honey 
watched Calhoun inhale a small village. Something to that effect anyway. By contrast, Beth ate like a 
bird. Or a rabbit, since the Abnegation diet seemed to have carried over.

"You need to eat more," she said, nodding at her own advice.

"Okay, mom," the other girl grinned at her. Honey waved the retort away with her carrot.

"I'm serious, you Abnegation have no meat on your bones."

"You sound like my mom," Daisy laughed, twisting her hair around her finger absently.

"I'm not too skinny am I?" Beth asked August, suddenly genuinely concerned. Of course, ask the 
Candor for an honest opinion. He shook his head vehemently.

"No, you look great!" Beth blushed prettily.

Calhoun waved his hand towards them. "You both look fine."

Honey rolled her eyes and took a loud bite of carrot. "It's not about looks. You need to get stronger. 
To do that you need to build muscle. To do that you need protein and calories." She nodded 
emphatically. "Seriously, at dinner, you should eat until it makes you sick. Just shovel it in, like 
Calhoun."
"Hey!" He protested.

"No, she's right. I saw you shove a boot in there at breakfast," August quipped, drawing laughs from the lot of them.

"You better not get too close, then, Hotdog Sandwich." The only people who ever called August by his actual name after that were Eric and Four. To everyone else, he was Hotdog.

"I thought you noses were supposed to be smart," Jacob said derisively, seemingly out of nowhere. Honey turned in her seat to look back at him.

"What?"

"What kind of an idiot helps their competition?" He expounded with disgust. "The stiff's might be the only ones more pathetic at fighting than you."

"Maybe I'm not afraid of competition," she replied with a superior smirk. He scoffed.

"You should be. You should be thinking about what kind of job you're giving up by helping someone get better than you."

"If they're better than me, they deserve it more," she countered quickly.

"That sounds like something a stiff would say. Are you sure you're Erudite?"

Honey glared at him determinedly. "No, I'm Dauntless."

Several people grabbed their cups and clanged them on the table in approval, which only seemed to incense Jacob. He pushed his tray away with a clatter and stood, moving to stand above her. Perhaps he thought it was intimidating. He was quite a bit taller than her, but so was everyone else. Her earlier sentiment was correct and they grew them big on the farm; his shoulders alone looked like they could support a barn.

"Anyway, who cares who deserves it? It's about who wants it more," he declared, his face hard and serious. More clanging rang out at the sentiment.

"I can see why you left Amity," Honey remarked. Those load bearing shoulders rolled back, hands clenching into fists. She wasn't afraid of him, but she still didn't want to get punched in the face at the dinner table.

"Did you leave Erudite because you were too dumb to hack it?"

"You think I chose Dauntless because it was less of a challenge than Erudite?" She asked in a flash of brilliance, far louder than she needed to. "You think Dauntless is for stupid people?"

The result was immediate and exactly what she hoped. A number of heads swiveled their way, the Dauntless seated at the tables around them having easily heard her words.

"What'd she say?"

"Who thinks Erudite is tougher than Dauntless?"

Jacob fumed down at her, storming out of the mess before someone took real issue with his purported opinion. With the imminent threat of violence gone, she relaxed.

"What a jerk," Hotdog said with a disapproving shake of his head. They all nodded.
"You should ignore him," Beth advised, sagely.

"Forget that guy," Calhoun waved one giant hand towards the door, knocking over a large oak tree in the process. Then he picked up the tree and took a bite. Unfortunately, forgetting about Jacob would prove to be both ill advised and impossible.
Challenges

After her early hour, breakfast, and warm ups, Four separated them into pairs for light sparring. Honey and Beth had been put together, probably because Beth was the closest to her in size and strength. They circled each other awkwardly, at first, but soon both girls became more comfortable. They weren't supposed to be hurting each other, after all. Just working on the movements. Fifteen minutes into the exercise, Honey spotted Eric walking through the room. She flushed, remembering her humiliation the last time she saw him, but he didn't so much as flick an eye in her direction as he headed to speak with Four.

"He must be checking on our progress," Beth said, tapping Honey's shoulder to reclaim her attention. She tried to focus on the sparring, not wanting to give the young leader anything else to sneer at. It was like he read her mind, because a moment later, his voice rang out.

"First jumper!" Her head spun towards him fast enough to make her neck crack. "C'mon, time to fight."

"Oh God," she whispered, eyes wide. Her feet were moving before she knew it, her brain trailing after. If the rest of her were as strong as her pounding heart, she'd be first in the class. The other initiates were gathering around the raised platform where Eric and Four stood by one corner. Surely, she wouldn't be fighting one of them.

"Get in the ring," he ordered, motioning her up. She nodded, climbing the two steps to stand on the canvas. "Last jumper."

A collective gasp rose from the class. She might have been better off against one of the men. Jacob stepped forward with an ugly smirk.

"He can't be serious," she heard someone say, but couldn't make out who it was over the pounding in her ears.

"In the real world, you don't get to choose your opponent," Eric informed them in the same tone a teacher might use to recite a text book. "Doesn't matter how big they are."

That was true. Still, though. In the real world, she probably wouldn't have gone after Jacob for a tussle. She'd have run as fast as her short legs would carry her. Or maybe just shot him, if that were an option.

"What are the rules?" Jacob asked, darkly eager. Yeah, he really was not cut out for Amity.

"You fight until one of you can't anymore," Eric answered.

Four quickly added, "Or one of you concedes. Say you quit or tap out."

Eric nodded to the side, as if it were immaterial. "But, a Dauntless never gives up. If you're a coward, you don't belong here."

Honey looked at the hulking boy across the ring. He could really hurt her. He would really hurt her. The only thing she had on him, maybe, was speed. Jacob looked back at her with a feral kind of grin.

"Don't just stare at each other; fight!" Eric commanded.

Jacob advanced on her. The thudding of his footfalls shook the whole platform. Honey tried to take a
defensive stance, but it was hard as she had to retreat and make sure to watch the edge of the ring so she didn't fall off it. She should have risked it and not taken her eyes off her opponent. She looked back just in time to see Jacob's knuckles careening towards her face. The girl spun away, but he followed and his fist connected with the back of her shoulder. It felt like she got hit by an anvil. The blow sent her sprawling to the mat with a yelp of pain. Jacob didn't persist; either giving her time to recover because he wanted to draw this out or he was as unused to fighting as the rest of them and thought he was supposed to.

She managed to get back up, but her whole shoulder was numb. As soon as she was on her feet, Jacob came after her. He swung again and she tried to dodge, but his knuckles still grazed her cheekbone. When you're talking about an anvil, a grazing still hits hard. Her face exploded in pain and she fell again. She moved to get up, but the room was spinning and she flopped back onto her ass. Jacob hadn't even broken a sweat.

Honey held up her hands in a T shape. "Time-out."

"What?" The boy took a step back, perplexed.

"There's no time-outs," Eric snapped from the corner. It was good for her that he had; she had gotten so turned around, she didn't know where he and Four were.

"No, time-out," she insisted, struggling to her feet. She staggered over to the two men. Eric's eyes were wide, aggravated and surprised by her gall. Four at least looked concerned. A little. "What are the rules?"

Her instructor leaned in, trying to get a look at her eyes. The leader scoffed, pointing back towards the middle of the platform.

"Get back over there and fight!"

She hissed softly, so only they would be able to hear. "Is there anything we're not allowed to do?"

"Yes, call a time-out," Four said. He opened his mouth to say more, probably ask if she wanted to quit, but this time Eric leaned in and cut him off.

"You do whatever you need to to win," he said, with an air of ominous finality. "Or you don't."

She nodded. Then she stopped nodding, because it threw her off balance. She turned back to face Jacob and waved a hand at him to indicate they could resume. He looked to the corner, unsure of what just happened. Eric swung out his arm towards Honey, the motion sharp from agitation. That was enough for Jacob and he advanced on her menacingly. She stumbled away, hands touching the mat here and there to keep herself on her feet. Her drunken legs made her slow and Jacob caught up easily. He reached down for her with one hand, clearly looking to hold her in place, while he drew back his other fist.

Honey seized her one chance. She grabbed his arm the way Four had shown them to bring an adversary closer, propelling herself towards him at the same time. He wasn't expecting it and was off balance, besides, so he fell into her. She brought up her knee as hard as she could, hoping his own weight and momentum would give her hit extra power. Jacob grunted loudly as her kneecap connected with his groin, dropping like a ton of bricks onto the mat and taking her with him.

The class erupted, as teenagers are wont to do. She rolled to her knees, tilting to the side for a moment before recovering. Drawing back her own fist, she punched him in the face. It was like punching a friggin' rock. She probably hurt her hand worse than she did him. Still, she went to hit
him again. He flung out his arm and hammered her across the chest, knocking her back a good three feet. Down to the mat she went again, Jacob following with a roar of fury. He grabbed her shoulders and lifted her, then slammed her back against the mat. Once, then again her head bounced off the wooden platform, and she didn't know what happened after that.

When Honey came back to the world again, she was being carried off the mat by Calhoun and Four, strapped to a flat panel. She couldn't really focus, but could hear people talking in the background. She tried to speak, to tell them to just give her a minute and she'd be fine, but couldn't get the words to make proper sense. Trying to sit up would have been futile, given the straps. She peered around curiously as they carried her through the compound to a room she'd never seen. A nice man there gave her a shot and the world faded away again.

She drifted in and out for a while and when Honey came fully back to her senses, she was in bed and feeling no pain. She peered sleepily up at Beth who looked beside herself. She also had a black eye.

"Did you win?"

"What?" the slim, raven haired girl asked.

"Your eye," Honey said, by way of explanation. Beth reached up to touch her face, but shook her head.

"No. I lost. I conceded." She seemed embarrassed. Honey shook her head.

"Hey, you'll get 'em next time." She stretched with a comfortable sigh. "What time is it?"

"Almost dinner."

Honey blinked. Then she sat bolt upright, which sent the room teetering out of control. "What?!"

Beth gently pushed her back down. "Honey, you're in the infirmary. Jacob gave you a concussion."

"Oh, no!" The smaller girl moaned, dejected. "I missed the gun range?" Beth nodded. "Did Eric go?" She nodded again. "No! Come on!"

"Please, calm down," Beth begged, looking around frantically for the nurse. Honey collapsed back onto the bed, all but in tears. Her chance to redeem herself in the leader's eyes; gone.

"Oh, I blew it," she groaned softly.

"No, you didn't. It was ridiculous of them to put you up against Jacob. He's twice your size! What did they think would happen?"

"I should have let him punch me a couple more times and then quit," she huffed, absolutely miserable.

"Hey, you did great!" Beth insisted. Honey scoffed. "You'll get other chances to show off your gun skills."

"You don't understand."

"I really don't," Beth agreed.

"Well, now what? How long do I have to stay here?"

"They said overnight. Just to be sure."
Honey sighed, rubbing the back of her thumb against her forehead. At least she wouldn't have to use the barracks toilet. Her new life at was not turning out the way she'd envisioned. It was too early to give up, she knew, logically, but that didn't make her feel better. She didn't feel very Dauntless.

Honey missed her early training the next morning, because the doctor would only release her to Four. While she waited for him, she leaned against the bathroom sink, looking at her reflection in the mirror. Her cheek was such a shade of purple that it looked painted on. It had swelled up the night before, but the nurse gave her a topical anti-inflammatory and it had since returned to a semblance of normal. There was a knot on the back of her head where it had hit the mat and the doctor said she was lucky that's all. If they'd been on the ground, Jacob might have killed her. There was a large bruise on the back of her shoulder, as well, but it was too much of an annoyance to look at. So she was staring at her face, lightly stroking her fingers across the skin, marveling at the mark and the way it felt, when she heard someone approach.

"Hey, how do you feel?" Four asked from the doorway. She shrugged.

"Disappointed," Honey admitted. "But I'll get over it."

"Good. Come on, you need to eat."

The first rankings had been posted while she was out of commission, so Honey didn't see them until after breakfast. She was dead last. Because she'd lost her fight so miserably and hadn't been able to shoot that day, her score was abysmal. She stared at the board for a long while, stewing in her disappointment and anger. The fact that the doctor had told her she couldn't go near a fist today would not help her standing. From first to last, Eric had told the others - while she was incapacitated - that they would be graded daily and the rankings would update accordingly. It was still early in the first stage of training. With her shooting capacity, she could make up some ground, but if she didn't do better at fighting, it would be a wash. She gritted her teeth and stalked over to her favorite dummy. Her punches were messy, caused by the combination of the pain in her shoulder and back, the pain in her head, and the pain in her heart.

Her spirits lifted a bit as they marched up to the firing range, but came crashing down to earth when her shots all missed their mark. Her vision was off. It was hard to focus properly. Honey was terrified her fight with Jacob had caused some kind of permanent injury. Despite her agreement with Four to not skip meals, she eschewed the mess hall at dinner and went straight to the barracks. Alone in the shower, water beating down on her, even she couldn't tell if there were tears pouring from her eyes. The water was as hot as she could stand, steam billowing all around, and she turned the knob even higher. Hissing through her teeth, she cringed and tensed, huffing out a silent groan of discomfort, but didn't step away or adjust the heat.

By the time she heard the others come back to the barracks, every mirror and bit of chrome in the bathroom was fogged over. She turned off the spray and quickly dried herself with a coarse towel that was harsh on her pink, nearly scalded skin. Without a word to her friends or anyone else, she crawled into her bunk and passed out.

The next morning, when the pain of her alarm clock woke her, Honey lay on her cot and stared at the ceiling. Should she even bother? Maybe she should just learn to like grass. And standing out in the hot sun all day. And doing nothing for the rest of her life. Like a walking corpse.

A Dauntless never gives up. She could hear Eric's words in her mind. If you're a coward, you don't belong here.

Four was actually waiting for her when Honey arrived at the gym. "For a second, I thought you
weren't going to show."

"No, just a little slow this morning," she assured him, rolling her bad shoulder.

As she taped up her hands, he said, "I want to go over what we covered yesterday while you were staring at the rankings and sulking." He leaned down to look at her eyes, his own deep brown gaze expectant as ever and without pity.

"How's your focus?"

"Clear as a bell," she said lightly. In more ways than one. Dauntless or death.

Honey didn't want to fight Daisy, but you don't get to choose your opponents. Really, though, if you're fighting with your friend, at least one of you made that choice. They squared off in the ring, sizing each other up. Four stood at the same corner as before, arms crossed, stoic as always. Eric was not there, which Honey was both grateful for and disappointed by. There was somehow less pressure without his presence, even though the scores would be tabulated the same regardless. But, without him there, she couldn't prove him wrong. If she could prove him wrong, anyway.

The blonde girl had superior height, reach, and grace on her side. It was no surprise that she was probably the most agile fighter in the class. If Honey wanted to stand a chance, she would have to take her down fast. Her long, slim legs were the most obvious target. Too obvious?

Daisy stepped forward suddenly, throwing a jab that Honey easily put aside. She responded in kind. Where Daisy's strikes were careful, like she didn't want to hurt her friend too badly, Honey's were strong and sure; she wanted to win. But Daisy still had her outclassed and not a single one of her punches landed. The sweet-faced Amity transfer danced around her like a golden mongoose teasing a snake - a weak, stubby snake.

Daisy darted forward, her fist shooting out and snapping Honey's head back. Her elbow followed, catching the other girl across the jaw. Mistake. She'd come in too close, negating the advantage of her long limbs. Honey rolled with the blow, turning her body to the side, so Daisy's momentum carried her forward. She grabbed hold of that flowing sunshine ponytail and dropped to the mat. Her opponent's head snapped back like a rubber band and she went down with a sharp bark of surprise. Honey quickly scrambled atop her to pin her down before she could recover.

Daisy struggled, swinging her fist into Honey's ribs. The smaller girl caught her wrist, shifting swiftly to pin it behind her own bent knee. She flattened her hand on Daisy's other bicep, holding her down and hit her again and again, pummeling that pretty face. By the time Daisy slapped her hand on the mat, surrendering the fight, she was a bloody mess.

Honey immediately stopped, hopping back off her friend. She was panting heavily, sore and exhausted, but felt elated. She'd won. She'd actually won. Daisy rolled over, coughing and spitting blood onto the canvas. Beth and Hotdog rushed forward to help her up, looking at Honey oddly. She realized she was smiling and not a small, private smile either. She opened her mouth to apologize, but nothing came out. She wasn't sorry. This is what she was supposed to do. They all knew that.

Maybe it was the fact she had enjoyed it so much that bothered them.

After the range, when Honey's adrenaline had finally worn off, her stomach was in knots. Daisy had been taken to the infirmary and come back to training halfway through shooting practice. Her nose had been taped up and there were deep eggplant rings under both her eyes. In an odd twist of fate,
Honey had actually caused the damage she'd idly imagined before. Now, Daisy hadn't turned up for dinner. The remaining four barely spoke, focusing on their meals. Honey knew they were sneaking looks at her when they thought she couldn't see. It was Erudite all over again.

Fifteen minutes into the meal, a girl dropped into the spot they'd left empty for Daisy and Hotdog started to tell her the seat was taken, but cut himself off with a loud, "Whoa! What happened to you?"

The girl none of them had recognized at first notice, staring at their trays as they were, was Daisy. He hadn't been referring to her injuries, either, but her hair. All Daisy's long, lustrous golden tresses were gone. The sides of her head had been shorn almost to the skin; all that remained was a two inch stripe in the middle of her head, running from her forehead to the nape of her neck. The short mohawk was gelled into a wild bramble and dyed the brightest pink Honey had ever seen.

"Wow!" Beth exclaimed, her eyes wide.

"It was time for a change," Daisy said, firmly, grabbing up a roll with a stern expression.

"I like it," Calhoun offered. He sounded less than positive about that, so it might just have been his Amity talking.

"It looks very Dauntless." When Honey spoke, Daisy paused, her hand stretched towards the pan of meatloaf. The others seemed to be holding their breath.

"Thanks," the tall girl said, slowly taking a slice, not looking up.

"I'm not going to apologize," Honey told her. She hadn't done anything wrong and she wasn't Amity, lying to pacify a tense situation. She wanted Daisy's friendship. But she needed to fight hard.

"No, that wouldn't be very Dauntless of you." The other girl finally lifted her gaze to meet Honey's and, after a tense moment more, one side of her mouth quirked up sardonically. "I should probably thank you. I don't think I could have made myself cut it all off otherwise."

A great rush of relief flooded the group as the tension broke. Hotdog actually slumped against the table dramatically.

"Next time, you're gonna kick my ass," Honey mused, narrowing her eyes. "That was the only advantage I had."

"Too bad," Daisy smirked. "You'll just have to work harder."

She did work harder, but it wasn't enough. The only thing Honey had going for her in the ring was the element of surprise and her growing reputation for fighting dirty. She bit, she pulled hair, she went after sensitive areas no one else did. She also lost, again and again. Each match ended the same way, Honey laying dazedly on the mat, more often than not, bleeding. She wondered if her bruises would all join together eventually and leave her looking like a human blueberry.

Her shooting was the only thing keeping her in the mid-range of the ranking. She'd finally been able to display her skill for Eric. After an abysmal failure in the ring, sporting a black eye that was darker than Daisy's even had been, she all but bounced her way up the roof. They ran High-Low drills first, lining up at one end of the range before working their way down, pausing at each target to fire a standing and a kneeling shot before moving on. Of course, Honey was flawless. Then they worked on their ranged shots. This time, each successive firing point was further from the target, marked by orange lines spray-painted on the rooftop. They only moved on when they'd hit within a circle on the
dummy's head or torso.

Eric stopped the exercise to single out one of the candor transfers after he missed three shots in a row. He always had trouble, because he flinched every time his gun fired. "How does it feel to be dead?"

The boy, Joseph, stuttered, beyond intimidated by the condemnatory glare his leader focused on him.

"Because that's what you are," he went on. He pointed at the target dummy. "He just blew you away, along with whoever was standing next to you."

Joseph could only stand there speechless. Eric jerked his rifle away in disgust and held it up for the rest of them to see.

"Your weapon should be a part of you, just like your arm. You control it or you don't pick it up to begin with." He grabbed Joseph by the front of his shirt, pushing him between himself and the targets. "You move, you fail."

Eric lifted the gun to his shoulder, raising the barrel to point over the boy's shoulder, the muzzle only a couple of inches from his face. Fail? If Joseph moved, he could die! The man squeezed the trigger, firing a shot. The rifles weren't very loud, but it was right next to his ear, so no one was surprised when Joseph flinched hard. Eric fired again and again and poor Joe just couldn't take it. He dropped to his hands and knees, panting like a frightened dog beside Eric's long legs.

"Pathetic," their leader sneered, dropping the rifle to his side. He shoved Joseph with his boot, knocking him down flat. "You're done. Get outta my sight."

The boy rose to his feet, hunched over in a pitiful cringe and made his way quickly off the roof. Eric moved to place the rifle down on the table with the unused ammunition, then motioned for them to continue, as though nothing had happened. A few minutes later, Honey stepped up for her turn and quickly made her way down the line, only pausing for the time it took to fire the one shot she needed at each target. Her last shot, the farthest line, was about as close to the center of the chest circle as one could hope for.

"Impressive," Eric intoned from a few feet away and, for once, he didn't sound like he was talking to something he meant to scrape off his boot. She might just float off the roof because of that. Finally. He came to stand beside her. "Can you do it again?"

She immediately lifted her rifle and hit the head circle, just left of center. Then, she fired twice more. It looked like eyes and a nose. The class laughed softly as she lowered her gun to look up at him. He wasn't smiling. In fact, he looked pissed.

"You think that's cute?" He asked harshly, shoulders tense, jaw tight.

Honey swallowed hard and shook her head, even though an instant before, she had thought it just that. He snatched her rifle away, the same as he had Joseph's. Then he pointed it between her eyes. Several people gasped audibly. Honey didn't even blink. Was he trying to scare her? She knew he wouldn't shoot her intentionally. He'd obviously had more than enough experience with a rifle not to fire accidentally. He was making a point, she understood that, but she wasn't afraid. She just looked at him passed the barrel of her weapon and waited.

"This is not a toy," he told her. His tone was soft, but menacing, raising the hair at the back of her neck. "You use this to kill and not to play. Treat it with respect."

His eyes were piercing, unwaveringly locked on her own, demanding every ounce of her attention
and her obedience. Out here on the roof, in the sunshine, they were as blue as the sky, but no less like stone - topaz instead of slate. She nodded, the metal of the muzzle brushing her skin. He held her gaze a moment longer, then slowly took the rifle away.

"Get off the roof. You're done." She bit the inside of her lip, furious and crushed at the same time, then spun on her heel and stalked away. Beth reached out for her as she passed, but even if she could stop, Honey didn't want to.

The second the door to the rooftop closed behind her, she threw her fist into the wall with a shout. She just couldn't win with that guy! Worse, this time, she had nothing to blame but her own foolishness. He was right, she had been showing off and playing with the gun. She scowled her way down the stairs. Joseph was sitting about halfway down, his head in his hands. He looked up when he saw her coming, blinking in surprise. Even in the shadowy stairwell, she could see the redness around his eyes and the shine of tears on his cheeks. Well, crap.

"What are you doing here?" He asked, quickly wiping at his face.

"Eric made an example of me, too," she admitted, sitting beside him with a huff.

"What'd you do?"

"Something stupid." She scratched her scalp, frowning mightily. "Are you really scared of the rifle?"

He shrugged. "No. I don't know. I can't get used to the sound of it."

"Really? It's just the sound?"

"It's like someone flicking me in the ear every time I shoot," he said, miserably. "And then he had it right in my face. I just freaked out!"

"Yeah… I can see how that would be scary." She couldn't, but why make him feel worse than he already did? "If it's just the sound, you should go get one of those audio-file players. Tomorrow, record your rifle reports and then just listen to them all the time."

Joseph looked at her, his eyes as wide as the swollen lids would allow. "You think that would work?"

"I don't know," she admitted. Then grinned, thinking of Beth. "But it's worth a shot."

He chuckled, but it seemed like a reflex more than anything else.

"You're weird, you know that?" Ah, the charm of Candor. "Like, really weird. Why are you always helping people? You know it really is going to hurt your ranking, like Jacob said."

"We're all Dauntless, now. The better we are, the better the faction is. If I let the faction suffer, just so I'm better off, what does that make me?"

"What do you want to do after initiation is over?" He asked, suddenly. Her lips quirked to one side.

"I don't know, really. I figured I'd cross that bridge when I get to it."

"If you do really great in stage two, you should go for leadership. You sound like a leader. I think you've got the right idea." Honey stared at him, both blown away by the idea of her being a leader - something she'd never even considered - and genuinely touched that he thought she should be one.

"Thanks."
"I'm gonna go do what you said." He stood and looked down at her. "You want to come, too? See the shops and all?"

She stood as well, but shook her head. "There's a dummy in the gym that's probably lonely without me."
This one's a little rough on poor Honey

Honey's ranking had dipped that day, after both losing her match and being kicked off the range, but she'd pulled it up before, so she wasn't overly concerned. Maybe a little. But it was needless worry as she actually won her next match; quickly subduing Beth with a neck hold that rendered her unconscious in seconds. That was a relief to Honey. Beth was just so tender-hearted, she didn't want to hurt her. Joseph wore the earpieces to his file player so often that, apparently, he'd started to hear gunshots in his sleep. But he'd stopped flinching on the range, so that was the trade off.

"Cliff and Honey, you're next," Four said as Daisy hopped off the platform and her opponent, one of the Abnegation boys, limped his way down. Cliff was the other male of the Candor transfers and about the same size as Jacob, but without the brutish personality. She wondered why Eric always chose giant opponents for her. To drive home to her how weak she was? To remind the others that the weak are crushed by the strong? Some such social truth as that, maybe. Maybe he just didn't like her. Honey bit back a sigh as she climbed into the ring. At least this one wouldn't try to kill her.

Cliff, being a decent sort, gave her every opportunity to surrender, pausing each time he dropped her hard to the mat so she could concede. Despite the blood running into her eye from where her eyebrow had split open, Honey would not give up. She never did. Really, at this point in initiation, it was foolish of him to think she would. She took advantage of his last hesitation to kick his knee out from under him. When he was more on her level, she aimed her elbow at his face.

Like always, she just didn't have the strength or weight behind her to do much damage to someone like Cliff and he easily caught her and slammed her to the mat. She threw her fist at his face in a flurry of rapid punches. He flipped her onto her stomach, sitting his considerable bulk on her legs and twisting her arm up behind her back, pinning her torso down with his other hand flattened on her shoulder blade. Her already injured shoulder screamed and intensely sharp pains shot up her forearm. Honey shouted in agony, her feet kicking uselessly behind him.

"Give up!" Cliff huffed at her, puffing like a bellows. She grunted and tried to look at him over her shoulder.

"Are you really going to break my arm?" she growled the question between her teeth. He was Candor, so there was a good chance he would answer truthfully.

"I don't want to," he admitted, sounding pitiful.

"If you're not, then let go!" She cried, pressing her forehead to the mat, gulping in air. Her free hand was clenched in a fist so tight that the nails cut into her palm.

"Just say you give up!" Cliff pleaded with her.
"There's no such thing as a tie," Eric announced from his usual place, annoyed and condescending as always. "One of you make up your mind."

Honey gritted her teeth. She was pinned, there was no way she could unseat Cliff. Tears of pain and frustration burned in her eyes.

"Honey, please say it!" Beth called desperately, obviously thinking of how the match with Jacob had ended. Eric, tired of the stalling, stomped one booted foot on the mat.

"Now!"

Honey's shriek of pain reverberated through the room, silencing everyone. Cliff had broken her arm. He jumped up and away from her like a scalded cat, "I'm sorry!"

She rolled onto her back, letting out a wail of anguish and anger, cradling her injured arm to her chest. Four took the two steps as one, moving to kneel by her side.

"You, out of the ring," he pointed at Cliff, then reached for her arm. Honey rolled aside to keep it out of his reach.

"Don't touch it!" She screeched. He rolled her right back and pried her fingers away, inspecting the damage. She already knew what it would be. A spiral fracture, with healing time a minimum of six weeks. Now, she was at an even greater disadvantage.

Her arm was set and in a cast before range practice was even half over, her left arm, thankfully. She didn't know what she would have done had it been the right. It took some adjusting to get her aim up to par, but that wasn't much hassle. It was when Four took her aside after shooting was done for the day and tried to tell her she was out of hand-to-hand for the remainder of initiation, that Honey lost it.

"What? No! You can't do that!" she cried in a panic.

"With that arm, you've got no chance to win," he told her flatly. "It's an unfair advantage for your opponent. And you will definitely try to use that cast as a weapon."

"Then that evens it out!" He started to say more, but she rushed on. "There's soft casts. I know, I've seen them at Erudite. Just give me one of those. I don't care if I'm handicapped in the ring; I'm already at a disadvantage!"

Eric, who had been silently watching the exchange, now spoke up. "If you permanently damage your arm, you'll be completely useless no matter where you rank."

Honey huffed, at her breaking point. "You made us jump on and off a moving train! You made us jump onto a building, ten stories up! Why the hell would you start worrying about permanent injury now?" She demanded, glaring at the domineering man. She was spitting mad and not the least bit intimidated by either of them at the moment. "If permanent injury was an issue, I wouldn't be in this cast in the first place!"

"Calm down," Four ordered. "The decision has been made. That's the end of it."

Honey looked to Eric, because he was the higher authority, beseeching and furious at the same time. "If I won't give up, you shouldn't make me! This is my life and I'm the one who has to live with the consequences; so let me live with them!"

He looked at Four. She couldn't read his expression, but Four evidently recognized something he
didn't like. He shook his head firmly, scowling. Eric shrugged.

"Give her the soft cast," he finally said. It made no difference to him. Her life was at issue here and he was completely ambivalent. It made her blood boil, but she clenched her jaw shut. He'd given her what she wanted. It shouldn't matter that he found her so insignificant that he couldn't summon an ounce of concern either way. He looked down at her. "You might live to regret this"

"But it'll be my regret," Honey stated, stone-faced.

The plaster was removed and the soft cast applied. She could continue to participate in hand to hand combat training, but it was a constant, painful struggle. More so than it had been already. The only positive to the situation was that her left arm now had a neon target on it and that drew in her opponents. They were looking for an easy win, but she took advantage of their misplaced focus. Necessity breeds invention. Because of her arm, she was forced to rely almost completely on defensive counters. She had not realized her size could be an advantage if she only used it correctly in a fight. Instead of trying to be stronger and attack more viciously, as she had been doing, what suited her frame and form was turning the attacks of others back on them. She actually won more matches than she lost in the next days. Part of her worried that the others were letting her win out of pity, but neither Four nor Eric called anyone out on it. And even on the off chance Four might let it slip by, Eric certainly would not.

The soft cast was clear, so Honey was able to see her arm through it, fascinated by the bruising and how it changed shape and color from day to day. Of course, every time she bumped her arm or sat down too hard, she was hit with a jolt of pain. She didn't mind so much, really. At one point, after her own match - one she'd lost, leaving her on the risers with a cold pack to her face - while everyone was distracted by the current fight, Honey idly, gently swung her arm back and forth, letting it strike the end of the bench very lightly. Each impact sent a little shock of pain through her system, making her hiss air in. It was oddly cathartic.

"You're not learning anything sitting there," Four called from not far away. She flushed hotly, wondering how long he'd been watching her. She quickly got up, hurrying back to the others. Eric briefly looked back at them as they rejoined the group, but said nothing. She needed to be more careful. This was the kind of thing that got a person sent for evaluation in Erudite.

It was visiting day and Honey was a wreck. Her hands had been shaking ever since she'd dressed. She'd been chewing her bottom lip so hard it was beginning to bruise. Not that anyone would notice one more bruise. Would her family come? She knew they loved her and there had been no ill will over her leaving for Dauntless, but they might think that a clean break was best. What if they thought it was for her own good? Or that she didn't want to see them?

She looked around at her fellow initiates as everyone milled about, getting dressed and ready, many of them fussing more than usual. They all looked so different from when they first arrived. Most of them had changed their hair, several had gotten piercings or tattoos or both. Even just the black clothing of their chosen faction changed their appearance. They all looked more Dauntless. What would Daisy's parents think when they saw her hair? When they saw her nose? Even when she smiled or laughed, she no longer conveyed Amity.

What would Honey's own parents think? Her black eye had faded, but was still there. Her upper lip was split and the gash on her eyebrow had visible stitches. She had bruises everywhere. Then, of course, there was her cast. She'd let Daisy put her hair up into pigtails that she had to admit looked cute; little bunches of wild ringlets bouncing against the back of her skull, not quite reaching her neck. She looked like some kind of character from the Erudite graphic-fiction archive, with her white hair and battle damage. Besides those changes, there were other, more profound differences. The
intense physical regimen of training had all but stripped away her baby fat, replacing it with lean muscle (though, she hadn't yet managed to straighten that curviness that had so bothered her mother since Honey was twelve). She looked older, pigtails aside. She moved with purpose, now; even standing still, she held herself with more confidence and ease. She was more self-assured. Honey grinned at her reflection. She was more Dauntless, too.

"Alright, listen up!" Eric called over the morning chatter. He stood at the top of the stairs that led into the barracks. "Some advice about today. If your families, by some miracle, come to see you, it's best not to seem too attached. It's for their own good. And yours." He added that last in a warning tone. "We take the philosophy 'Faction before blood' very seriously. If you miss your old life, you're obviously not entirely happy with your choice. If you're not fully committed to Dauntless, you don't belong here."

No one spoke. A few people shifted uncomfortably. After a moment, he stepped aside and motioned them all out of the barracks. With his position on the landing, everyone had to walk by him in single file and he fixed his penetrating stare on each one as they passed.

Down the hall, once they were out of his sight, Hotdog leaned heavily on Calhoun, letting out an exaggerated sigh of relief. The rest of them chuckled, understanding how he felt. "It was nice of him to put us all in such a positive mood!"

Honey stood on the lower walkway, looking out over the Pit. As always, it was a hive of activity. People moved about their business, talking loudly to be heard over everyone else. Music and neon lighting spilled out from shops and tattoo parlors and stylists. It had become a comfortable chaos, now familiar to her. She searched the sea of black - today flecked here and there with bits of red and yellow, a single shockingly contrasting speck of white - for trace of blue. Her anxiety rose higher with every second she didn't find what she was looking for. Wait! There. A precious sapphire in a field of obsidian.

She hurried down the stairs, no longer noticing how narrow the steps were or the lack of railings. As soon as she could see her family's faces, Eric's words flew right out of her mind. Both of her parents had come, and her oldest brother, Dexter, as well. The others would be at work, she knew, and did not take it personally. She flung herself into them with a joyous shout. They seemed afraid to touch her, as if she would shatter. After a too gentle hug, her mother held her at arm's length, her big, blue eyes flooded with tears.

"Oh, my baby," she hiccupped. "What have they been doing to you?"

Her father cupped her unbruised cheek. His skin was so soft, unblemished. She couldn't imagine a Dauntless man having such delicate hands. "If they're abusing you, tell us. We'll go to the council. That can't be legal."

Honey couldn't hold back a laugh, despite their obvious upset, shaking her head. She tried to reassure them. "No, it's fine. I'm okay. It's just training. We have to learn to fight and I'm so small…"

Her mother sobbed and released her, turning into her father's chest and gripping the front of his azure waistcoat. He stared at her, uncomprehending. Dexter looked uncomfortable, but not as much so as their parents.

"I'm doing much better with firearms, though," she insisted, trying to put them at ease somehow. "I'm the best of the transfers with a gun."

"A gun?" Her father was horrified. Her mother let out a wretched sound of grief.
"How can you want this?" she blubered.

"I've always wanted Dauntless," the girl insisted softly, repeating what they all knew, distraught over her mother's distress. "This is where I belong."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart," her father said. He reached out to touch her face once more. "I have to take your mother out of here. We love you."

They turned and walked away from her. They'd been right, she was shattering, her heart breaking apart in her chest.

"You have to understand how this looks to us," Dexter said gently, laying his hand on her shoulder. He gestured at the Pit in general. "This isn't who we are."

"Can't you just trust that I made the right choice?" she asked, feeling the heat and moisture in her own eyes. He nodded.

"I do. We do," he assured her. "But it's not easy to see you like this."

She swallowed and wiped at her eyes. "It's just for initiation. It's not like I'm going to get beat up everyday for the rest of my life."

"Are you sure?" The question was wholly genuine. He really was concerned that, somehow, this was what her life at Dauntless would always be.

"Not unless I want to," she answered with a disapproving frown. He sighed.

"This didn't go the way any of us intended." He sounded sorry for that and she let her expression soften.

"I'm still glad you came," she said, looking up at him. Her father was nearly six feet tall, her mother was a few inches taller than Honey; Dexter fell somewhere in between.

"Good. I am, too." He graced her with a small smile. A real one, that reached his eyes - the same brown, mottled with green as their father. "So, tell me more about your inexplicable firearms proficiency."

She couldn't hold back a grin. They talked about her training and the other transfers, Four, her hair, and how initiation was going for her. She kept the details of her losses to herself, not wanting to upset him all over again, and left out any mention of Eric, since her only interactions with the leader had been humiliating and upsetting. The time went by heartlessly fast and, too soon, Dexter had to leave.

He hugged her again, just as carefully as before. "We just want you to be happy here."

Honey nodded with a sniff of emotion. "I will be."

He took her hand and pressed something into it. "Don't forget about us. Okay?"

"Never," she insisted unshakably. He tugged one of her pigtails gently, a soft look of affection on his face, then turned to go. Honey looked down at what he'd given her. A long ribbon flowed over her fingers, as soft as her father's hands and bluer than her mother's eyes. Her heart ached at the simple, sweet gesture. As she left the Pit, Honey rubbed her thumb over the smooth, shiny strip of fabric, smiling to herself.
All of the Amity transfers had someone show up, because, of course they did. Only one of the Candors' came - it wasn't Joseph - and Beth and one of the Abnegation boys' mothers came. She saw Calhoun talking to his own mother with a broad, easy smile. The woman was barely taller than Honey and she had his same hair, while her skin was the color of coffee with cream.

As she passed the trash can at the base of one of the sets of stairs that led to and from the Pit, Honey let the ribbon slip from her fingers. She loved her brother and was happy to let him think she'd cherish his memento, but she wouldn't keep it. He wouldn't understand. She would cherish the sentiment behind it. She didn't need a scrap of fabric to remember him. And she would never wear blue again.

Honey was just coming out of the bathroom when she heard music. The gentle, confident strumming was a shocking contrast to the heavy, pounding rhythms that were ubiquitous at Dauntless. Calhoun was sitting on his cot, holding a lovely guitar made of light tan and deep mahogany colored wood. Beth and Hotdog sat on her bunk, watching him with tranquil expressions. His fingers moved unerringly over the strings, plucking them with mesmerizing skill.

She went to join them, standing beside her friend. "Where'd that come from?" Her question came out soft, as if the melody were a fragile thing she could frighten away.

"Ma brought it," he smiled up at her, not missing a note.

"You're really good," she smiled back. He shrugged, modest, and looked to the frets as he changed up his fingerings. The room was uncharacteristically quiet, the people who weren't actively listening to Calhoun play were keeping their voices down. Everyone seemed lighter, happier when he finished and they went to lunch. Even the transfers whose families hadn't come seemed unburdened.

It didn't last. When they returned to the barracks, Eric and Four were standing in the middle of the room, which looked like a tornado had swept through it. Blankets and pillows were on the floor. Clothes were strewn about. The two men were clearly displeased. No, Four was displeased. Eric was livid.

"Apparently, I didn't make myself clear this morning," he boomed, freezing them all in place. "Or some of you just chose to ignore me. It's come to my attention that at least two of you have accepted gifts from your family."

Honey's heart stopped beating.

"You know who you are, so don't make me come get you."

Calhoun and Honey stepped out of the group. But so did Hannah. The all stopped, looking at each other.

"You, here," Eric pointed at Hannah. She looked terrified as she went to stand before him. "We searched your bunk and your locker and came up empty. What was it and where did you hide it?"

She shook her head, her eyes wide with fear. "It was just blueberries," she squeaked out. "I ate them at lunch."

Eric's lips twisted into a cruel smirk. "Oh, just blueberries," he repeated with mocking pleasantness. "Were they good? Nice and ripe?"

Hannah's mouth opened and closed, but no sound came out.
"I hope they were," he went on. "Since our plain, boring Dauntless food isn't good enough for you, you can go without. No dinner, no breakfast, no lunch. Those berries should tide you over, though, right? Step back."

She practically ran away from him, pushing her way to the back of the group to escape his glare.

"You," Eric pointed at Honey next. One would think after being on the receiving end of his bad mood as many times as she had, the girl would be used to it. She wasn't. He half turned to Four, "What do they call her; Rat?"

"Badger," Four corrected.

"Whatever. A rodent's a rodent. Front and center," he ordered the last, pointing at the ground before him. Honey quickly complied. He reached back and Four handed him something blue. Her face burst into flames. "What the hell is this?"

It was a scrap of fabric, about the size of a playing card. The edges were ratty from where she had torn it lose. Most of it was stained maroon. She tried and failed to swallow the lump in her throat. "It's… from my Choosing Day clothes."

His brows went up, genuinely surprised. Still furious, but surprised.

"You were instructed to burn those. Why did you keep this?"

She wanted to crawl under her cot and die. At the very least, she wanted to look away, but she couldn't tear her eyes from his.

"I scraped my knee on the roof. It… It was like Dauntless taking first blood." God, it sounded so stupid when she said it out loud. She was utterly mortified. She should just go throw herself into the Chasm.

Eric stared at her, his silent glower crushing in on her. Then he dropped the bit of fabric onto the cot beside him. Before she could even start to comprehend that, he demanded, "Then what was the gift?"

"My brother gave me a ribbon," she admitted immediately.

"Where is it?"

"I threw it away. It's in the garbage by the stairs in the Pit."

He pursed his lips slightly, his jaw quirking out to the side a fraction. His eyes narrowed. "You sure about that? If you're lying to me, I will see you Factionless."

Factionless; the word itself was enough to terrify her. Honey shook her head in vehement denial. "I'm not lying!"

"Four," Eric motioned the other man over. "If she's hiding it, find it."

Her humiliation knew no bounds as Four made her remove her boots, socks, shirt, and pants. It wasn't as though the rest of the initiates hadn't seen her in her bra and shorts before, it was the circumstances that made it horrible. He shook out her clothes and checked her pockets and boots and found nothing. Her instructor barely glanced at her, but Eric never looked away. His gaze moved over Honey like an Erudite would observe a dissection in a lab, mercilessly critical, not missing a single flaw. She could only hope that seeing all her many bruises and scrapes, her baneful softness so
clearly displayed didn't make him think she was too weak and pathetic a fighter for Dauntless.

"She's clean," Four finally announced. Blessedly, they didn't seem inclined to push it further.

"You can step back, initiate," Eric told her, his tone still hard, but strangely satisfied. Did he enjoy making an example of her? She all but fell over herself rushing back to the other initiates, leaving her clothes behind. The group parted for her, so she didn't have to push her way through to the back. Beth was there with Hannah and wrapped her arms around Honey as the petite girl tried not to break into tears.

"You, the big one. Calhoun," Eric motioned him forward. Calhoun walked stiffly to stand before their leader. He had several inches height on Eric and Four and was broader than either man. He seemed to shift back and forth between hiding his own fear and suppressing his fury over Honey's strip search. "Are you sure you belong here?"

"Yes," Calhoun ground out, the muscles in his jaw visibly clenching.

"You don't want to go back to the farm? Pick blueberries? Sing All the Little Children?" The man mocked him with a sneer.

Calhoun kept his eyes straight ahead, his hands in tight fists at his sides. "I'm Dauntless," was all he said. Eric picked up the guitar and offered it to him.

"Prove it."

Without hesitation, the normally laid back, good natured boy grabbed the guitar by the neck and swung it hard to the ground. The wood splintered into kindling with a crash, bits of wood flying way as Calhoun destroyed the beautiful instrument his mother had given him. He snapped the neck in half and dropped it on the ground before returning to attention. His expression never changed through the whole violent episode. Eric nodded, his mouth turning down in a sarcastic grudging approval. He waved Calhoun disdainfully away, waiting for him to rejoin his peers before speaking again.

"I don't like to repeat myself," he announced. "I'm disappointed in all of you. Get this shit cleaned up and change out your clothes. You'll be running stairs for the rest of the day. You have fifteen minutes."

He left the room, but Four stayed behind. The initiates rushed to do as ordered, grabbing up their discarded clothes and bedding. Honey sniffed mightily as she pulled on her pants, hands shaking even worse than they had that morning. She saw the discarded bit of fabric, right where Eric had dropped it. She stared at it as she donned the rest of her clothing, trying to decide what to do with it. Her first instinct was to throw it away, wanting to destroy anything connected to the humiliation still burning through her veins. That impulse was waylaid by the reason she'd kept it in the first place. In the end, she shoved it into her pocket and quickly squared away her bunk, then stuffed it into her locker along with the rest of her possessions to be dealt with later.

She could not get over the astonishment that Eric had just let it go the way he had. He'd made her strip to find the ribbon, but the blue Erudite fabric right in front of him drew no further action. He hadn't demanded she burn it, as she was originally instructed; he hadn't even commented on her reasoning. And Eric was not one to hold his tongue. Maybe he understood; understood what the bloody scrap of cloth meant to her. Honey didn't think she really wanted to share that kind of understanding with Eric. If they thought alike, what kind of person did that make her?
Chapter End Notes

Ouch, right?
In the last days of stage one, training ramped up. They no longer went to the rooftop range for target practice. Instead, Four took them to a long room that was set up with a maze of wall panels and hip high barriers. Using solid plastic rifle stand-ins, they learned how to maneuver through the room. He showed them how to assess where threats may be hiding, how to search and clear an area both alone and as a team. Then they were given infrared guns to use against optic-detection targets that popped out at them at random as they ran their drills.

They added knife throwing to their hand to hand training, as well. That took Honey longer than she was happy with to get the hang of. She'd never even considered a knife to be a ranged weapon; it was for slicing and stabbing, not throwing. She had a gun for that kind of thing. It was brutally frustrating to watch her knives smack into the plywood framing that surrounded the blue - of course, it had to be blue - humanoid target. She could feel Eric's disdain from across the room, like an unpleasant ray of sunshine. She gritted her teeth, turning the knife over and over in her fingers before throwing it. It thumped against the blue man's shoulder, handle first, and fell to the floor. The next one she threw straight at the ground, just for the catharsis of hearing its metallic clatter against the concrete.

"It's not the knife's fault you can't hit the target," Eric pointed out. His biting superiority had been like a cheese grater on her nerves ever since Visiting Day. Just the thought of him made her spine tense. Being in his presence set her further and further on edge every time he walked into the gym.

"I know. That's why it's frustrating," she snapped back. Between her frustration over her poor attempts at the exercise and the stress of his constant brutal scrutiny, she had reached her limit.

"Try again."

She turned to face him, lifting her empty hands. "I don't have anymore."

He was unmoved. "Then go get one."

She started to walk back to the table where Four had laid out the sets of knives, but Eric stopped her with a hand on her stomach. She instantly hopped back to break the contact.

"No, the one you wasted." Honey looked at the knife, which had skidded to rest just in front of her pathetically unmarked target, then back to Eric. "What are you waiting for?"

She scoffed. "A lull."

"Why; are you afraid?" The question was heavy with unspoken meaning. She knew better than to push him, she knew better, but she was so very sick of his unforgiving domination.

"No," she sniped defiantly. "But I'm pretty sure I've bled enough today."

His lips curled upwards and she knew she'd screwed up. She'd given him the excuse he wanted. Stupid, stupid, stupid!

"You don't trust your fellow initiates?"

She licked her lips, insolence gone, already dreading whatever he was going to subject her to. "I trust them."
"Good," he nodded. Honey could feel the color draining from her face. Oh, God. "Now, get all your knives. And trust that no one will hit you," he said calmly, obviously enjoying himself. Honey looked passed him at the line of teens. Daisy's eye caught hers. The other girl nodded in stern reassurance. Honey turned and forced herself to walk towards the target, keeping her eyes on the knife closest to her. The others stopped, looking around in confusion, but quickly recognized a bad situation unfolding.

"Keep throwing!" Eric ordered the rest; glaring down the line when his command wasn't immediately followed. A knife thudded into the wall, a good six feet away from her. Then another and another. She relaxed a little. They were all throwing wide to make sure they didn't hit her. Okay. Maybe Eric had a point about trusting the others. This was going to be f-WHACK!

"Ah!" She stumbled forward as something hard thumped painfully against her shoulder blade. Oh, God, she'd been hit! Honey reached back to feel for blood in a panic.

"Stop!" Eric bellowed. "Who threw that? You!"

Of course, it had been Jacob who aimed right for her. Eric charged over, knocking the remaining knives from his hand and viciously shoving the massive initiate to the ground with an ease that startled the rest. Jacob scuttled backward as Eric advanced menacingly, shoulders back, hands in fists so tight his fingers were bloodless white.

"Four! Get this piece of shit out of my sight before I use him for target practice," he barked, but looked like he wasn't going to give the other man a chance to follow the order. Jacob scrambled to his feet, rushing for the door. "Run him till he pukes!"

He turned back to the class, then spun again, shouting at Four's back. "Then run him some more!"

Eric stalked onto the knife range, to where Beth and Hotdog were fussing over Honey. It was probably the first good luck she'd had since choosing Dauntless that Jacob was almost as bad with a knife as she was. He'd hit her handle-first, so she would receive a bad fright and another bruise, but nothing more from his throw. The two transfers backed away quickly when the furious leader approached. Eric grabbed Honey's arm to hold her still while he yanked the back of her shirt up to assure himself that she hadn't been injured. Then he dragged her off the range.

"Show's over!" he snarled at the rest. "Get back to work!"

Honey tried to pull her arm from his grasp, but he had a grip like a vice. He wasn't hurting her, but she also couldn't break free. He scowled down at her like the entire episode had been her fault. She glared right back up at him, unafraid despite how scary he'd been going after Jacob. Finally, his Adam's apple bobbed once and he let her go.

"I guess you were right. Get back to work," was all he said before walking away.

It was the last day of stage one, the last fight, so of course, Eric called Honey and Calhoun to the ring. She wondered what it was she had done to make the man so determined to see her bleed. Did he fixate on every First Jumper? Trying to break them down because he thought it was hubris that made them step up first? She couldn't fathom how she might have personally offended him that first day. She climbed into the ring. This was the first time she'd been paired off with Calhoun, likely because it was clearly a preposterously one-sided fight. The big Amity wasn't just strong and huge, he was fast and far more agile than he looked.

He shook his head, stepping up opposite her. Honey shrugged and offered him a little smirk before
falling into a defensive stance.

"I concede," Calhoun announced. The class broke out into murmuring.

"No, he doesn't!" Honey insisted immediately, alarmed and angry. She was touched that he would sacrifice points and damage his rank just to avoid hurting her, knowing he'd have to because she never conceded a match. She really was. But she was also angry that he thought she was so weak or fragile that he would disregard her choice that way.

"I already did," he said simply, lifting his hands.

"You fight who we tell you to fight," Four cut in. "Doesn't matter who it is."

Calhoun walked out of the ring, stopping beside Eric and Four. He pointed at Honey. "Look at her. I'm not doing it. Just take off the points."

"This isn't about points or ranking. Orders are not optional," Eric told him, firmly. "If you can't follow orders, you're no good to Dauntless. If you don't get back in there, you're out."

Calhoun's face dropped. He looked like someone had just walked over his grave. Factionless. He swallowed hard, then turned to step back up onto the mat. He squared off with Honey, looking absolutely miserable.

"Hey, at least now we'll be even for the train thing, right?" she asked, lightly, trying to reassure him.

"No, I still owe you for that," he contradicted her. They circled again. Since Cliff had broken her arm, she normally waited for people to come to her, countering their attacks and using their own momentum against them. The girl now understood that was the best, most effective style of fighting for her. But she was afraid Calhoun would never go on the offensive and get himself in deeper water with Eric; so, Honey darted forward and tried to take out his knee. He knocked her aside easily, but carefully and with as little force as possible. She tried again and was gently rebuffed again. It felt as though he was treating her like an angry toddler. That irked her a bit. She wasn't the only one.

"Stop screwing around," Eric commanded, with his trademarked bored, impatient irritation. Calhoun sighed and an instant later, he was on her. Apparently having decided to get this over with as quickly as possible, he grabbed her shoulder in one giant hand and brought his other fist fast and hard into her gut. It was like getting kicked by a horse.

Honey collapsed to the mat and choked on nothing, since he had knocked all the air out of her lungs. Lights flashed in front of her eyes, the Chasm seemed to rush through her ears. She threw up on the canvas, gagging before finally sucking in a gulp of air. She coughed and sputtered, then groaned in pain, but fought her way back up onto her hands and knees.

"Stay down!" Calhoun hissed, pleading fiercely. He should have known better. Honey sucked in a few more breaths, finally getting one of her feet planted. She started to push herself upright when he came at her again, determined to keep her from drawing this out. She turned quickly, swiping a hand through what had once been pancakes and sausage, flinging the vomit at his face in a wide arch.

Calhoun staggered back with a shout of shocked disgust. The rest of the initiates echoed this sentiment. A loud chorus of groans and gagging broke out around the ring. Honey popped up and rushed forward. She drop-kicked the side of her opponent's leg, bringing him to his knees. She spun back to her feet and fired a kick straight for Calhoun's face. He caught her ankle and thigh and swung her around, throwing her to the side. She bounced off the corner of the platform as she flew clean out of the ring. Honey landed hard on the concrete and her arm screamed in pain, but, stubborn
as ever and flush with adrenaline, she struggled back onto her feet.

As the girl hurried back into the ring, Four spoke up. "That's enough. You're done." He pointed at her. Beside him, Eric grunted in revulsion, shaking something off the sleeve of his jacket.

"Why?" Honey demanded. Four nodded towards her arm and she looked down to see that her soft cast had torn nearly in half. She must have caught it on the edge of the platform.

"Damn."

"Points for resourcefulness, though," Eric said, wiping his cheek. He actually sounded amused. Disgusted, but amused. Both he and Four; their lips were even minutely quirked upwards in what some ancient stoic cultures might have considered a smile.

"I can't believe you did that!" Calhoun gaped at her. He pulled off his shirt and used it to wipe his face, grunting harshly in revulsion. "Ugh, forget what I said. We are so even!"

Honey was jolted awake by the piercing trills of what had to be whistles. She rolled off her bunk to the floor, dropping onto one knee. Her eyes, wide in the dim light, sought out any threats hiding in the shadows as her sleep clouded brain tried to figure out what was going on.

"Wakey, wakey!" Eric's unmistakable voice called pleasantly. The lights flicked on and she saw him standing at the top of the landing. There were also more than a dozen young Dauntless gathered around him. They were the source of the sound, silver whistles glinting in several mouths. Four was there as well and all of them were wearing the same black uniforms.

"Everybody up," Four announced. "We're going on a little field trip."

A group of the Dauntless youths spread out amongst the cots, dropping black bundles on each of the bunks. "Get dressed. You have five minutes," Eric announced. Everyone scrambled to comply.

Fifteen minutes later, they were all outside, running along the tracks to catch the midnight train to somewhere. Hotdog had asked where they were going and was told to wait and see. No more information was given for more than half an hour as they waited in giddy anticipation, all crammed into the same car. The bulk of the group turned out to be the Dauntless-born initiates. It was the first time the two divisions of initiates had been allowed to intermingle as a whole and they were all shouting to be heard over the train and each other. Finally, Eric and Four called them to attention in the middle of the group.

"Okay, the game is Capture the Flag," Four announced. Wide grins spread over eager faces. He threw open a roll of fabric (one of several), which turned out to be holding half a dozen unfamiliar firearms.

Eric pulled one out and held it up in his leather, fingerless gloved hand, turning a circle so they could all see. "This is your weapon. You may notice it's not a standard rifle. We are obviously not using live rounds, but I still want trigger discipline at all times."

None of the initiates had ever seen him in something so close to a good mood before. He seemed to be in his element, uniformed, holding a gun. They started passing out guns and clips of ammo to everyone. Honey looked over the weapon, her bottom lip pouting outward. Some kind of electromagnet-propulsion dart gun. The ammo was finger-sized, metal cylinders, pronged on the business end. She didn't recognize them.

"Your ammunition is a neuro-stim dart," Eric went on, once all the weapons were taken. "Be
prepared, because it simulates the pain of an actual gunshot. It's not fun, but it only lasts a few minutes; so when you get hit, do not panic."

"We will be breaking into two teams, yellow and green. Eric and I are captains. We will guide you, but you will be the ones calling the shots."

"It's my turn to pick first; so, First Jumper, you're with me." To say she was surprised would be a hell of an understatement. Maybe he planned to shoot her himself right off and get rid of the dead weight.

"The little kid?" one of the Dauntless-born shouted, astonished. She didn't blame him for being shocked, but still. For Pete's sake, she was small, but they were all the same age.

"If I got first pick, I'd take the best shooter," another told his friend, but everyone could clearly hear him.

"She is the best shooter," Four informed them, offhandedly. Another shock. She knew she was the best marksman in the transfer group, but had never imagined she would be ahead of the Dauntless-born. No wonder her rank had improved so much. "I'll take Daisy."

The other transfers on her team were Hannah, Cliff, Jacob, the two Abnegation boys, and Joseph, who, once he'd gotten over his reaction to rifle report, had become a pretty decent shot. Once all the names were called, the teams gravitated towards opposite ends of the car; Eric's green team in front and Four's yellow in back.

A searing pain burned into the back of Honey's thigh out of nowhere and she shrieked, falling into the other initiates. They all jumped back, crowding away in surprise and confusion. She collapsed to the floor and grabbed her leg with a groan. There she found a metallic tube stuck into the meat of her upper thigh, just below her left buttock.

"Son of a bitch!" she growled, yanking out the dart.

"What the Hell is going on?" Eric demanded in a shout. He had been at the door of the train, so a crush of teenagers separated him from her and whoever had shot her. The same went for Four, who was at the opposite end of the car.

"Sorry, it slipped," a familiar voice said snidely. Jacob. Of course, it would be Jacob who thought it would be funny to shoot her in the ass. Honey looked up at him, burning with pain and malice. He just smirked down at her and shrugged with a sneeringly fake look of apology. She curled her lip, tilted her gun up, and fired right back at him, hitting his thigh in retaliation. He let out a shout that was pitched high enough to be pretty damn comical and dropped to the ground a few feet from her just as Eric and Four managed to shove their way into the space that had been cleared when she cried out.

"What happened?" Four asked sharply.

"He said he fired on accident," the Dauntless-born girl closest to him said. "His finger slipped."

"Yeah, my finger slipped, too," Honey snarled and shot three more darts into Jacob. He screamed, writhing on the ground. Eric bent down and hauled her to her feet, pulling her gun away. She could have sworn he was laughing.

"Dammit, stop that!" He ordered, giving her a shake. She must have imagined the laugh or maybe it had been her own, because he was all scowls as usual. "Can't even put you two in the same room without you trying to kill each other. Four, you take him. Fucking liability."
He dragged her back through the crowd, ostensibly to separate her from Jacob as much as possible. She grunted again, limping heavily on her injured leg.

"It'll fade in a couple minutes," Eric assured her, propping her against the wall. "We might not have that time before we have to jump off. It won't cost you points if you can't do it."

"No, I'll be fine," Honey assured him right back with a grimace that was half grin. "I'm already down an arm, what's one more limb?" He scoffed, shaking his head, clearly continuing to think she was insane. So that's what a gunshot felt like? It wasn't as bad as she would have guessed.

A pair of Dauntless-born - Hunter and Shay - quickly took a leadership role as the team trooped through the streets. The other Dauntless-born had easily deferred to them, indicating to Honey they were already established as reliably skilled in their class. The plan was for a small group to hide their flag, while the others scouted for higher ground in an attempt to find the yellow flag. The problem was that no one could agree on who would go and who would stay.

"The best shooters should come with me," Hunter insisted. His name was appropriate, since he would be leading the seeker squad. They were gathered in the deep shadow of a dilapidated building.

"And leave me a bunch of SPs to guard the flag?" Shay scoffed.

"What's an SP?" Hannah asked.

"Spray and pray," Shay smirked. "It means you have shitty aim."

"If we hide it well enough, it won't matter who we leave behind," Hunter declared.

"If we keep dicking around, none of this will matter. We're wasting our advantage," Eric cut in from the periphery of the crowd. They'd been second to leave the train, so they at least had some idea where the other team had gone.

"Fine," Shay huffed. "You take the best guns and go. I'll hide the flag in a mouse hole somewhere."

"Okay," Hunter grinned victoriously. "Dusty, Kyle, Vicca, Maxine, Tobin, and the kid are with me. Who else is good?"

Honey assumed "the kid" meant her. Joseph spoke up, "Honey should stay with the flag. She's slower than the rest of you, even without what happened on the train. She'll just hold the squad back."

Ah, Candor. Honey made a face at him, but didn't disagree. Her short legs were not made for covering long distances at speed. Plus, the back of her thigh, while no longer a source of tearing agony, tingled like she had been sitting cross-legged for too long.

"Good point," Hunter nodded. They quickly chose four more, leaving three Dauntless-born and three transfers to guard the flag. The seeker squad jogged off into the night and the flag squad regrouped. Eric stayed with them.

"Now what?" he prompted.

"We should do the same thing: find some high ground and get the lay of the land," Shay told him decisively. They quickly made their way to the roof. It was only a few stories up, because the buildings in the game zone were all small and squat, but did improve their eye line.
Eric lifted his arm, looking at his watch. "You've got eleven minutes to pick a location. You can't move the flag after that."

"We should pick something along the riverbed," Cliff advised. "To limit their access."

"Like a castle," one of the Dauntless-born agreed. Shay pointed at something and the rest strained to see what she saw. It was the remains of what appeared to have been a construction company. It was situated on the outcrop of land at the south base of Navy Pier, surrounded by trees, marsh mud on three sides. There was a small yard, there, with eight or so iron shipping containers, some old machinery, and plenty of cover. The girl had eyes like an owl. They moved out.

They made it to the site with two minutes to spare. Eric and Cliff boosted Hannah up into one of the containers that had been stacked on top of another. One of its doors lay on the ground nearby, the other rusted in place halfway shut. Holes had also been worn through the metal in spots, letting the bright luminescence of the flag shine through. It was about as good a spot as they could find and still not be breaking the rule that the flag had to be reasonably visible.

Shay and one of the Dauntless-born boys went to stand watch at the northeast and northwest corners of the property. The rest took up defensive positions, using the containers and stacks of what had once been bags of cement, but were now solid stone, as cover. If a team captured their opponents' flag, they would send up a flare to let the rest of the initiates know that the game was over. So they waited and watched the sky.

Sitting against the cold steel of a container, Honey chewed her lip and looked at her watch for the thousandth time. It was taking forever and she was wishing she'd fought to go with the seekers. At least she'd be doing something. She kept getting the sickening thought that this is what it would be like everyday if she didn't rank well. This, but worse. She shuddered; not for the first time. The intellectually demanding upbringing of Erudite coupled with the fierce will of Dauntless made the lack of stimulation nearly unbearable. And it had only been a little over an hour.

"Augh!" She heard the soft, guttural shout and jumped to her feet.

"Contact! Contact!" Eric shouted the alarm an instant before all hell broke loose. The yellow team had found them and launched a blitz offensive, but they'd lost the element of surprise. The first three of them to storm the yard were cut down, but the rest took cover. Darts whizzed through the air, plinking off concrete, clanging against the shipping container walls.

The green team had the better position, but the yellow team had superior numbers. With their lookouts neutralized, they were down to five, including Eric. Hannah shrieked, falling to the ground. Now four. They were going to lose. She saw a small form darting toward her and fired. The person - she was fairly sure it was Beth - ducked behind a stack of pallets. The rest of the yellow team was advancing. Her clip was empty and Honey swore, retreating back towards the flag, ducking behind the massive tread of the loading crane. Cliff skidded through the dirt beside her, huffing heavily.

"We're fucked," he gasped, but was clearly enjoying himself. Honey grunted in agreement. She reloaded her gun while Cliff emptied his, trying to halt the yellow advance. The things they had chosen for the cover advantage also blocked her view. She wished she'd taken position up with the flag, instead of Hannah.

It hit her all at once. The idea, not a dart. "I'm taking your belt!"

"What?" Cliff scoffed, gawping at her like she was insane as she grabbed at his waist. Maybe she was.
"Just give it to me!" He did as she said, but with obvious confusion. She quickly pulled the belt free of his pants, then reached into one of his pockets.

"I'm taking one of your clips!" She shoved it into her own pocket and started moving away. Using his shoulder as a step, she clambered up onto the crane's tread. "Cover me!"

"You're nuts!" he shouted, catching on. She probably was. If they were going to lose anyway, why not try something crazy? He gave suppressing fire, keeping the yellows nearest them behind their cover, giving her a few precious seconds. Like a squirrel, she scurried up the crane tower. It was more rust than metal and she coveted Eric's gloves as her palms were quickly shredded. Yeah, she was going to need a tetanus shot. Thankfully, the trellis was functionally a ladder and she only had to use her arms for balance and not holding her weight. When Cliff's clip ran out, she flattened herself against the metal, winding his belt around her waist and through the bars, cinching it tightly to keep herself from falling.

Looking down at the dark shapes moving around the yard, Honey grinned. Like fish in a barrel. She didn't know how many shots she could get off before they realized where she was, but she was going to make the most of it. Honey emptied her clip: seven shots, five hits. She'd nearly halved their force. The rest scrambled for better cover.

"Where the hell is it coming from?!"

She reloaded and emptied again. This time, she only managed to take out one. She thought it was Calhoun. He made a big target.

"Up on the tower!" she heard Daisy shout as she slapped in the clip she'd taken off Cliff. "They're on the crane!"

Honey fired towards her voice, but she'd ducked behind a stack of cement. A dart grazed her temple and two more pinged off the trellis. Then four struck home in her thigh, side, and shoulder. She might have screamed, but couldn't think passed the white flash of pain that flooded her, blinding her, making her deaf. She collapsed, arms and legs useless, but the belt held her in place.

Honey tried to focus on breathing. She wasn't really shot, it was just a chemical trick. Her body didn't believe her. She heard someone calling her name. She heard shouting. Was she falling? She snapped back into herself with a jolt and groaned. No, she wasn't falling. And her team was shouting, but not out of concern. They were letting out whoops of triumph. She wished she could celebrate, too, but she couldn't move just yet. The best she could do was grimace in an attempt to smile through her pain.

A green flare was shimmering in the night sky. They'd won.
Fear

Chapter Notes

You might have guessed, this is where we get into stage two and the simulations. This was interesting to write, since Honey isn't divergent and we don't really get a look at what it's like to just be a normal person in the fear sims. Hope I did it justice. And thanks for continuing to read!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"She's crazy," Shay was telling Hunter as they rode back to the Dauntless compound. "In the middle of a firefight, she goes right out into the open!"

"We won, didn't we?" He stated, clear that this was all that mattered. "If she hadn't, they'd have gotten our flag right before we got theirs."

"I'm not saying it's bad," Shay laughed. "Just crazy!"

Honey grinned up at Calhoun, whom she was sitting beside, leaning her tired frame against his arm. He just shook his head.

"We all already knew you were crazy."

"They never knew what hit 'em," Joseph declared happily.

"I knew what hit me," Honey responded with a rueful chuckle. "Four times." She still tingled all down her left side. It wasn't unpleasant, exactly.

"They sure don't tickle," Calhoun nodded. His eyes were now closed, head back against the wall of the car.

"Thank God, we get tomorrow off!" Daisy exclaimed. They would get three days to rest before starting stage two. Honey didn't even know what she would do with herself.

Hotdog suddenly perked. "We should all go get tattoos tomorrow. Obviously, not the same one. That would be weird. But we should all go."

"I'm in," Daisy grinned at him. The others followed suit. Honey just blew out an incredulous puff of air.

"I don't think I have enough unbruised skin left for a tattoo."

The next three days flew by far too quickly. Points were spent on tattoos and hair and piercings and Dauntless style clothing. The transfers were moved into the larger barracks that the Dauntless-born had been staying in, conmingling the entire initiate class at last.

Honey spent the majority of her time resting. Not an easy feat in the loud, blissful chaos of the compound, but she managed well enough. Her lighter bruises faded and she was able to get the stitches out of her eyebrow, but it would take more than three days R&R for her to really heal up.
Still, it was a nice reprieve.

"Today, we start phase two," Four announced when they'd all gathered in the gym. "Each of you will enter a simulation."

"Like the aptitude test?" Hotdog asked. Their instructor nodded.

"Except in this sim, you will be subjected to one of your greatest fears. It varies from person to person, so I can't really tell you what to expect. You'd know better than I would."

"What do you mean, 'subjected to'?"

"The simulation will try to break you. That is its purpose: to test your mental stamina. When presented with a fear, the sim will not end until you have either figured out a way to overcome your fear or calm your heart rate down to within a normal range." This was said by Lauren, the woman who was in charge of training the Dauntless-born.

"How are we supposed to do that?" Daisy inquired.

"You have to figure that out for yourself," Four shrugged.

Lauren went on. "You will do this twice a week to prepare for the final test. We call it your Fear Landscape and you will have to face not one, but all your fears."

A hum of anxious murmurs blossomed around the group. They were all, no doubt, thinking the same thing as Honey. What are my greatest fears? And how do I overcome them?

"On the days you are not in sim, your physical training will continue as before."

Four added, "There are no more ranked fights, but you will continue sparring and are strongly encouraged to work out your own matches. You know how hard you have to hit to cause damage by now. Work on your technique; work on your stamina. There are no more scores for matches, so there is no need to fight until you're debilitated."

Honey noticed Daisy and Joseph glance over at her and knew there were more heads turning her way as well. She couldn't help but feel that last part was aimed at her. The rest of them certainly did. She'd take it under advisement.

They were called by order of rank, so Honey didn't go to the simulation room until after lunch. She had barely eaten, her stomach tied in queasy knots. She'd spent the whole day trying hard not to think of her fears, as if by pretending they didn't exist, the serum wouldn't force her into them. She was sweating when Four led her into the small simulation room. It was brightly lit, sterile and stark. The hum of the electronics buzzed against her senses, the smell of astringent filled her nose. So very Erudite. It was calming, really; so familiar. She climbed into the big dentist chair and waited while Four drew her serum, picking at her soft cast nervously.

The needle stung her neck. Four gave her a bracing look, his jaw firm. "Be brave."

Honey nodded, sitting back and closing her eyes. And waited. And waited. "Is something wrong? Why isn't it work…" She trailed off, because when she opened her eyes again, Four was gone and she was alone in the room. Her brows furrowed. She hadn't heard the door. That was weird.

"Four?" she called, questioningly. Something must have gone wrong with the program in the computer. She slid out of the chair and went to look at the screen. Sure enough, the word Loading
was written across the screen, flashing. She frowned. "Great."

Should she leave the room and get Four? If he wasn't with her, he was probably putting another
initiate into their simulation or had already gone to get tech support. She'd just have to wait. The
computer suddenly started beeping and the word Error was added. Error Loading; even better. The
buzzing of the system intensified and she could hear the hard drive starting to whine. The beeping
shifted into a high electronic shriek and the screen pixilated wildly.

"Crap!" It was overloading somehow. She tried to find the plug, but couldn't. It must have a hard line
into the power grid. The hard drive was grinding, rumbling threateningly. The screen flashed red and

The screen exploded outward in a violent spout of water, knocking her down to the floor under the
deluge. She sputtered and scrambled away. It wasn't possible! The large computer tower sparked and
hissed as the water touched it. There was a loud pop and acrid smoke curled its way to the ceiling.
The sprinkler system came online, spraying even more water into the already flooding room. Oh,
God, it really was flooding!

Honey rushed to the door as fast as she could through the water that was already up to her knees.
She turned the handle, but couldn't pull the door open. She yanked hard, as hard as she could,
planting one foot against the wall, screaming with the effort. Then she was just screaming, slamming
her hands on the door.

"Help! Help me! Someone help me!" she cried. "Please!"

But no one came. The water was up to her hips. She sobbed, looking around frantically. There were
no windows, no other door. There was an air vent, so if the water got high enough, she could- Just as
she thought it, the vent burst open, still more water cascading out. Was the whole compound
flooding? What the hell was going on?

She didn't know. All she knew was that if she didn't get out of this room, she'd drown. She'd die.
She tried throwing her shoulder into the door, but even if she had been stronger, it was set in a steel
frame and opened inward. It opened inward. She slogged her way back to the counter where Four
had left the serum syringe and grabbed it. She was freezing, water up to her chest. Taking a deep
breath, she ducked under.

It was hard to get traction in the churning torrent, but she persisted. Honey used the stainless steel
handle of the syringe to work the bolt out of the hinge. She came up gasping, her toes barely able to
touch the floor now as she reached up to pry the second hinge bolt free. The instant it popped out of
place, the door burst inward, plunging her back down under the icy water. She kicked off the floor,
breaking the surface again. Her fingers scratched desperately for purchase at the ceiling tiles, sucking
air in a panic.

Once the room was full, the current would ease, she knew. The pressure would equalize. Facts from
science class were flashing through her mind. She kicked off her boots and wriggled out of her pants
to make swimming easier. There was barely an inch of space left. Her lips kissed the ceiling as she
gulped down one last deep breath. She dove down, her arms pumping hard to propel her out of the
doors. She couldn't see anything, just black on black. She quickly got disoriented. She knew she had
to swim up, but she wasn't even sure which way up was! But she had to find it, because that's where
the air was.

She put her hand in front of her mouth and blew out a flurry of bubbles. They bounced sideways
along her palm. She shifted, aiming herself that way, and pumped her arms and legs for all they were
worth. She broke the surface with a harsh, ragged gasp and almost fell off the chair.
"It's alright, just breathe," Four instructed gently, holding her shoulders back against the leather. Breathe, yes. That's all she wanted in the world. She looked around with wide, wild eyes. No water. Not even a drip.

She put a hand to her forehead, trying not to cry. "Five finger me."

"What?"

Honey didn't answer him, focusing instead on pulling herself together. "God, is it always like that?" He nodded, actually appearing sympathetic. "How does anyone make it through initiation?"

He gave her a spare, doleful sort of smile. "If it makes you feel better, you did well."

Honey sat up, running her fingers through her curls. "Yeah?"

He nodded. "The average for first-timers is twelve minutes; you managed to work your way out in ten."

"Really?" A little tendril of happiness curled its way through the receding panic.

"Really," he affirmed, his dark gaze approving. "Keep it up and you can forget about the grass."

A time of ten minutes and twenty-six seconds put her performance in the first sim in the top five of the class. All she had to do was keep it up, Four had said. She could do that. It had been the most terrifying thing she'd ever experienced, but she'd made it through. She could do it again. Honey was certain. Some of her fellow initiates were not so sure.

"You don't understand; they were everywhere!" Daisy insisted, her voice high and strained. "In my nose, in my mouth! I swallowed some!"

Her fear had been maggots. Swarms of them, mountains of them; crawling out of dead, rotting things to overtake her. Honey had never been afraid of any insects, but it sounded absolutely revolting.

"No, we get it," Hotdog told her, plaintively. "But we're trying to eat!"

Of course, the only thing anyone could talk about at dinner was their fear simulation and what had happened. Most of them were shaken, but fine for the most part. A few of them couldn't seem to let the experience go. Hannah refused to talk about hers. Hotdog, being formerly Candor, reminded her that it wouldn't exactly be a secret, anyway; not after her Fear Landscape. She'd pushed her tray away altogether after that and even Hotdog had known to let it drop.

Since they were no longer being scored on their fighting and, thus, the matches became far less bloody, Eric seemed to lose interest. They rarely saw him anymore, when he briefly observed the class and spoke to Four about their progress. He still handed out cutting remarks like candy, but there had been no more harrowing scenes like Visiting Day.

Honey's times in the simulation continued to improve steadily. A few seconds shaved off, then a minute, then two. As her durations decreased, her ranking increased. She went from the lower mid-range to the upper third of the class in a little over two weeks. The next week, she was in the top eight. Her worries about the fence were becoming a distant memory.

But not everything about stage two was so positive. The day of the second simulation, Hotdog had noticed Shay was absent from dinner. No one had thought much of it, until they returned to the barracks for the evening and found her bunk stripped bare. Whatever had happened her first time
through, she couldn't bring herself to repeat it. By refusing to re-enter the sim, she'd sealed her fate and been cut. She had been Dauntless-born and for days Honey couldn't stop thinking about her family. It was hard to lose your child to another faction, but it must be torture to lose them to what amounted to exile.

A black cloud hung over the class for the remainder of initiation. Shay was the first to break, but she would not be alone. Tobin, Max, and an Abnegation boy named Cyrus had all followed her in time. After every cut, the remaining initiates speculated on what had been so bad that they couldn't face it. The simulations were not public knowledge, only Four, Lauren, and the leaders of Dauntless had access. They carried on - trained, ate, laughed, lived - but always in the background was the spectre of Factionless. They searched for it in each other's eyes. They searched for it in themselves.

They were given two days to themselves before the final test. Those were exuberant hours, as they all seemed to be trying to fight off the pall that had haunted them during the final stage of training. Honey's arm was finally pronounced fully healed by the doctor and her cast removed for good. There was a massive climbing wall rising above the southern side of the Pit - the natural crevices and protrusions of the rock face augmented with artificial hand and foot holds hammered into the stone - and she had allowed herself to be egged into climbing it to "celebrate". With two sound arms and all the muscle and dexterity she had built over the passed weeks, she scuttled up the wall like a spider.

As Honey stood at the top, hands thrown up victoriously, her friends cheering from far below, she could see all of the Pit. The shops, the parlors, the people. She felt alive; she felt free; she felt Dauntless. In less than two days, she would enter her Fear Landscape and leave all her doubts behind her.

"I think I'm going to throw up," Hotdog huffed on the morning of the final test. He was lying on the floor, curled on his side, looking pale and drawn.

"Well, don't throw it at me, for God's sake," Calhoun warned, shrugging on his jacket. It was new, Honey noticed, and looked very much like the one Eric wore sometimes. Shiny bands around the arms and on the lapels broke up the black, lined with deepest maroon instead of purple. It suited him, made him look older, more professional.

Honey rolled her eyes. "Once," she scoffed. "You throw puke at someone one time and never hear the end of it."

They were all gathered in a large room near the Observation Theatre, where the final exam was held. There were chairs and tables set with food, since they were not supposed to leave until after they were called. Most of the food was as yet untouched. They all seemed to share the same knotted stomachs.

Beth sat by Hotdog's feet and patted his calf reassuringly. "We're all nervous. But you'll do fine." He looked at her like she was an angel. "You're way surer than I am. You don't even look worried."

Honey rolled her eyes. "Once," she scoffed. "You throw puke at someone one time and never hear the end of it."

They shrugged. Beth didn't need to worry, she had the fastest sim times in the class. Hot on her heels was Daisy and then Hunter, the Dauntless-born who'd captured the yellow flag. Cliff and one more Dauntless-born, Elijah, were also ahead of Honey. If she could at least hold that spot, she'd be able to choose just about any position available - save for the juiciest. There were only three spots open for Patrolling the Factionless and just one leadership placement. It seemed somehow fitting and ironic, should the rankings stay as they were, that Beth would be the one to become a Dauntless leader. The Abnegation ran the city government, after all, but she was so soft spoken and gentle for a Dauntless.
Four entered the room and called for Beth. They would be entering the simulation in the order they were ranked. The ebony haired girl rose, the slightest tremor in her hand the only tell that she was anxious. She smiled back at her friends and followed her instructor from the room.

No watches were permitted in the room, because they were not supposed to know exactly how long each other had taken to clear their Landscape until it was all over. The final rankings would be announced at the Membership banquet to be held after the final test was completed and the scores tabulated. The seconds drew out like hours, days. Honey wished she'd studied more vocabulary, so she knew an appropriate word to describe how slowly things were moving. The closest she had was "torturous".

Beth, then Daisy, Hunter, Cliff, and Elijah. Honey's bottom lip was sore and stripped from how she chewed it. Finally, Four appeared in the door. Her legs felt like rubber as she hurried to him, heart beating hard and fast against her ribs as she followed him to the Observation Theatre.

"Remember," Four told her softly. When he spoke quietly like that, his voice was a gravely rumble that she might have found very agreeable under normal circumstances. "You're a quick thinker and you're levelheaded under pressure. You'll do fine."

"Right." She nodded. Her own voice sounded like nothing more than wind against sand. Everyone said the same thing. You'll do fine. She wished it felt different coming from her instructor, the person who had led her through all the brutal trials of initiation. She wished Four's confidence in her had put her at ease; she had spent so much time and effort earning it. But her skin was still clammy and cold, her eyes too wide.

They entered a vast circular chamber, with a ceiling far above their heads. There was an upper observation area that ringed the room, where the Dauntless members could watch the proceedings, but only the leadership and instructors would be able to see the actual simulation on their monitors. In the center of it all, waited a shining chrome and black leather version of the chair in the practice sim room.

Honey immediately noticed flashes of blue scattered about the Theatre. Erudite technicians were there to monitor the equipment. Though she knew none of her family worked in simulation science, she couldn't stop herself from searching for a familiar face.

"Initiate Honey," Four announced her to the leaders. Heads bobbed in acknowledgement. Honey looked to Eric, seated amongst his peers, simply because he was the only other person she knew in the room. He appeared impatient, as always, but held her gaze for a heartbeat before giving a small nod. Four escorted her to the chair and she climbed up. She took a deep, steadying breath as he picked up the syringe.

"Be brave."

To conquer fear sim training, Honey had fallen back on her Erudite upbringing. She documented all her sim experiences. She made lists of everything she thought she might be afraid of. When everyone discussed their fears, she hung on every word, cataloguing all their obstacles, every variation, all the ways out. She studied and planned and quizzed herself mentally. If this happened, what would you do? Like running fire drills or knowing how to react in an earthquake. She hoped it made a difference as the needle stung her and the serum flooded her veins. Her eyes slipped shut.

Every time she entered a sim, it was like the first. Memories made in-sim didn't stick the way they do in reality, which had been the problem with the original Erudite armed combat simulation. What was a flaw there, was a desired effect here, making the fear fresh and intense every time a subject went
under, no matter how many times they had experienced it before.

When Honey opened her eyes, back inside the small simulation room, she briefly wondered if the Observation Theatre had been part of one of her own fears and she was still in training. Then the air vent exploded inward in a waterfall that ripped down several of the ceiling tiles. Honey leapt from the chair, grabbing up the syringe and racing to the door. She tried the handle - she always tried the handle - but the door wouldn't budge. She worked out the hinges in quick succession, but forgot to breathe before the door burst inward, knocking her under. She sucked water and clawed for the surface. She only managed to bob above the swirling maelstrom for an instant, gagging and pulling in air desperately, before being dragged under again. She hit the chair and grabbed hold, planting her feet and launching herself towards the door.

Grabbing the frame both to pull herself through and keep her bearings as she swam into the inky blackness beyond, Honey pushed herself as hard as she could upwards. Finally, a light shimmered above her, brighter and brighter, and she knew she would make it. Just as her fingers hit blessed air, something caught her ankle and jerked her downward.

Honey looked to see what it was and screamed, bubbles billowing around her face. A bloated, fish-eaten corpse held her boot in its puffy, rotten hand. She tried to shake lose desperately. Her lungs burned, her hands were splashing above her, the air so close, but still out of reach. The cadaver yanked her down again. Her vision started to spot over and she contemplated taking the water into her lungs so she could end it quickly, knowing with certainty whatever the thing holding her had in store would be far worse.

No, she had to fight. She kicked the hand, but only succeeded in stripping the putrid flesh from the bone, which held fast to her boot. Her boot. She jackknifed in the water, bending in half to reach her laces. Then, one quick shake and her boot slipped off, freeing her from the deadly grasp. She lunged upward, finally rising above the waterline and taking in air ravenously.

"Hey! Over here!" someone called. Spinning towards the voice, Honey saw she wasn't far from a small dock, a man stood there waving at her. "Swim this way!"

As she approached, he knelt and offered her a hand up, which she gratefully took. But before he could pull her up, she was yanked under again. The corpse had caught up with her and was pulling her down. The man on the dock grabbed for her other hand, using all his might to get her up again. "I've got you!" His grip was like iron biting into her wrists.

"You're hurting me!" the girl cried, but he didn't seem to hear her. Her arms and legs began to ache and burn. He tugged hard, but so did the corpse, and Honey screamed as her shoulder popped out of the socket. They would tear her apart. She lifted her free leg, planting her foot against the edge of the dock and pushed with all her strength, pulling the man off balance. He tumbled into the water, releasing her. The corpse must have found him a more attractive target, because it released her as well and she was able to clamor up onto the dock. Panting heavily, still coughing and gagging on the water she'd swallowed, Honey rushed along the planks toward solid ground.

She ran right into the center of the initiate barracks, soaking wet and stark naked. Wild peals of laughter erupted around her as people she thought were her friends pointed and sneered.

"She really is a little kid!"

"How stupid can you be?"

"Someone throw a blanket over her, she's making me nauseous!"
Honey tried to cover her body, aflame with embarrassment, tears in her eyes. The jeering faces moving in closer and closer. She opened her mouth to scream at them to stop, but only a startled squeal came out. They laughed louder. Of course, once someone in the barracks had realized Honey had a bad startle reflex, it had become a popular method for those that saw her as a threat or just didn't like her to cause her embarrassment. Until she'd punched Hunter in the throat for it, that is. She swung out a fist wildly and connected with a stomach. The nightmare version of Hotdog went down like a sack of potatoes. Well, then. She went on the offensive, attacking with all her might, punching and kicking, throwing elbows into all the laughing mouths.

She tackled Daisy, dropping her to the ground and pummeling her mercilessly. Four was shouting from far away for her to stop. Honey looked at him, to explain, but he was shock white and looking at her in abject horror.

"What did you do?!" he demanded. She looked down and saw Daisy's eyes had rolled back, her head lolling to the side. She wasn't breathing.

"Oh, God, no!" She scrambled off her friend, ice running through her veins. She felt for a pulse, but there was nothing.

"Get away from her!" Four shouted, but came no closer. Honey looked to him imploringly.

"Help me!" she cried, but he would not budge. She rose up on her knees, tilting Daisy's head back and opening her mouth. She sealed her lips against the unresponsive girl's and blew a breath into her, then another. Sitting back up, she put one hand over the back of the other, lacing their fingers together, and made a fist. She centered it on Daisy's sternum and started to give chest compressions, wailing that she was sorry, for her friend to come back. "Don't leave me!"

As she screamed it, her hands hit pavement hard. She was kneeling in the middle of the road, just on a normal street in the city. She looked around for Four, but he was gone. Everyone was gone. Not just everyone from her class or even Dauntless. The city was empty. Honey got to her feet, spinning in a circle, listening and looking for any hint of life. Not so much as a fly buzzed around her.

This was something she had not prepared for. Honey had never even imagined such a thing. Everyone had left her, the whole of the world as far as she was concerned had gone and abandoned her. What would she do now? Give up, sit and do nothing, and fade away - what else could she do? Try to find them? Try to find anybody. She'd have to venture outside the fence and face who knew what dangers lurking beyond their perimeter. She'd need a weapon. That meant first heading back to the Dauntless compound.

As if summoned by her decision, she heard the familiar squeal of steel wheels taking a corner. She raced for the tracks, heart soaring as the train came into view. She ran along side for a moment before grabbing a railing and pulling herself up.

A palm flattened against her chest, pushing her back hard, and Honey nearly fell off the racing locomotive. The car was full of Dauntless, several of whom she recognized, and they were all glaring at her. She tried to enter the car again and was shoved back again.

"What do you think you're doing?" a Dauntless demanded angrily.

"I'm going to Dauntless!" she shouted back. She struggled to get better footing, to push her way into the car proper, but so many hands were shoving at her. Her grip was slipping.

"You don't belong here!" She'd heard the man say it so many times. You don't belong here. You don't belong at Dauntless. If you're a coward, you don't belong at Dauntless.

"I'm not a coward!" she screamed at him. "And I won't quit!"

She dove to the side, grabbing the railing on the other side of the door. She lifted her foot and wedged it between the sliding door and the wall of the car, then pushed herself upward. Using the top of the railing as a step and holding the edge of the door for balance, she pushed up again, fighting her way up onto the roof of the train. If she couldn't ride in the train, she'd just ride on top; she would make it to Dauntless headquarters.

The wind whipped her hair wildly as she rose to her hands a knees. She could see the glass dome above the pit glinting in the sun. Home. She got to her feet, fighting to stay upright as the wind tore at her body and the train rocked beneath her. Now, she had to go now!

She leapt from the train. The roof of Dauntless headquarters crumbled away, leaving only a gaping hole. She fell down forever, screaming as the ground raced up to meet her. The last jump of the First Jumper. She flung her arms out wide, head back. She'd die Dauntless then.

Honey swore she could feel the firm, but yielding embrace of the net an instant before she came back to the real world in the leather chair. She lay there, looking up at the high ceiling, and noticed for the first time that it was painted with a beautiful bedlam of flames. She'd made it through the final test.

She was Dauntless.

Chapter End Notes

What do you think? How did you like the Landscape? Took me forever to work through that and get it to flow.
Chapter Summary

Let's all celebrate with Honey now that she's passed her Landscape and is officially part of Dauntless!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She was still shaking. It had been twenty minutes since she'd come out of the sim and Honey could not chase the tremor from her hands. Daisy and Beth had been waiting for her, pale, but exuberant. They'd all passed. Cliff looked more like Honey felt. He was sitting quietly in a corner of the antechamber attached to the Observation Theatre, where initiates were taken after the test to decompress. His eyes were closed and he seemed to be focused only on breathing, ignoring everyone around him.

"God, I need a drink!" Daisy half-shouted, bouncing on the balls of her feet. "Do you guys want to get a drink? We're allowed now. We can do whatever we want!"

Beth laughed at her excitement. "I think the last thing you need is to be even more out of your head."

Daisy scoffed, turning to the shorter girl. "What about you, Honey? Come on, don't you want a drink?"

Honey shook her head. "No." She paused, struck by an overwhelming urge. "I want to get a tattoo."

"This is a new one," the tattoo artist, a middle-aged man who said his name was Vex, commented, after she told him what she wanted. Flames on the back and sides of her recently healed forearm, reaching wildly towards her elbow. The design was probably typically Dauntless enough, but that she wanted them to be solid white was not. He looked her over as he got his tools set up. "I mean, I get it. It's just new."

"I'm new, too," she grinned at him, giddy and eager. He grinned back.

"Oh yeah? Just passed your Landscape and celebrating, huh?" She nodded. "Welcome to Dauntless, then."

"It's good to be here." He used a dampened cloth to wipe her arm, then shaved the skin where she wanted the tattoo. When he picked up a spray bottle filled with blue liquid, she asked, "Is that an antiseptic?"

Vex shook his head. "Analgesic."

"I don't want it."

He laughed at her without malice. "It stings like a bitch without it, sweetheart."

"I'll manage," Honey assured him. It was supposed to hurt. If she was going to brand her skin, she
wanted it to mean something. And important things, more often than not, hurt. She knew the tattoos could be taken off with the microlaser grid, but she didn't want hers to just be a fashion accessory to be changed out on a whim.

"Whatever you say, kid," he shrugged, putting the bottle back down. As he picked up the etching pad - which would sear the ink into her skin - a thought made him pause. "Hey, that's you, right? The kid. Should have known, with the hair."

"What?" she blinked. The only people who called her that were the Dauntless-born initiates.

"The one who took a dozen stim darts to win capture the flag," Vex told her. She laughed incredulously.

"It was only four!" Honey insisted. He shrugged.

"Still. Same principle, sacrifice yourself for your team." He applied the pad, making sure it adhered securely to her skin.

"I wouldn't call it a sacrifice. How do you even know about it?" That was the important thing.

"Having your team win is bragging rights," he informed her, with a knowing smile. Like, she would know better someday. "Some people heard Eric talking about how his team pulled out a last minute victory, because a crazy kid ran down the clock. And they told some people and so on."

Apparently, tattoo artists were as gossipy as hair stylists.

"What, so everyone knows?" She wasn't sure how she felt about that. She also wasn't sure how she felt about the idea that Eric was bragging about her, after berating and belittling her all through stage one.

"I don't know about everyone," Vex shrugged, then patted her shoulder. "Here we go."

He turned on the tattoo machine and a million fiery claws tore into Honey's skin. She gasped, eyes wide.

"I tried to warn you," he clicked his tongue against his teeth. She shook her head and tried to keep her breathing even.

"It's fine." She swallowed hard and let her eyes slip shut. She inhaled through her mouth and out her nose, lips parted slightly, as the little, burning points of agony crawled across her flesh. This was what she'd come looking for. She had earned this tattoo.

"Like I said," Vex chuckled to himself. "A crazy kid."

The banquet was held in a massive room that reminded Honey of the gym. It was rough and rugged, with columns and bare concrete floors and dirty windows. Instead of the normal track lighting, the room was illuminated by braziers of fire and the deep, dancing glow imparted a heady, primeval feeling. This was not just any night. The hall was only used for special occasions, mostly because of the turn out. Honey wondered if all of Dauntless was there tonight to bring them into the fold. She liked to think so.

Every initiate who had made it to this day had passed their exam; though some took markedly longer than others. The important thing was that no one gave up. Honey sat surrounded by the people she was now closest to in the word. Beth at her right, Calhoun at her left, and across from them Hotdog
and Daisy. Joseph and Cliff were nearby, also. She could not remember ever being happier, ever feeling more sure and safe and home. She couldn't even summon up disappointment that Jacob had managed to pull through training. Maybe tomorrow.

But not tonight.

There was no raised platform or balcony set aside for the leaders, here. They sat at ground level like everyone else. So when Eric - since he had overseen the training - stood to make his speech, he stepped right up onto the table so everyone could see him. It was somehow more fitting, more right. He stomped the heel of his boot on the metal several times with a resounding clang that echoed in the vast room. The crowd fell to silence, all eyes turning to the youngest of the leaders.

"Tonight we welcome a new crop of members," he announced loudly. "We have lost a few along the way, but the strong have survived. They have fought for this. They have bled for this. They have proven that they belong."

Honey hung on his every word. Eric never demanded less than your absolute attention and, just now, what he was saying struck a chord deep inside her.

"We are Dauntless. We believe in bravery. We believe in conquering your fears to free yourself, so that you, in turn, may free others from the bad that threatens our world. We believe in taking action, so that the good may thrive. We believe in ourselves. We believe in each other. We believe… in you."

"Stand up, new members, no longer initiates. You are Dauntless and we welcome you home."

Metal cups clanged on metal tables, a cacophony of shared faith rising like a wave as the former initiates rose to their feet. The room surged like the sea and suddenly people were swarming them, pressing in like the flood in her Landscape, but Honey was not afraid. The crowd lifted the new members into the air, cheering, clapping, clanging their mugs and banging their fists on the tables. It was Choosing Day all over again, falling forever into the safe embrace of the net, only it was all of Dauntless catching her now.

After a lifetime in the hands of her faction, Honey was finally set back on her feet. Her hand was shaken, her shoulders patted, her back slapped. She was welcomed a thousand times and thought the joy she felt would never deplete. She sank back into her seat and saw the same light shining from her friends' faces. Beth wiped tears from her cheeks. Hotdog let his stay, holding nothing back - but not Candor; Dauntless.

When the noise settled down once more, Eric went on. "Tomorrow, as their first act as full members, our new blood will choose their professions in the order of their final ranks."

Above his head, bolted to a thick, cement cross support, was the same kind of screen that hung in the gym and displayed their daily rankings. The screen blinked to life, empty at first.

"First, we will show the daily rankings over the course of initiation," he said. Names appeared on the screen and a large number one in the upper corner. There was her name in the first slot. First Jumper. Then, the large one became a two and she was in the last slot. As the days ticked by, Honey watched her name slowly make its way higher and higher in the rankings and felt a great swell of pride. She had done that. She had never given up, she had fought hard and trained hard, and this was her reward. The last day ticked by and the chart was blank again.

"Now, we will give the final rankings. The names will appear in the order the initiates took their final test, but that does not mean they will stay in the position they first occupy. They may be knocked from first to last by the higher score of the next person. Many of you observed the testing today, but
remember, a faster time does not necessarily mean a higher score.

Of course, it didn't. Faster times were the end all, be all of sim training, but in the Fear Landscape there was a formula applied to the results to make it even. Otherwise, a person with one fear, who took nine minutes to conquer it would score higher than a person with ten fears who only took one minute to defeat each obstacle. It wasn't the number of fears that a person had which made them brave (despite Four's famous nickname), it was how they faced those fears.

Beth's name appeared in the first slot. Then Daisy right beneath. Hunter appeared below Daisy, but dropped down a space when Cliff's name took his slot. At the bottom, Elijah appeared. Then, Honey saw her name. It was above Beth. She stopped breathing. Hannah, Joseph, Hotdog, Jacob, Calhoun, and name after name appeared on the board. They shifted, they warred for rank, but at the top of the list, her own name remained constant. And then there were no more names. Honey gaped at the screen.

The rest of the banquet passed in a blur of people she couldn't name congratulating her and everyone asking what job she was going to pick. She stuttered to all of them that she didn't know, she hadn't expected to rank so high. The strangers laughed, her friends nodded - they understood. Honey had been so focused on the profession she didn't want, she hadn't put much thought into the one she did. Perhaps that was one of her smaller fears; if she set her heart on a position, she would jinx herself into failing to achieve it. She only knew that she had to save herself from guarding the fence. Now, she was adrift in a sea of possibilities.

As the crowd thinned, Four came to congratulate each of them, shaking hands firmly. "You look a little worse for wear," he told her, actually sounding friendly for the first time since Choosing Day. She guessed he couldn't be so popular and be a complete hardass all the time, too.

"Just shocked, you know?" He nodded. Of course, he knew. He'd been first, too.

"You earned that rank," he assured her. "Don't let anyone influence you. Choose the position you want most."

"Thanks, Four," she said with a nod. He patted her shoulder and moved on to the next former pupil. Tonight was the last night they would stay in the initiate barracks. After they chose their professions tomorrow, they would be moved into their own, personal apartment. Some would be better off than others, but they would each have a place of their own. Honey didn't think she'd know what to do with all that peace and quiet, but she couldn't wait to find out.

To that end, she slipped away from the table, making her way out the door unnoticed. The gym was deserted, silent as the grave. Someone had set up a large board, with the available positions written on one side and blank spaces waiting to be filled on the other. Honey sat on the edge of the ring and stared at the board, looking over each offering and considering it slowly.

There were normal ones, like tattooing or keeping a shop, working in the kitchens or laundry, but she wasn't interested in those. There wasn't enough going on in them, not for her body or her mind. She needed something that would challenge her, push her. Something that gave her actions purpose and meaning. Patrolling the Factionless? Ambassador to the other factions? Ballistics? Medic?

"Why am I always finding you in here when you shouldn't be?"

Honey jumped with a squeal of surprise. God damn, Eric! He hadn't even come up behind her this time; she was facing the door!
"I know I was in your Fear Landscape, but I really shouldn't scare you that much," he sneered. But it was different than his normal sneer. She couldn't put a finger on how, though.

"Since initiation is over, I don't have to be afraid of failing it. So, you won't be in my Landscape anymore," she told him, the little adrenaline rush he'd given her making her tongue bolder than usual. That and the fact that she was no longer terrified he would cut her from the class.

"Unless I walk into a room when you aren't expecting it." He seemed very amused. Very amused for Eric, anyway. That was barely on the scale for a normal person.

"Being startled isn't the same as being afraid," she pointed out defiantly. He ignored her, turning to face the board, clasping his hands in front of him.

"Doing some hard thinking, I see." She didn't know how to respond to that, so said nothing. He gave her a sidelong glance, smirking meanly. "But, not about grass."

Her face instantly formed into a scowl. "No, not about grass," she bit out the words. He shrugged. "I suppose it's only right for me to admit that I was wrong." Honey could not have been more floored if he had told her he liked to wear pink dresses. Eric… admitting he was wrong. Not the same as admitting someone else was right, as he had at the knife range, but that he, himself, was wrong. Unheard of. "I underestimated you. You've blown by everyone's expectations of you."

She just sat and stared at him. He was actually giving her a sincere compliment. It was like she didn't know Eric at all.

"Though, to be frank, that bar wasn't set very high." Oh, there he was. "But congratulations are in order, anyway. So, congratulations."

"Thank you," she said, automatically. This conversation was leaving her so confused.

"I think you'll do well, whatever you choose," he went on, still not looking at her. "In the interest of continuing to be frank, I wouldn't recommend you choose Patrol. Not that you aren't capable in a fight or levelheaded-" He thought she was capable and levelheaded? "-but your size will always make you an attractive target. It won't be an easy life."

She lifted her chin. "You assume that concerns me? When has my life at Dauntless been easy so far?"

"I didn't assume anything," he shrugged. "I was stating a fact. You should know what you're getting into, if that's what you want. It's not easy to switch professions once you've chosen. There's only one that always has openings. You need to make the right choice the first time."

She agreed. She did need to make the right choice, the first time. But the right choice for her, regardless of what Eric said. She said nothing, though. He didn't speak again. The silence stretched on and on as they both stared at the list.

Finally, Honey stood, stretching her legs for a moment to work out the stiffness from sitting on the corner of the ring as she had been. "Goodnight, Eric," she said, then walked passed him, towards the door.

"Goodnight," he responded in kind. A moment later, as thought he'd forgotten, he called, "Oh, Honey, did you make up your mind? About what position you want?"

She froze mid-step. It was the first time he'd ever called her by name. She didn't know why that
mattered to her legs. Or her stomach. She turned to back towards him, setting her jaw in a look of steely determination. "Yes."

He nodded approvingly. "What job are you going after?"

"Yours."

She would take the leadership position, not because of Eric, but in spite of him. His response was something she never would have expected in a million years. Eric looked over at her… and he smiled.

Chapter End Notes

Uh oh. What lies ahead for our intrepid little heroine?

Fun fact, I wrote Eric's speech before actually reading the Dauntless manifesto. Then I laughed and laughed about how apropos it turned out to be.
Step into My Parlor

Chapter Summary

Honey begins her new life as a member of Dauntless. Things don't go as she expected.

Chapter Notes

I just want to take a moment here to thank everyone for the awesome comments. Feels so great to know people are enjoying all the effort I've put into this. THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Actual note, since it's not addressed in the books, I had to make up the government of Dauntless pretty much from whole cloth. Sorry if it's confusing at all, I tried to explain what I had in mind the best I could.

Six months passed in the blink of an eye. Life at Erudite had been an endless stream of study, documenting results, and compiling data; hypothesizing, testing, and retesting. It wasn't boring, but the time did not move quickly, as every second had to be observed, processed, and catalogued. In Dauntless, every sunrise brought an endless string of obstacles to overcome, new challenges, more to see and do than could fit in a day. Each task was completed eagerly for the simple pleasure of moving on to the next.

The leadership program was like nothing Honey had experienced before. There was no classroom and no instructor. She was thrust into the middle of the governance of Dauntless from the first day. There were five leaders of the faction: Max, Amelia, Kai, Belen, and, of course, Eric. The girl would shadow each of them, in turn, functioning as both a student and a de facto assistant, learning all she could. At the end of her apprenticeship, dependant upon her performance, she would become permanent staff and possibly, eventually, an ancillary or sub-leader. There were a dozen or so of these, forming a sort of advisory senate. The five heads of Dauntless made all the final decisions regarding the faction, but the subs participated in all open meetings and were able to put forth motions and proposals and debate their position on issues, attempting to sway the leaders' votes. Max, being the highest ranking official in the faction, had ultimate say, but rarely did he overrule the rest of the board. When a leader was lost, an ancillary was chosen to take their place.

Honey had started off shadowing Max; right into the fire. He had a hectic schedule of endless meetings with the department heads within Dauntless and the subs, who were continually bringing him updates on the daily goings on of the faction; additionally, he attended monthly sessions with the city council. He also did strength and combat training and hit the firing range twice a week. All the leaders had a different schedule to keep up their physical performance and their military skills. He was firm and sometimes Honey saw a coldness in him that put her on edge, but he seemed to be a fair and open-minded leader. She could see why he was the head of Dauntless.

After Max, had been Amelia, who was more focused on the supply aspects of running the faction.
How much food was required per week, how much detergent for the laundry, how much fabric for the clothiers, how many bandages for the medics, how much metal for the weapons manufacturing, etc. Her time with the woman had been an unceasing barrage of numbers and percentages and lists upon lists of goods. The girl had found herself counting everything - steps to the bathroom, peas on her plate, how many times she chewed each bite of food on each side of her mouth. Honey couldn't say she was sorry when that time had ended.

Then had come Kai, who was a brilliant psychopath. That was the only way Honey could describe the man. He had an unhealthy obsession with his guns - all one hundred and seventeen of them; which she had helped clean and maintain for an hour every day. He spent his days supervising the designing, manufacturing, testing, and distributing of every weapon and piece of tactical gear used in Dauntless. He was the one who had come up with the idea of the neuro-stim dart; before that, war games had been run with paintball guns. He felt people didn't try hard enough not to get hit in those days. "Bullet hurts a helluva lot worse than a paintball."

Belen had been Honey's next assignment. The woman was as cold as ice and had only spoken to the young novice directly five times in the month the girl was at her side - nine hours a day, six days a week. Belen was responsible for the policing of the city, which covered everything from patrolling the Factionless to guarding the fence to fire and rescue emergencies. She was calm and collected at every moment, organized to the point of suffocation. The girl had begun to miss Kai's gun collection by the third day.

Between the shadowing of each of the lower leaders, Honey had spent an additional week under Max. He seemed to be quite pleased with her progress, praising her quick grasp of the day to day tasks required of a leader and her enthusiasm towards tackling the problems that arose. He encouraged her to tell him her thoughts on the issues facing the faction and seemed to genuinely consider her ideas. Honey's confidence in her place within the leadership of Dauntless grew under his guidance. She felt she had found her purpose and a plan for her future, that she was finally standing on solid ground.

Her final mentor would be the one she both anticipated and dreaded the most: Eric. Eric's venue was intelligence and strategy. He spoke with the patrol captains, the fence guards, as well as both leaders and informants from other factions. He knew everything that happened in the city and everyone who was involved. Despite being the youngest leader, he seemed to be Max's right hand and had far more influence on the Dauntless head than any of the others. Max and Eric interacted so often that Honey had almost grown comfortable with being in a room with the younger leader for more than two minutes at a time. Almost. Having to be at his beck and call for a month put a knot in her stomach that would not go away the entire week she spent working with Max leading up to it.

It was nothing like the girl had expected. Yes, Eric was still condescending and superior, but he not longer behaved as though she were a predetermined failure he had to endure until she was flushed out of the faction. He didn't treat her like an equal - she wasn't sure he did that with anyone other than Max - but he expected her to keep up and get her work done and she was dangerously close to believing he actually trusted in her ability to do so. He also didn't make a single comment to the girl that wasn't strictly professional and instructional until almost the last week of her apprenticeship with him, when they were heading to a meeting at Erudite.

They had been picked up in one of the solar cars as a courtesy, since the temperature was below freezing that day. As they drove through the city, Honey's mind was a whirl of nostalgia, homesickness, and, most importantly, motion sickness. The vehicle moved so differently from the trains, bumping over the poorly maintained roadways, rocking her forward and back whenever the driver touched the break or the accelerator; her stomach swirled unpleasantly. To think riding in one
of these used to quickly soothe her to sleep as a child. Beside her, Eric was focused on his micro-
tablet, reading a report or emessage or some such thing. All the leaders and many of the ancillaries
had one, but Eric seemed particularly attached to his.

The girl grimaced silently and pressed her palm into her belly to try and calm the churning she felt
there. Ugh. Looking out the front windshield was better, she knew, than keeping her gaze on
something stationary inside the car, so she tilted her head, leaning slightly to the side for a better
view.

"It takes some getting used to," Eric suddenly spoke up beside her. Honey looked at him and found
she was leaning far closer to the man than she had been aware of. She sat back quickly.

"Sorry."

He shrugged, resting the tab on his thigh. "Most Dauntless go through it in these things," he told her.
"Chewing mint or ginger seems to help."

The girl nodded. "Thanks for the tip."

He turned back to his tab, not lifting it from his leg. With the size of the print on the small screen, he
must have eyes like Shay. Poor Shay. What was she doing right now? Did her family think of her
often or just try not to? Honey thought of her - and the others who were cut - more often than she
wished.

"Can't hurt your breath, either," he said, not looking up, his lips curved into a familiar smirk. She
scoffed, incredulous and insulted.

"There's nothing wrong with my breath," Honey insisted sharply. Was there? God, she hoped not.

"Jeanine usually insists our meetings be private," he informed her, not looking up. That didn't
surprise her. Jeanine was the sort of Erudite the other factions hated; she hoarded knowledge and
information like a dragon hoards gold and jewels. She also liked to lord her treasure over others, for
knowledge was power and people like Jeanine Matthews craved that. "Since you'll just be sitting in
the hall, waiting, you can go visit with your family, if you want."

Honey froze. If she wanted? Of course she wanted to see her family. It had been almost eight months
since visiting day! But, this was Eric offering it to her and the memory of how he had reacted the last
time she'd seen her family was still painfully clear in her mind. She felt herself flush, as though she
were stripped and sitting there bare before him again. He had to be baiting her, to see if she'd eagerly
accept the suggestion and then shred her for doing so.

"I'll just catch up on my reports," she told him. Honey had been aiming for calm detachment in her
tone, but what she hit was far off the mark - tight and a little throaty. He looked up at her, clearly
seeing through her pathetic attempt at nonchalance.

"I'm serious," he insisted. He was much better at controlling the timbre of his voice than she was.
Anyone who didn't know better would think he was being sincere. "It's obvious you're close or they
wouldn't have come to see you."

"I never said we weren't close." Her words came out much smoother this time. She didn't try to push
more, knowing he would know she was lying if she tried to feign ambivalence again.

"I'm not testing your loyalty," Eric declared firmly. "I am giving you a legitimate offer."

His eyes were blue here in the car, in the sunshine, and they looked right into her own, unwavering
and honest. There was only one thing the girl could say. "I don't believe you."

One side of his mouth quirked upwards, almost approving, almost rueful. "That's because you're not stupid."

How the hell was she supposed to respond to that? The novice was glad her mentor didn't think she was dumb. Beyond that? She had no idea what he was looking for. So, she just stared at him for a moment, then looked away.

"Honey." She could count on one hand the number of times he'd said her name; it always caused her stomach to twitch and she didn't know why. It wasn't a sensation she enjoyed, that was for sure. Though, this time, it could possibly be just the motion of the car. The girl turned her eyes back to his obediently, if reluctant. "If you don't do this, you may regret it."

She shrugged. She might regret it either way, considering her track record with the young leader. His jaw squared just a little, a sure sign his patience - what little of it there was to begin with - was growing thin.

"Go see your family. It's an order."

She blinked. BS offers and mind games were one thing, false orders were another. No one did that, not even Eric. He really was being sincere. Her heart started to pound. The butterflies erupting into her already upset stomach made her feel incredibly sick, but she tamped it down. Honey knew her eyes were too wide, her breathing hitched, her cheeks flushed with sudden excitement. Between the rush of joy and the roiling in her gut, she didn't dare try to speak, nodding quickly and eagerly instead. He seemed to understand her lack of words and his eyes narrowed, just the bottom lids, just a sliver. It was not a suspicious sort of shift, closer to pleased than anything else. She'd have missed it if she wasn't sitting so close.

The rest of the ride to her birth faction seemed to take forever. She might think little of Eric's stores of patience, but Honey really couldn't say hers were any more bountiful. By the time the tall, shining spire that was the central building of the Erudite compound came into view, she was practically bouncing in her seat. But, not actually bouncing, because Eric was still Eric and still sitting inches away from her.

They were escorted through the grounds and Honey was struck by a surreal feeling of detachment. She had grown up here, knew every snow-covered shrub, every crack in the walkway; this had once been her home. Yet it moved nothing inside her to be back. She did not feel a sense of rightness or calm. The girl hugged her thick leather coat, lined with soft, warm maroon fleece tighter around her, though it didn't help the chill that came from inside. Surrounded by busy little blue ants, she felt alien. She did not belong here. But then, she never really had. The sensation only seemed to fully solidify that her place was buried deep within the stone corridors of her chosen faction.

Into the tower they went, up and up, watching the ground drop away beneath them from inside the crystal glass elevator that overlooked the courtyard. Higher up even than the members' entrance at Dauntless. The view of the city was breathtaking from this height. The noon sun sparkled off every bit of glass, ice, and snow, glittering as if the skyline were littered with diamonds, so bright it hurt her eyes. Cold and beautiful.

The lift reached the top floor and stopped, opening unto a stark lobby of sorts. There was a set of electronic, frosted glass doors - probably bullet proof with steel reinforcements waiting to slide in place - and in front of these a receptionist's desk, complete with receptionist. There were no windows, only harsh tract lighting, and no decorations to speak of. On either side of the lift doors sat
a row of identical plastic chairs in a straight line. The room was also just a shade too warm, even for this time of year. Jeanine didn't seem to place much value on the comfort of those coming to see her. That wasn't a surprise.

The woman seated at the desk, dressed smartly in a blue blouse with an oversized collar and large black buttons and hair pulled back into a bun so tight and perfect it looked molded from plastic, looked up as the two Dauntless stepped out of the elevator. She pressed a button on her intercom and spoke, but not to them.

"Ms. Matthews, your twelve-fifteen appointment is here," she said, not even deigning to use the young leader's name. Honey tried not to be annoyed by that, because she knew that her annoyance was its intent. Not her annoyance, specifically, but it was meant to insult and subtly belittle whoever had been granted audience with the great and powerful Oz. The whole room was designed with this in mind, she realized. It was very effective.

Eric had no reaction; he'd been through this countless times before. He didn't move further into the room and didn't sit, only remained just in front of the lift doors, thumbing boredly through his tab. Honey took her cue from him, standing by his side, aloof and passively insolent. Had he not been there, however, she would have been sitting in one of those chairs, impatiently tapping her foot and playing right into their hands.

A moment later the glass doors slid open with a hiss and Gwen Stevenson, Jeanine's assistant, appeared between them. Honey knew her by name and by sight, a beautiful, ambitious, and wickedly intelligent woman. She was wearing a deep sapphire sweater dress that clung softly to every curve, with a thick, black belt accentuating her slim waist and matching heels that made her legs seem impossibly long and willowy. Her shoes clicked sharply on the tile floor as she approached the young leader, striding gracefully across the room. Her hair was blacker than the Chasm at midnight and her eyes bluer than her dress. She gave the man a catty, yet inviting smirk, lips so red they might as well be bleeding.

"Hello, Eric," Gwen said, pleasantly enough in her sugar sweet voice, but with a hint of admonishment. "Jeanine has been waiting for you."

Honey bit the inside of her cheek. The appointment had been for twelve-fifteen and they'd stepped off the elevator at two minutes to noon. Eric said nothing, but motioned the woman ahead of him politely enough. Seeing her move with such fluid ease, Honey couldn't help but feel rough and unrefined, plodding along after her mentor in her thick soled boots; short and too round, even with all the muscle she had acquired. It was worse even than when she walked beside Daisy. She consoled herself with the knowledge that she could lay Gwen out flat in less time than it took to reach the doorway.

After the stark and uncomfortable lobby, Jeanine's office appeared impossibly grand and impressive. Her large, white desk stood opposite the door on the far side of the room and the entire wall behind it was floor to ceiling windows looking out over the city. There were fichus trees standing here and there around the vast open space that must take up the entirety of the floor, a large bank of computers, and a small laboratory area encased in two sets of Plexiglas walls. There was a long, glass conference table and beside it a massive presentation screen.

The woman, herself, was standing behind the desk, her hands planted wide on the spotless surface as she peered down at an open file. Her sandy-blonde hair was shorter than the last time Honey had seen it at the Choosing Day ceremony, arching in a pleasant crescent moon shape into a point just aside her jaw. She was wearing a navy pants suit, tailored perfectly to leave her looking professional and just slightly masculine, but in a way that didn't detract from her natural femininity. It was just as
well Honey had left for Dauntless; she could never look so polished and perfect. Jeanine looked up and smiled amicably.

"I didn't know you were bringing a guest," she said.

"I didn't." Eric stopped, still several feet away from the desk, tucking his tablet away. He looked down at Honey and he seemed somehow less readable than ever. "You can go."

The girl nodded, but before she could even turn, Jeanine's voice stopped her. "I know you, don't I?" Honey looked at her former faction leader and shrugged. "I guess?" Well, that was articulate.

"Oh, you're the one who transferred at the last Choosing Day," the woman intoned. She sounded as though she was only just realizing as much, but it was clear, to Honey anyway, that she had known exactly who the little, white-haired Dauntless was all along. She's probably known before they'd gotten on the elevator that Eric had brought her, too. "David and Brienne's daugh-

"Honey," the girl said, quickly cutting the leader off.

"I'm sorry?" Jeanine squinted slightly, head tilting just a degree to the side in confusion.

"Her name is Honey," Eric announced, mildly impatient. "And she was just leaving."

"Oh?" the woman's lips pursed in incredulous amusement. "I suppose it's not uncommon for transfers to change their names. How are you adjusting to your new life at Dauntless, Honey?"

The way Jeanine said her name felt like a slight dig, but the novice ignored it; she was used to people making fun of her for it by now.

"I'm doing well," the girl told her former leader, determined to keep her answers short and simple. She didn't like having this woman's interest.

"If you're here with Eric, you must be in the leadership program," Jeanine declared, sounding subtly prideful, as if it were her accomplishment and not Honey's. "Unsurprising for an Erudite transfer."

Of course. If Honey failed, she wasn't good enough for Erudite anyway; if she succeeded, it was because she was Erudite-bred. This was the insufferable arrogance that fueled the hate of the other factions. She said nothing and the woman turned to the young leader at her side.

"Isn't sitting in on meetings a part of the shadowing process?"

Eric shrugged. "I assumed you wouldn't want her hanging around. I gave her permission to see her family."

"Oh, she can see them afterwards."

"They'll be working," Honey interjected. There was something off about this; Jeanine pushing for her to stay, Eric insisting she leave. He looked his usual bored, impatient self, but there was something tense about him that Honey could only sense on a visceral level. If he didn't want her there, she didn't want to be there; whatever the reason, it couldn't be good. The last thing she wanted to do was start pissing Eric off again. She didn't want to sit in on a meeting with Matthews anyway; she wanted to see her family.

Jeanine waved a dismissive hand at her words. "Nonsense, I'm sure they can get away. In fact," she turned to her assistant. "Gwen, why don't you set up a lunch? This shouldn't take more than an
"She has her own research to do, also," Eric stated in a noticeably sharper tone. A lie. Now he was lying just to get her out of the room? Honey was dead certain she didn't want to be there anymore. "What research would that be?" He opened his mouth to answer, but Jeanine turned her attention to the girl before he could speak. "Honey?"

"Dogs," she replied without hesitation, but not too quickly. "I'm putting together a proposal to form a canine search and rescue team."

The best lies have a string of truth running through the middle to hold them together. She had been thinking about canine assisted search and rescue ever since her shadowing of Belen, when three Dauntless and a dozen Factionless were killed in a building collapse. It had taken a week to dig out all the bodies. Beside her, Eric showed no sign that this was the first he was hearing of it.

"That is fascinating. You'll have to let me look over your proposal when it's completed," the woman said, bright and approving.

Honey nodded, appreciative of the offer. "It would be amazing to get your input." Flattery will get you everywhere.

"Gwen, set up that lunch, anyway," Jeanine ordered lightly. "And take Honey to Kent in Behaviorism. I'm sure he'll be able to help her with whatever she needs. Eric, I've just been reviewing the figures you sent over and it's clear we need to discuss them."

Summarily dismissed, Honey followed Gwen from the room, wondering if she would ever know what the hell that was all about. Though, she wasn't sure she really wanted to.

Chapter End Notes

Uh oh. What the hell has Honey walked into?
Tense Moments

Chapter Summary

Honey finally gets to see her family again. Things never seem to go the way she expects.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kent in Behaviorism was about the same age as Eric, early twenties, average height, thin as a rail, and very sweet. Jeanine hadn't been wrong, he was definitely the one to go to. He eagerly pulled up studies on canine/human teamwork, massive amounts of information on the breeds of dog most suitable for the task, hours of dog training instructional videos, and everything else Honey could ever have needed. He loaded all the data onto a notebook sized scroll tablet, an eighth inch sheet of flexible fiber optic plastic with a microprocessor imbedded and paper thin solar battery blacking out the back, something the girl hadn't seen since she'd transferred.

It was almost like being back in school, researching a project with a partner. The main difference being Honey was actually very invested in the idea of the canine unit; she thought it could do some real good for the faction and the city as a whole. Also, Kent kept giving her little speculative glances when he thought she couldn't see and no boy had ever done that when partnered with her. The back of her neck pricked with a feeling of awareness that wasn't particularly unpleasant and she found herself looking at the floor far more than usual. She wondered if it was because she was Dauntless, that he seemed to be interested; her faction was second only to Amity in their freewheeling attitude when it came to sex.

Not that Honey had any first hand knowledge. Her attitude and actions during initiation had been very off-putting for the boys in her class. She didn't blame them; who wanted to kiss the girl who threw her own vomit around? Sometimes, she wished she hadn't done that. She'd lost the fight anyway, she could have just stayed down after that first punch and not even Eric could have called her a quitter. Honey would have known, though. And she wouldn't have gotten to see the look on the young leader's face as he shook her puke off his favorite jacket. The memory never failed to bring a smile to her own face.

When the time came for her to leave, Kent had repeatedly insisted she come back and see him if she needed anything else for her proposal. His hand was just as soft as her father's when he shook hers in parting. The girl's palm had remained warm until she'd stepped back out into the frigid December air.

She bolted across the courtyard, in no danger of slipping on ice, because the Erudite walkways were heated from beneath to prevent such a thing. The doors to the cafeteria building barely had time to slide open for her before she zoomed through them, her boots squealing on the tiles as she took the corner that led to the stairs. Honey's patience had been stripped to nothing and she couldn't tolerate standing still to wait for the elevator again. The luncheon area was on the second floor, so she might actually have shaved off time anyway.

Bursting into the room, she paused, scanning each table for familiar faces. She saw some, people she had known growing up on the compound, though none of them seemed to recognize her. What Honey did not see was her parents or brothers. She hurried to the host podium, breathlessly asking
the man there about the reservation Gwen had set. He checked his screen and nodded, then gestured for the panting Dauntless to follow him. Through the dining area and into one of the private rooms she had never been in.

Dexter stood from his seat the moment she stepped inside, smiling widely as he strode over to hug her. Everyone was there, her mother, Brienne, and father, David, Dexter, and her other brothers Randall and Julian. The younger men were close behind the oldest, the three of them all talking at once, tugging teasingly at her white pigtails and black coat, asking if she'd joined Candor by mistake. After a few moments, her father called them back to sit down. The exuberant girl had all but scampered around the table to her parents, throwing her arms around her father's neck and hugging him tightly. He patted her back and told her how good it was to see her again, how much they had missed her. Her mother was crying, but not in the same way as the last time Honey had seen her. She kissed Brienne's cheek and gave the woman's shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

Removing her coat and setting it on the chair between her father and Dexter as she sat, Honey wondered how she must look to these people, her family. Strong and confident? Strange and different? She had kept her hair short, as it had been in initiation, but it seemed to have grown even more curly and wild. Under her coat, she wore only a snug black tshirt with a thin, maroon stripe running from the far right edge of like-colored collar to the hem, exposing her shock white flames fully. Her pants were loose, because it was too cold for anything tighter, and had more pockets than she knew what to do with; very militant when coupled with her thick boots. She wore no jewelry aside from her simple, black wristwatch, nor makeup, having no time to deal with such things on her busy schedule, nor the inclination to make some. Perhaps most importantly, where her parents and Dexter were concerned, she didn't have a single bruise, cut, laceration, or abrasion and her cast was long gone.

Her father decreed that they should all decide what to order before barraging the prodigal daughter with questions about her new life. When the door to the room opened, they were all expecting it to be the waiter he'd summoned with the call button. Instead, Jeanine Matthews entered the room. Eric was behind her and he didn't look thrilled about it.

"Jeanine!" David said, startled, but pleased as could be. "I didn't know you would be joining us."

"We've finished our meeting and I thought, 'well, Eric can't just leave his apprentice behind; we may as well have lunch'," she explained pleasantly. "You don't mind?"

"Of course, not," Brienne gushed, motioning for the to sit. "Please, sit."

There were two empty seats at the large, round table. *What a fortunate coincidence.* Jeanine sat beside Randall, Eric took the seat beside Honey's mother. That was an interesting contrast, the girl couldn't help but notice. The big, muscular, dominating Dauntless man with his severe hair-style and black on black attire, his tattoos on full display with his coat off, piercings glinting in the comfortable lighting of the room and the pretty, petite Erudite woman in her modest, but high quality, powder blue cashmere sweater and pearls, her auburn hair set in soft waves back from her face, perfectly applied makeup, and manicured nails.

"We were just about to order," her father said.

"Then we're just in time," Jeanine smiled, picking up the menu before her. Her family and Jeanine all ordered soup and salad or the day's special - lake trout brought in from the Amity climate-controlled fishery that morning. Eric ordered a steak - rare. That sounded fantastic to Honey, so she did the same, medium, with blue cheese crumbles and caramelized onions and garlic bread and glazed carrots and two glasses of lemon fizzy soda, please and thank you.
"Hungry?" Julian snorted at her. It wasn't as lighthearted as Hotdog might have said it, but it wasn't really insulting either. He had always been the most critical of her siblings; he took after their mother. Honey had learned to ignore him long ago.

"No, I'm just gonna sit and smell it," she smirked at him.

"Did Jeanine say that-" her mother began, but broke off with a quick glance at the young novice before continuing. "Honey was your apprentice, Mr…?"

The emphasis on her name, sounding so foreign in Brienne's mouth, made it clear she was ill at ease addressing the girl as such. Dexter had laughed when Honey told him her choice of moniker at Visiting Day, telling her it was ridiculous. Her injured scowl had been enough to get him to drop the subject. Honey was surprised and touched that her mother accepted and honored her decision.

"Dauntless leaders only use their first names," Jeanine informed the other woman. It was true. There was really no need for the distinction of surnames; whenever someone mentioned Max or Eric or Amelia, everyone automatically knew who they were talking about. Honey didn't even know what Eric's last name was.

"Oh." It was obvious her mother had no idea what to say to that, so her father stepped in. They had always made a great team - very supportive of one another.

"And you're mentoring our daughter?" David repeated the original question.

"Yes, Honey is the newest addition to our leadership program," Eric confirmed, polite but not friendly. Her parents puffed up with pride.

"Well done," Dexter complimented, patting her on the shoulder.

"Eric tells me she's doing very well there," Jeanine chimed in. The way Eric's shirt tightened across his clavicle at the statement told Honey otherwise. "She's even currently working on her own proposal."

Brienne fairly beamed. "Oh, that's wonderful!"

"What kind of proposal?" Julian inquired. Honey briefly explained what it was she was supposedly working towards. Her family seemed quite interested, but only politely. None of them worked in animals; her parents were both involved in agri-science/botany, Dexter and Julian were in the technology sector, and Randall was a microbiologist.

"Is it usual for an apprentice to do this kind of thing independently?" Honey's father asked Eric as the food arrived.

"It does seem a bit advanced," Jeanine added, subtly concerned, as if worried Honey was biting off more than she could chew. The girl thought she was trying to draw Eric out into giving away that the whole thing had been an excuse to get her out of the meeting.

"It's a bit outside the norm," the Dauntless leader admitted with a shrug, cutting into his steak with an air of ambivalence to the issue. "But Honey is probably the fastest rising novice Dauntless has had in a number of years. Apart from myself, of course."

He smirked as he said the last, popping the bite of meat into his mouth. Her family looked at him, then her, practically dumbstruck at his casual statement. Honey flushed brightly under their shock and his offhanded praise. Not that she believed he actually thought that of her; he was just trying to cover his lie, but it was still nice of him to say, anyway.
"Really?" Julian piped. "This one?"

Dexter elbowed him with a frown. The novice just dug into her own meal. She was hungry, after all.

"Apparently, Honey was the highest ranked initiate in her class," Jeanine said, again with that tone of pride she didn't deserve to use.

David suddenly frowned, turning to the Dauntless leader. "Were you aware of our daughter's injuries during initiation? Is that normal for your faction?"

Eric looked up from his plate, then, leveling a steady gaze on her father. Hostility crackled in the air between the two men. Honey suddenly laughed loudly around her mouthful of steak and carrots, drawing the attention of everyone at the table. She leaned back, one hand covering her mouth, the other resting on her stomach.

"Oh, gosh," she chortled brightly. "It's like school all over again! This isn't a parent-teacher conference, you guys. Just let the man eat!"

She reached for one of her glasses and took a drink, still giggling like it was the funniest thing ever. "Besides, I want to hear about you. How's the aphid repellent tomato plant coming? How's Corrine?"

Her outburst of laughter and subject change worked like a charm and the girl's family began to fill her in on all the goings on in their lives since she'd left the faction. Eric was able to eat his meal in peace.

Honey was swiping up the last of the blue cheese crumbles and steak juice off her plate with the last bite of garlic bread when she caught sight of her mother watching. Brienne's mouth was pinched, her brows slightly drawn down. Her grandmother, Sonja, her father's mother, had been a short, squat, round little woman with ample padding and maybe a chin to spare. Once Honey's backside had started to round out and her shoulders to soften, Brienne had become very concerned her daughter would take after the woman. Honey was very glad her mom had no idea what she ate - or how much - on a daily basis at Dauntless. The girl almost sighed, feeling a stab of guilt as she popped the sharp, savory morsel into her mouth.

Eric downed the last of his water and wiped his mouth on his napkin, dropping the cloth onto his equally empty plate. "Jeanine, thank you for lunch," the younger leader said affably, pushing his chair back. Honey quickly wiped her own mouth and stood when he did. "We need to be getting back."

Her family rose, moving to hug Honey goodbye. Both her parents softly told her how proud they were and it was only the presence of Jeanine and Eric that kept her eyes dry. As for Jeanine, the woman offered her a hand to shake.

"Don't forget to bring me that proposal when you've finished. I'll look it over for you," she offered, her smile as warm as her hand was cold. Honey plastered a grateful smile onto her own face.

"Thank you so much. That's so great of you."

Eric shrugged his coat on and nodded to Jeanine once, then walked away, expecting his apprentice to follow. She gave a final wave to her family and trailed her mentor out of the room. They walked in silence, eschewing the elevator again, Eric setting a brisk pace as they left the building and crossed the courtyard, clearly wanting to be off the grounds as quickly as possible. The girl's much shorter
legs had to work twice as hard just to keep up with him.

They rode in silence as well, Honey knowing better than to bring up anything that had transpired over the last two hours while the driver was there to overhear. Her mind was a whirr of questions and confusion and it was driving her nuts having to sit quietly and wait. She reached into her coat and pulled out the scroll tablet, intending to read up a bit as distraction. It wouldn't help with motion sickness, but it was better than going stir crazy.

"Where did you get that?" Eric asked sharply. She looked over at him, surprised by the scowl on his face.

"Kent in Behaviorism. It's got reams of info about working dogs," she explained.

He held out a hand, motioning with his fingers curtly. "Give it."

Frowning in confusion, Honey handed the device over. He started tapping at it with quick, irritable movements. "What are you doing?"

"Disabling the uplink to the Erudite servers," he told her, his words clipped. A moment later, her mentor looked at her with a hard expression she couldn't fathom having done anything to deserve, pointing at the scroll. "Don't reconnect this. If you need to look something up, use your regular system in the office."

"Wh-" Honey bit off the word, closing her mouth with a soft clack as her teeth came together. Then she nodded. "Of course."

He gave her back the tablet and she had to force her eyes away from his face. What the hell was going on with him? She tried to focus on the paper displayed on the screen in her lap, an in depth review of the most popular methods for training search dogs, but couldn't. Her thoughts kept pulling back to the two faction leaders' strange behavior and how it seemed to revolve around her. Was it just because she was an Erudite transfer and it made him uncomfortable for her to be back there? It wasn't possible that such a thing would happen, but Eric might think that, she supposed.

After the longest car ride of her life, they pulled to a stop at a non-member entrance to the Dauntless compound. Eric got out of the vehicle, slamming the door behind him, and strode off without so much as a word. Honey had to run to catch up.

"Wait!" He stopped, turning back to her with a heavy, thoughtful frown on his features. The girl knew all at once that she wouldn't get a single answer out of him about what had happened or why. "Okay, I don't expect you to tell me what the hell that all was, but I need to know - is this something I need to worry about? Whatever it is, is it going to come up again?"

Eric's jaw worked for a moment, brows furrowing further as he mulled it over. "I think I'll be able to take care of it without involving you," he finally said. That answer wasn't quite as reassuring as she'd hoped it would be, but definitely the best she would get from the man.

"I really do want to write up this proposal," Honey told him. "What do I do about Jeanine's offer? Should I just blow her off?"

He nodded a few times in silence, before saying, "Yeah. Just blow her off. And don't reconnect that
tablet. Got it?"

The girl nodded. "Got it." That seemed to satisfy him. He started to go, but she quickly said, "Eric, thank you, also. For what you said to my parents. About me being a rising star and all that. It really meant a lot after how they saw me on Visiting Day."

A look of recognition drifted across the man's face, probably remembering how many injuries she'd had back then. He just gave his head a little shake, frowning at her. Maybe he didn't understand just how badly they'd reacted, how much it really meant - to them and to her.

"You didn't have to say it and it really put them at ease," Honey insisted, so sincere. Eric frowned at her as if he'd given her an instruction she just wasn't getting.

"I said it because it's true." His words floored her and she could only stare at him as he went on, terse and irritated, like he shouldn't have to explain something so obvious. "I'm not going to lie about how great you're doing just to make your parents feel better about something they don't understand. I really couldn't care less. You'd have been better off if they hadn't come at all. Then you'd have been focused on training, instead of worrying you couldn't hack it because mommy got all weepy about your booboos. You know you had the most balls out of any of the initiates. You were never going to end up on the fence, no matter what anyone said. You can't still think you're struggling."

The girl gaped at him. He'd said it all like she was a complete moron for not already knowing and maybe she was, because Eric was the one saying it, which meant it was all true. Or at least, he believed it was all true, which was as good as. His lip curled in disgust and he turned her toward the building roughly with a hand on the back of her shoulder.

"Just get inside before you freeze," he ordered, giving her a little shove to get moving. Once they were indoors, the leader brushed passed her, walking away as he spoke. "Do me a favor; make sure you pull your head outta your ass before you show up at the office tomorrow. And get started on that proposal. I want to see your notes first thing in the morning."

Honey just stared at his back as he left, seriously entertaining the theory that the whole day had been some kind of fucked up fever dream.

Chapter End Notes

It's been a weird day for ol' Honey Badger.
A Good Night

Chapter Summary

Honey finds an outlet

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You look like you had a hard day," Hotdog said as Honey slumped heavily onto the couch beside him.

"You have no idea," she shook her head. "I'm not late, am I?"

"No, they haven't gone on yet," Daisy assured her, perched on the back of the couch, her feet on the cushion between them.

The last six months hadn't so much changed her friends as allowed them to blossom. Daisy and Cliff had taken Patrol positions and were doing very well. Daisy was already a squad leader, with the name of said squad tattooed on her bicep - Mudhumpers. Her Mohawk was now two toned, pink in the center where it spiked up, flanked by two purple braids against her scalp on either side. Hotdog was working in the security office with Four. After spending just about every day with their former instructor, he said Four was a pretty decent guy and he almost wasn't scared of him anymore. Beth had surprised everyone by going into weapon design and had turned out to be quite inspired. Honey could only hope she didn't end up like Kai; for Hotdog's sake at least, since the two had been a couple for four months now and were madly in love, with matching fiery half-heart tattoos on their hands that formed a whole when side by side. It was sickeningly wonderful. Calhoun had gone into inter-faction relations where his affable personality and easy-going nature, coupled with that firm core of his made him a quick favorite.

He was the reason the three of them were sitting on an old couch down in the concert district of the Dauntless compound. Presently, the young man in question took to the stage with his three cohorts and the sound system crackled to life. He lifted his guitar - a gorgeous ebony and chrome instrument that his friends had pooled points to gift him after initiation was over, to replace the one Eric had forced him to destroy - and started to play. It wasn't the lazy, lilting melody he'd strummed on Visiting Day, but something a bit harder, more up-tempo. He really had a gift.

The band be played in was called Lockbox. Currently, anyway; the month before it had been Copper Core and the week before that, Inferion. The "leader" was a man named Chris, a drummer, who was head to toe tattoos of naked women and trolls. Honey wasn't a fan. None of them were, really, but he could play and it worked for Calhoun, so that's what mattered. The singer, Jasper, was a tiny, angry little man. He wasn't a bad guy, just always scowling and swearing about something or other that had set him off. He had a voice like a raspy angel and, just now, was singing about how sad his mother would be if he fell into the Chasm. Honey could never remember the bassist's name.

Halfway through the second song, Hotdog went to get something to drink and came back ten minutes later with a cardboard tray full of bar food - cheese, potato skins, pickles, and sausage balls - all breaded and deep fried. As Honey helped herself to a sausage ball, she remembered the look on her mother's face that afternoon and her stomach clenched around the bite she'd just swallowed.
"Hey, Hots n’ Tots?"

"Yeah?" He shoved several pickles into his mouth.

"Candor question," she prefaced, meaning she needed some blunt truth. He nodded, understanding. She paused, trying to decide how to phrase it. "Do I eat too much?"

Hotdog snorted, smirking at her. "Depends on whose points are paying for it," he quipped. Of course, points were only used for foods outside the mess hall and aside the basic rations each member was entitled to - like the cholesterol special he had set between them. Daisy reached down and picked up a cheese finger.

"Are you asking if you're fat? Why would you think you're fat?" she demanded, incredulous. *Because I'm sitting next to you, gorgeous.*

Honey shrugged. "My grandma was chubby."

"So what? My grandpa was a man, that doesn't mean I'm gonna sprout a dick," the other girl said with a laugh. Anyone who didn't know better would think Daisy had been raised Dauntless. Hotdog choked on his pickles.

"It's genetics. I'm short like she was. I had her hair, before I bleached it out. So, it's more than likely I've inherited other traits from her," Honey explained. The squad leader looked at her with a speculative frown.

"Your nose is showing," she said, displeasedly. "What happened today? Did one of those crows say something to you?"

"Crows" was what some of the faction called the ancillaries, since they were waiting for one of the leaders to drop, like a carrion eater waits for a corpse.

"I might be one of those crows someday," the smaller girl pointed out. Daisy rolled her eyes at that notion.

"You should be eating them for breakfast. Now, tell me what happened."

"Nothing. Nothing in the office, anyway. Eric had a meeting at Erudite-"

"That explains this," Daisy tapped her on the nose.

"I had lunch with my family," Honey finished. Hotdog gave her a perplexed look of disapproval.

"And they told you that you're fat?"

She shook her head, but her slightly pouted, frowny lower lip didn't agree. "No. I mean… No, they didn't say I was fat." Julian had commented on her meal, but that was just Julian being Julian. And her mother hadn't *said* anything at all.

"Good, because that's bullcrap," he declared, uncharacteristically sharp. She got the feeling he might not have believed her. "Your family needs to have their eyes checked."

"Or their mouths sewn shut," Daisy agreed. Honey's cheeks and throat felt warm and her boots were suddenly incredibly interesting.

"They didn't say anything," she insisted. "And, even if they had, it's not like I'm not all soft, still. Even after eight months."
"What's wrong with that?" he demanded, high and incredulous.

"No one wants to fuck a board, you know," Daisy declared, giving her shoulder a little shove.

Honey covered her face with her hands and groaned. She couldn't believe the things that came out of Daisy's mouth sometimes.

"What are you talking about? People lay boards all the time." This was said by Beth, who sauntered up to the couch and plopped herself into her boyfriend's lap. She looped an arm around his neck and kissed him lazily for a moment. She'd come a long way from Abnegation.

"Honey's stupid family told her she's fat," Daisy told the dark-haired girl.

"They did not. And they aren't stupid," Honey frowned at her. She really wished she'd kept her mouth shut. "Just forget it."

"What happened, now?" Beth asked, brows high with surprise over the conversation she'd walked into.

"She saw her family today and is suddenly concerned she eats too much, but no one said anything, of course," Daisy condensed the issue, heavy with sarcasm. Beth frowned, eyes wide and soft.

"Can we just drop it, please?" the smaller girl implored, growing irritated in her embarrassment. "Thank you for saying I'm not fat. Now let's forget I said anything."

"Don't thank us, because you're not fat," Daisy gave her a scowl. "So, yes we can stop talking about it now, because there's nothing else to say."

They lapsed into tense, awkward silence. Honey tried to feel comforted by their anger over the subject, but just felt stupid for bringing it up. And she couldn't miss the fact that this was the second time today someone had gotten mad at her while telling her something complimentary about herself. By the time Lockbox's set ended, she was roiling inside with the sum of all the stress, confusion, and embarrassment of the day. She was just going to tell Calhoun they sounded great and then go take a hot shower and go to bed.

The group weaved through the crowd, some of which was sitting on other couches, some standing around, chatting, waiting for the next band to go on stage. Calhoun and the others were together by the bar. Jasper was bouncing on the balls of his feet and gesturing at the much taller man agitatedly. Chris was already tipping back a line of shots. The bassist had vanished. He did that a lot, which was probably why Honey never remembered his name.

"Come on!" the little bundle of fury was saying in a pushy tone. "Daisy can come, too. I bet she'd clean house!"

"I'm not a damn janitor," the girl in question informed him, insulted. Jasper turned his piercing green eyes on her.

"Daisy Baby, give your worse half his balls back," he ordered with a sneering smirk. "Then maybe he won't be such a pussy."

Calhoun just rolled his eyes, looping his arm around Daisy's shoulders as she slid up to his side. Honey wasn't sure when the two had become a pair; there didn't seem to be a demarcation between when they were separate and when they were together. She wondered if they had been an item back in Amity and had just not shown it during initiation.
"He's not going to the Mats with you and neither are his balls," Daisy declared with a smirk of her own, drawing a chuckle from the big Amity - big Dauntless now. Jasper made a sound of absolute disgust.

"The what?" Honey asked, curiosity waylaying her quick exit plan.

"The kid doesn't know about the Mats? What the fuck, you two?" The little spitfire seemed more incensed than usual. Even after six months, Honey had not shaken the nickname. Not everyone used it, but enough that everyone seemed to know it. She'd managed to break five feet since her last physical, topping out two inches above. Maybe if she tacked on a few more, people would let the unflattering moniker go.

Beth's frown had returned, but without the soft eyes. "She doesn't need to go down there."

"Where don't I need to go? What are you guys talking about?"

Jasper's intensely bright gaze turned to her. They were almost on eye-level. "It's fighting for points," he told her, all teeth. "Every night, down in the old training quarter. It's still early enough to sign up. You in?"

Honey felt a little electric tickle run up her spine. She hadn't fought since initiation, only light sparring or working with a dummy whenever her current mentor did their upkeep routine. Her fingers twitched at her sides. Jasper seemed to see something in her face, though she couldn't imagine what. Whatever it was, it made his grin widen and his eyes practically shine.

The old training quarter, where initiation used to take place before the massive gym she'd trained in, was located off the eastern tunnels of the Dauntless compound. It was chilly and dark and it was easy to see why they'd changed venues. A crowd was milling about, the air thick with eager excitement to get started. Jasper pulled her through the throng to a wall where a large chalkboard had been bolted in place. A bald man with more piercings than she could count was standing before it, writing down names in the slots as people came up to sign in.

"Hey, Dante, write me up, man," Jasper shouted to be heard over the din of voices behind them. Baldy jotted his name into a space beside another. Most of the names on the board appeared to be male, but not all of them. The pairings didn't seem to take gender into consideration. "Put the kid up there, too!"

Dante turned, brows furrowed in confusion until he saw her, then they jumped up to where his hairline should have been.

"You serious, sugar?" he asked her, seeming genuinely concerned.

"What are the rules?" Honey inquired.

"It's about take-downs. The ref calls the slams. Drop your huck three times to win," he explained.

"Anything barred?" At that question, Jasper's manic, wild grin returned.

"Nothin' in the eyes. No intentional bone break. No sleeper or submission holds."

"Yeah, put me up," she told him, feeling her own lips bowing upward. Baldy eyed her for a moment, then shrugged. He turned and scribbled the word "kid" on the board. Great.
"Four and… Kid? Who the fuck is Kid?" Honey stepped forward, into the empty space where a mat lay on the ground. There were three of them set up, so three fights could happen at once; which was necessary, since there were so many people itching to brawl. "Oh. That kid."

Four stepped into the space as well, frowning at her as though he was disappointed. That didn't do much to brighten her day. He walked onto the mat and Honey met him there as people started shouting predictions and bets at each other.

"What are you doing here?" her former instructor asked.

"I needed to blow off some steam," she told him with a half shrug. "Been having a bad day."

He smirked, somberly amused, and gave his head a little shake. "It's not about to get any better."

"Can't get any worse," she replied cavalierly. The ref squared them off and let them loose.

It took three minutes. Honey lay on the mat, her left arm, both hips, and right knee screaming with familiar pain. Four stood over her, looking almost apologetic, not even sweating. She laughed up at him.

"Wanna go again?"

When Eric strode into his office the next morning his customary twenty minutes early, Honey was already perched on the corner of his big, black steel desk, thumbing her way through the scroll.

"Get off my desk," he ordered, moving to sit behind it. She hopped up.

"Morning to you, too," she said with a smirk. He looked up at her with his usual stoic impatience, but Honey still blinked in surprise. His left eye was ringed in deep eggplant and there was a gash along the ridge of his cheekbone held closed with two small butterflies.

"Notes?" he demanded simply, holding out a hand. She pointed to the file resting directly in front of him. He picked it up and leaned back in his chair, opening the folder. As he looked over her work, he asked, "Why are you so chipper?"

He'd asked it snidely, but the man wasn't wrong. She was visibly bright-eyed and bushy-tailed that morning, despite the aches in her body after her less than stellar premier in the Mats. Or maybe because of them.

"Had a good night, that's all," she shrugged. He let out a silent little scoff, but said nothing on the matter.

"So, talk to me about this dog unit of yours," he ordered, still not looking up. Honey explained the concept to him: using the dogs to find people based on scent. There were other applications as well. They could be implemented on Patrol, dealing with violent Factionless. Additionally, there was the potential for finding contraband or even hidden corpses, should the need arise. Eric seemed to begrudgingly accept that the concept could be useful.
"I want daily updates on your progress," he told her. "I don't want to catch you slacking off."

"When have I ever slacked off?" Honey demanded incredulously, taking her notes back. His brows went up, lips curling just slightly at her tone and the fact that she'd snapped back at him at all.

"You did have a good night," the leader declared, amused and intrigued. He'd never looked at her that way before. His slate eyes were speculative and she couldn't begin to guess what he was thinking, but it made heat creep up her back and over her shoulders.

"I'm gonna get to work," she said in a rush, then spun to hurry out of his office and get away from that almost teasing little smile he had given her.

Chapter End Notes

Oh dear, what happened to Eric's pretty face?
That night found Honey again making her way down the eastern corridors, her heart fluttering in anticipation. She'd been fine all day, getting her work done, ignoring Eric the best she could, but now that she was on her way, the girl was giddy. Her arm and knee still ached, but it wasn't much. Four hadn't been trying to hurt her. He hadn't specifically kept from hurting her either, which she appreciated, but his goal had not been to cause her real harm. The man easily could have; effortlessly. He was amazing in a fight. Her stomach dipped a little, thinking about it.

Honey pushed that thought away. Then called it back with a little internal huff. Four wasn't her instructor anymore. She was a full member of Dauntless and on her way to one day becoming an ancillary leader - if what Eric said was to be believed and she thought it must be. There was no reason at all not to entertain thoughts of the tall security officer. With his dark eyes and full lips and long limbs. Obviously, he wouldn't be interested in her, but that didn't mean she couldn't think about it. Maybe it was best not to think about it right now, however, since she was stepping into the old training quarter.

Honey wove her way over to the chalkboard and Dante. He seemed surprised to see her, but before he could comment on it, she told him to put her name in a slot.

His eyes narrowed and he chewed the inside of his cheek. "You sure you want to do that, dolly?"

She just stared at him, silent and stony, until he sighed and turned, writing her up on the board. Kid. Dammit.

"That's not my name," she told him with an expression of consternation. He shrugged.

"They'll know it's you." Honey rolled her eyes and wandered off, finding an empty spot to stretch and warm up in. She wasn't the only one doing so, either. The room was just as busy now as it had been the previous night. People were shouting, laying bets, collecting winnings. Every payout was skimmed by the house and the winner got a piece of that take. Not a bad racket.

"Ellis and the kid!" The name that wasn't hers was called and Honey pushed her way towards it. It was the same ref as the night before and he gave her a kind of down-turned smile that conveyed grudging respect. "Hey, she came back."
"She's so screwed!" someone in the crowd shouted, laughing. They placed a bet against her immediately afterward. The girl saw why when her opponent stepped forward. He wasn't overly tall, nor built, but there was a caginess about him that warned her to be wary. Lean and wiry, with stringy black hair, and a familiar set of rings through his left brow - each two silver dragons coming together, biting into a black bead between them. So, the bassist's name was Ellis. Maybe she'd remember now.

The ref had them square off, then gave them the signal to start. Ellis came barreling at her straight out of the gate. That was his second mistake. Thinking she'd be an easy win was his first. Honey froze, eyes wide as if terrified, then easily stepped aside just as he reached her. She kicked his foot out from under him, bringing her elbow down on the back of his neck as he stumbled, taking him to his knees. She hopped up, planting her own knee on the same spot her elbow had struck, her weight dropping him to the mat completely.

"Point; the kid!" the ref shouted. The crowd around her mat lost it, shouting at her and each other in an incomprehensible roar. Honey quickly jumped back off Ellis, giving him plenty of room to get up. When he did, he turned a seething look of fury on her.

"Well, no one wants to get taken down by a little kid. Again, the ref sent them off. This time, Ellis circled, planning his attack carefully.

He darted forward, even faster than before and when Honey went to sidestep him, he anticipated it and moved with her. His fist connected with her cheek, followed immediately by his elbow. She reeled back, but he kept coming. This time, he struck her stomach, then her kidney - which made a jolt of color flash before her eyes. He kicked the back of her knees and when she went down, brought his own knee into her face, while grabbing for her hair. He yanked hard, throwing her facedown into the mat and leaving her there.

"Point; Ellis!"

Ffucking! Honey panted out a groan, rolling onto her back. That hurt. A lot. It was initiation all over again. Well, she knew what to do, then. She wiped the blood from under her nose and rolled again, drawing her knees under her. Pushing up, the girl stood and looked at her opponent. He was smirking, sneering superiority, a cruel gleam of pleasure in his eyes. Oh, buddy; you're so out of the band. She wiped her nose again and looked at the blood, then smirked right back at him. She lifted her stained hand towards the man and motioned him to her with a cocky flick of her bloody fingers.

Ellis's sneer turned into a snarl as he came at her once more. This time, instead of trying to avoid him, Honey launched herself at the man. He swung for her and she hooked her arm through his, using her momentum to swing around like a do-see-do. Their combined inertia spun them both and his feet got caught up in each other. The fighters tumbled to the mat - him flat on his back, her hard onto her side next to him. Honey rolled back, towards Ellis, and brought her elbow down. His nose crunched wetly under the blow.

With a gurgling shout of pain, he rolled to his stomach, hands moving to cup his broken nose. She followed, rising only enough to drop herself onto his back, flattening him against the mat.

"Point: kid!" Honey rolled off him, but as she went to stand, he released a furious bellow and grabbed her ankle. He yanked her towards him, hooking his arm around the joint as he rose to his knees. His hand shifted to grip the side of her foot and Honey instantly knew what was about to happen.

"Hey!" the ref shouted in alarm. The girl pushed up with her hands, towards her attacker, and kicked with her free leg as hard as she could. Her heel slammed into his mouth, crushing lips against teeth and splitting them open. The shock from the blow loosened his grip enough that when the ref grabbed his arm, she was able to slip her boot free and scramble away.
The ref hauled Ellis to his feet, giving him an angry shake. "None of that hole shit here, fucker!"

The bassist shoved the other man into the crowd, who held fast, caught up in the display of violence before them. Blood was running freely from his nose and mouth, his eyes were black with rage. He charged her with vicious intent. Honey dropped to the mat, scissoring his legs between hers and rolling to bring him down with her. His hand shot out, snatching the girl by the shirt, tearing it as he pulled her under him. His body was heavy against hers, pinning her torso to the mat.

"I'll kill you, you fucking bitch!" Honey believed him as his fingers wrapped around her throat and squeezed. He leaned in close, his blood dripping onto her face, his wide eyes boring into hers. They were empty black pits of murderous intent. The girl grabbed his stringy hair and yanked, pulling his head down to hers, snapping her jaws at him.

Ellis pulled back from her, easily breaking her hold. Her hands, anyway. Honey's teeth held fast and he screamed as two of his eyebrow rings and a bit of his eyebrow stayed in their grasp. He let her go, grabbing at his face, more blood pouring from the new wound. Honey pulled her knees into her chest, then kicked out with all her strength, hitting him in the sternum full force with both heels. As he fell back, she popped to her feet, fury and adrenaline surging through her.

"You're gonna kill me?" the wild girl screeched, kicking him hard in the ribs. He curled on his side in anguish and she kicked him again, in the stomach. Then again. "You're gonna kill me?!"

Strong arms wrapped around Honey from behind to pull her away and she yowled like a wild cat, kicking and struggling.

"Stop! He's down!" a familiar voice shouted in an unfamiliar tone. "Honey, stop!"

Honey shrieked one more time, fierce and furious, then slumped back against Four's chest.

As she sat in a dark, quiet, chilly hallway, somewhere in the east corridor, nursing the bottle of water Four had given her, Honey wished she hadn't been so out of it with anger. Not for Ellis's sake, because fuck Ellis. But so she could have appreciated the feel of being wrapped in Four's arms, her back pinned to his chest. That was probably the adrenaline talking. There was a well documented correlation between high stress situations - particularly those involving violence - and sexual arousal. Not that she was aroused, but the thought of his lanky body against hers was certainly a pleasant one.

She was leaning back against the cold, rock wall, her knees drawn up as close to her body as possible with how her body hurt. Four was crouched in front of her, watching her sip the water, concerned and protective. Too bad he hadn't been there with that protective attitude two minutes sooner. Then the girl might not be sporting pale purple, finger-shaped bruises on her throat. The blood smeared on her face and neck and staining her snowy locks would still be there, though, but it would only be her own.

"You calm now?" Four finally asked, his voice a soft baritone that reverberated off the stone walls.

She nodded. "Calm as the marsh."

"Good," he nodded in return. The expression on his face was so familiar: firm and serious, but solemn, like he was about to deliver bad news. Honey recognized it from gun range, so many months ago. "Don't come down here again."

"Oh, is that an order?" she asked tersely, her face pinched in anger at the command.

"Yes."
"Yeah, well, I don't have to listen to you anymore," the girl declared, defiant, if somewhat immaturesly. "So you can shove your orders."

"Honey, why do you do this to yourself?" His brows were low over his dark, deep eyes, full of question and concern.

"I didn't do anything to myself!" she snapped. "That asshole tried to strangle me!"

"You know what I mean," Four insisted. She thought she might, but that didn't mean he was right about her. He didn't even know her. "You don't have to prove anything."

"I know I don't." Honey agreed sharply. "Maybe I just like it. Maybe I like to fight, is that so weird? Isn't that a Dauntless kind of attitude?"

He nodded, but didn't look happy about it. His lips looked poutier than ever, all pulled down into a frown like that.

"I'm not some kind of delicate flower, Four; you know that," Honey insisted. "I was doing fine until that dickhead lost his frickin' mind. Hell, I was doing fine when you pulled me off him!"

"He wasn't the only one who lost it," the broody man pointed out. Her lips pinched together tightly, eyes stormy. He was right; she had snapped at the end there. He rested a hand on her knee, large and warm and reassuring. "He's not going to be the only one who tries to really hurt you. If you keep coming here and you let them get to you, it's going to change you inside."

Her stomach felt hollow as his words sank in. If that person she'd become after she'd taken Ellis down the last time was an indication of just how much she could change, then Honey knew he was right to be worried. She hadn't just been angry or vicious, she'd wanted to punish him. She had wanted to make him bleed and scream and just tear him apart. She might have even wanted to kill him. That made her feel sick, now.

Four seemed to see or maybe sense the suffocating feeling of dread that washed through the girl before him and squeezed her knee, brushing his thumb back and forth over the material of her pants comfortingly. She took a long drink of the water, hoping that would somehow help quell the tumult inside her gut. It didn't. She took a deep breath and held it a moment before letting go.

"I'm not gonna let that happen," Honey told him, meeting his gaze. His eyes were somewhat dubious - caring, but still skeptical. She pulled a corner of her mouth up in a semblance of haughty confidence she didn't quite feel just yet. "C'mon. I'm a fast learner, right? I get knocked down, I get back up."

She laid her own hand over his, patting it lightly, then left it there, mimicking the movement of his thumb with her own against his warm, smooth skin. He sighed, somber and weary. Looking at their hands on her knee, Four lifted his thumb across her fingers, brushing it over her knuckles lightly. A confused jumble of sensation surged through her. Honey's skin prickled where he touched it, her palm suddenly hot against the back of his hand. An anxious fluttering of heat low in her belly somehow made her pulse ring in her ears. Then he lifted his eyes to hers again and it all intensified ten fold.

"You need to be careful," he told her, quiet and low. She nodded, unable to speak.

"Hey, kid; there you are!" Dante's voice shocked through the girl like an emergency siren, making her jerk against the stone at her back. Four pulled his hand away, resting it on his own knee now, and looked up as the bald man approached the pair. "Is she okay? Shithead didn't really fuck her up,
"No, she's fine," Four assured him in his usual brusque tone. Dante came to stand over them, arms hugging his middle with a relaxed sort of posture.

"Good. That fucking guy," Baldy shook his head in disgust. "Should have let her really go to town on him. Fucker deserved it."

Her former instructor only shrugged. Dante looked down at Honey with a mixture of displeasure and admiration. It was the latter that caught her attention. He was impressed?

"Ya did good, sugar," the man said, certainly sounding impressed. "Came to bring you your ticket."

He bent forward a bit, offering her a slip of yellow paper. Slightly perplexed, she reached up to take it. "What is it?"

Baldy laughed. "It's your winnings," he told her jovially. "You really cleaned up. Keep coming back and making me profits like this and I'll fucking marry you."

Honey's eyes rounded as she took in what was written on the tag in her grasp - a point transfer order. Apparently, people had bet quite heavily against her, so the house take had been substantial. The amount of points constituting her cut was more than the combined total of all her monthly allowances since she'd joined Dauntless. A lot more.

" Seriously?" she squeaked, drawing another boisterous laugh from Dante.

"I thought you might want this, too," he grinned down at her, offering out his closed fist. She turned her hand upward dazedly, holding it under his to accept what he held. He dropped something small and warm into her palm. She stared at it for a moment, then looked up at him, closing her fingers tightly.

"Thanks."

"Alright," Dante nodded in approval. "Take it easy the next couple days, huh? See you later, Four."

As Baldy walked back the way he came, Four frowned at Honey in disapproval. That lift was back in the corner of her mouth, this time less haughty, but more genuine.

"I'm starving. You want to get something to eat?" She waved the ticket blithely. "My treat."

After buying a somewhat reluctant Four some very greasy food and a beer that she really thought he could use, they parted company on a much more amicable note than they'd joined with. Honey made her way through the Pit from the bar, Four's jacket zipped securely around her. He'd given her the garment to cover her ruined shirt. Such a gentleman. It smelled like him; far more pleasant than she'd have expected, given how sweaty the Dauntless tended to get and how very gamey most of the men (and some of the women) seemed to be. She was heading for a parlor with a bright purple neon sign. The girl had never been in there, but the color of the glow spilling from it had always caught her eye.

Inside, a woman whose skin was very nearly as black as her clothing was busying herself wiping down counters. Her hair was the same shade as her shirt, as were the dozen or so studs set into her ears and face. The whites of her eyes and her teeth when she smiled welcomingly were the only break in the darkness. She looked like a walking shadow and Honey found her absolutely stunning.

"What can I do for you?" the woman asked in a pleasantly smooth voice. Honey reached into the
pocket of Four's jacket and pulled out the bit of blood-stained silver Dante had given her.

"First, you can sterilize this."

Chapter End Notes

Yeesh. Tough evening for poor Honey.
Little Moments

Chapter Summary

Thangs and stuff.

Chapter Notes

It's short. I guess you could call it a transitional chapter.

"I need you to bring up the E7 footage within these time periods and review it for any Factionless activity. Compile anything you find, with corresponding timestamps and summaries."

Honey nodded, taking the paper Eric was holding out to her. E7 was part of the Erudite district. Once she finished cross-referencing the dates and locations of fires in the city over the last ten years, she would head to the security office and request the video files. Good; she could bring Four back his jacket at the same time, then grab herself some lunch while they pulled the footage and put it on a drive for her. Maybe she'd stop for food on the way and hang out with Hotdog while she waited.

As strange as it was to her now and as incomprehensible as it would have been six months ago, Honey found that working with Eric had been one of her favorite parts of the leadership program. His straightforward, professional attitude in the office and clear, concise way of giving instruction were ideal for her Erudite trained brain. He was superior and demanding, but he wasn't cold and hostile like Belen or certifiable like Kai. His purview was far more to her liking than Amelia's numbers and lists.

Working with Max was another aspect she enjoyed. The novice had to admit it stroked her ego whenever the head commented on her work or asked her thoughts on a matter. Aside from his angry remarks after their stressful visit to Erudite, Eric never complimented her performance, but he never criticized it either; which, with Eric, meant that she was meeting his standards, which were undoubtedly higher than most. Thinking it over, the girl could see why he would have expected her to know she was doing well without needing it to be pointed out. Having been considered a mediocre student at best by her faction all her life, excelling to such a degree was not something she had experience in, so she had simply not recognized it. Especially when she had struggled so much during initiation.

Honey set the paper down, intent on her current task. Eric didn't leave, however; just kept hovering at her side. The same way she hadn't commented on his black eye and cheek, he hadn't mentioned a word regarding her very obvious injuries. His eyes had lingered for a time on her throat, though. She wondered if he was going to ask about it now.

"Will your proposal be ready in time for the staff meeting on Monday?"

She looked up from her computer, bewildered by the inquiry. "I hadn't planned on it. Why?"

"Do you think you can get it done by then?" he asked, instead of answering her. She chewed her lip
"I mean, that's really short notice. I thought I'd have more time," the girl hedged, having assumed she would have as much time as she needed to work on her project, ultimately passing it on to whatever ancillary she'd have been assigned to work under when she finished it. Honey caught the telltale glint of the studs above his right brow.

"But do you need more time is what I'm asking." His tone was knowing. **Dammit.**

"I guess I could pull it out," she reluctantly admitted. Then warned, "It'll be rough, though."

"We're Dauntless; we like it rough," Eric smirked down at her. It was such a shock to hear the innuendo come so casually from Eric that she couldn't stop the laugh that tumbled out from her lips. His smirk softened ever so slightly into something not quite so snarky.

"I suppose that's true," Honey admitted with a little half-grin. **Just look at the two of us.**

"Give me your first draft when it's finished. I'll smooth it out a bit," the leader told her. She nodded in agreement. "By the way, I like your new hardware."

Like the laugh, the girl couldn't stop the grin that formed at his words. She reached up reflexively to touch the silver, double-dragon ring now set in the upper cartilage of her left ear. "Yeah? Thanks. I'm pleased with it, myself."

Four had given Honey a little smile when she'd returned his jacket, but the moment he noticed the earring, it had vanished under the weight of his frown. She'd have to explain it to him when they weren't surrounded by his coworkers and one of her best friends.

"What the hell happened to you?!" Hotdog had all but shouted when he saw her. More specifically, when he saw her throat. She set her lunch - with extra in case he felt peckish while she ate - down at his station and pulled an empty chair up next to his.

"Well, let me tell you," she sighed, picking up a carrot stick. "Lockbox is gonna need a new bassist."

"It's cold as an Erudite honeymoon out here!" Hotdog huffed, hugging Beth as close as possible. Honey wasn't sure if it was a chivalrous boyfriend action to keep the slim girl warm or if he was using her as a human heating pad. He was right, it was absolutely arctic up on the rooftops of Dauntless. Still, half the faction was out, bundled up against the cold, eagerly waiting for the stroke of midnight.

Once, when she was thirteen, Honey had snuck into the spire at Erudite and ridden the elevator up to the top, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Dauntless New Year's fireworks. They were faint and far off, but the little bursts of color had meant the world to her back then. She knew, someday, she'd be able to see them up close. This was that day.

It was shaping up to be everything she'd dreamed as a child. She was surrounded by her faction, but more closely by her friends. Hotdog and Beth were wrapped up in each other, Calhoun and Daisy beside them, arms around each other's waists. Jasper and the new bassist for Lockbox were circling one another tentatively. They'd be an interesting couple. Gertie was about four inches taller than the hot-tempered vocalist and calm as the marsh was wet. Joseph was there with the guy he'd been
seeing, though there was nothing official there, yet. Damon was a nice fellow, very butch, but very sweet - they worked together in a tattoo parlor. She'd seen Cliff meandering about and Hannah, too. So many familiar faces.

Somewhere nearby, someone started loudly counting down from thirty. The lower their count went, the more people joined in, until everyone was shouting along. Five. Four. Three. Two.

A soft puff caught Honey's attention, followed immediately by a sharp hiss. She looked up at the sky, eyes wide and eager, ignoring the twinge it caused her bruised neck to crane it so. Pop! A burst of gold almost directly above them and she gasped. The crowd erupted in cheers. Pop! Pop! Pop-pop! The whole sky was alight, a glorious display of color that put the stars to shame. Her chest was tight and though her heart pounded, it felt weightless. Her eyes pricked with heat at the beauty of it. All of it. Not just the fireworks, but the faction and being there.

Cold gloves caught her cheeks, pulling her face down, and warm lips pressed against her own. She gasped again and a tongue slid between her teeth, bringing the taste of whiskey with it. It only lasted a moment and the mouth was gone again.

"Happy New Year, kid!" Jasper's eyes were as bright as any of the fireworks, manic and wide, just like his smile. And that was her first ever kiss. Stolen by a crazed little man on a rooftop under a blanket of colored sparks.

Her second kiss came from Daisy. The third from Hotdog, who tasted of Beth's cinnamon lip balm and Calhoun's perpetual peppermint habit. She'd waved her friends off after that, laughing and insisting she wanted to watch the fireworks. It was a madcap tradition, the kissing at New Year, but so very fitting to her faction. Honey wondered, if Four had been there, would he have kissed her? She thought she would have wanted him to. Would Eric? That was a thought that was simultaneously hilarious and terrifying, yet, she was surprised to realize, not entirely off-putting. Or Kent from Behaviorism? She thought he would have kissed her, if only out of curiosity; cupping her face in his baby-soft hands.

As she turned her gaze back to the sky, she couldn't help but wonder what her family was doing right then. Sleeping, probably. It was late and they had to work in the morning. She couldn't be any happier to be at Dauntless.
Eric stomped up to her station midmorning on Friday, shoulders back and his whole body tight with agitation. "Where's your coat?"

Honey blinked up at him. "Back at my room, why?"

He scowled as if her lack of outerwear in a fairly warm inner room was a personal slight, then stalked off towards his own office. She stared after him for a moment, trying to work it out, but realized it was insane and she wouldn't be able to. So, she got up to follow him. He'd barely disappeared through his doorway before he was already marching back out again, a file and his own heavy winter coat in hand.

"Here put this on," the tense leader ordered. Honey just looked at the garment, her face a mask of questions. More impatient than usual, he pushed the coat into her chest, forcing her to catch hold of it or let it drop to the floor. Brushing passed her, Eric went back towards her station. "Where's that scroll tab?"

"On the shelf, above the view screen," she told him, head tilting to the side. "What's going on?"

He grabbed the scroll, tucking it and the file into his favorite jacket, the one with the purple lining and shiny banding that he'd been wearing the first time she saw him on the rooftop. Walking back towards the perplexed girl, he motioned for her to get moving.

"We're going to Erudite."

That explained so much and still left her confused. A sudden trip to her old faction after their last visit would definitely account for his highly stressed behavior, but why would they be going back? Honey shrugged his coat on. She swam in the thing; it reached her knees and the sleeves hung well passed her fingertips.

"Why? What happened?" she asked, her own voice and shoulders tight now, too.

"Jeanine sent Max an emessage about your proposal. He asked me about it and when I told him you were already done and presenting it Monday, he insisted it would be rude to ignore her offer to look at it for you." Eric's tone was low and quietly irate. So, that was why he'd pushed Honey to finish it
so soon, trying to head off the Erudite leader. "She sent a car over to pick you up."

"What am I supposed to say to her?"

"As little as possible. I'll try to do all the talking," he insisted, turning her down the hall towards a street level entrance. It was then she realized he had his hand on her spine, guiding her through the corridors. "If she asks why you didn't bring it to her first."

"I wanted to do it on my own," Honey quickly supplied an excuse. "Because I've got to prove myself."


As they reached the doors, he stopped her, zipping up his coat as if she were a child. "If anyone else at Erudite talks to you..." He trailed off with a heavy frown and furrowed brow, caught up in his own thought, whatever it was. The man shook his head. "Just stay with me. Understand?"

Of course Honey didn't understand. He wouldn't tell her what the hell was going on! She nodded anyway and they stepped out into the snow that was falling in thick, cottony clumps all over the city.

Eric's coat smelled amazing. It wasn't until they were safely tucked away in the car, with the air warm from the heater, and she had so much time to just sit and think because they couldn't talk with the driver there, that she noticed it. It was warm and sweetly spicy with a light, pleasant musk undertone, the way cigar smoke can sometimes be. It had taken the girl more than a few minutes to realize that it wasn't the coat that smelled amazing, but Eric. It was Eric's scent on the coat that she enjoyed so much. She felt herself flush and hoped he would attribute it to the cold.

As they rode the elevator up to the top of the spire, Honey tried not to fidget. She really did, but she had so much nervous energy and she'd never been good at standing still. Eric was practically made of stone beside her, which made it all the more noticeable. She moved to clasp her hands together, hoping that would help to stay still, but his sleeves were so ludicrously long on her.

"Oh! I need to take this off!" she suddenly piped, trying to shove the cuffs up to get at the zipper. He brushed her hands away and did it for her. The girl wiggled out of the coat and folded it over her arm, trying to make it look like it could possibly be her own. She could come up with a lot of spontaneous explanations, but why she was wearing Eric's coat wasn't something she had an answer for.

"You remember what I told you?" Eric asked. Honey nodded.

"Try not to talk and I don't need help from anybody," she paraphrased.

"Be rude, if you can." The girl peered up at him, perplexed by that order. "She doesn't like it."

"So, I want her to not like me?"

"You want her to not be interested in you," he clarified. She chewed her lip, then narrowed her eyes.

"How rude?"

"Believably rude. You grew up here. She'll know if you're overdoing it," he warned. That was true. So, subtlety.
Just before they reached their floor, Eric handed her the folder and the scroll. It wouldn’t make sense for him to have them, since it was her research and her project. The lobby was as stark and uncomfortable as she remembered. There was no wait this time; the receptionist didn’t even call back to announce their arrival. A moment after the elevator doors closed, the office doors slid open and Gwen appeared in the space, beckoning them inside.

Honey forced her nerves in check, taking Eric’s lead and matching his unhurried pace and relaxed manner. He’d pulled out his tab and was flicking through it, though she knew he wasn’t reading a word on the screen this time. Jeanine was at her desk as before, seated this time, wearing a turquoise blouse and deep azure scarf.

"Oh, Eric, you didn't have to come," she announced pleasantly and slightly apologetic. "I told Max Honey and I could manage on our own."

He shrugged, slipping his tablet away. "Must have gotten our wires crossed. It's fine. You know I'm always happy to come by and see you, Jeanine."

Eric’s tone was so bland and ambivalent, had she not been part of the dramatic rush from Dauntless, Honey would never have known anything was wrong. But she wasn’t Jeanine and who knew what that woman was thinking?

"That's kind of you to say," the Erudite leader smiled at him warmly. "Would you like some coffee? There's a little café a few floors down that makes an excellent winter blend."

She was trying to get rid of him. She wanted Honey all on her own.

"Thank you, I'm good," Eric deferred politely. Be rude.

"So, we can get started, then?" Honey stepped away from her mentor's side, sloppily draping his coat over the back of one of the chairs set before Jeanine's desk. She offered the file to the woman, with a sweetly puckish, "It's kinda rough."

The slight pinch of Jeanine's perfectly glossed lips and arch of her perfectly shaped brow told Honey that she was definitely headed in the direction Eric wanted. The Erudite leader took the file, flicking her eyes towards Honey’s mentor. The rude Dauntless girl plopped herself down on the chair, feet kicked out in front of her and crossed at the ankles, fingers steepled in front of her stomach.

The blonde woman opened the folder and began reading through it. Eric sauntered over to the chair beside Honey’s and sat himself down, looking comfortable and mildly interested. After a moment, Honey shifted in her seat. Then shifted again a minute later. She crossed her legs at the knee, her upraised boot wiggling as if she just couldn’t sit still. Sighing, she pulled out the scroll tab and started to look through it. She contemplated getting up and wandering nosily around the room, but that would be too far outside her character.

After twice the amount of time it should have taken her to read and reread the proposal, Jeanine looked up. "You're right. It's a little rough."

Honey nodded. "Yeah, but I figured, we like it that way at Dauntless."

Eric chuckled, shaking his head as if amused by, but still disapproving of her comment.

"Clever," the woman said, but her tone suggested she found the joke to be anything but. "There's some things here I can certainly help you with. You can take notes on your scroll there."

"Can I be blunt here for a minute?" Honey asked, toying with one of her bootlaces.
"Of course," Jeanine insisted, motioning for her to speak.

"I mean, I really appreciate your offer and all. Really," the girl said, trying to sound sincere. "But I kinda wanted to get this done myself. You know, under my own steam?"

Honey glanced at Eric, pausing as if she had something to say that she didn't want to say in front of him; then said it anyway, "I really want to be the youngest ancillary leader in Dauntless history and I've only got a couple months left to get it done."

The idea was ludicrous, but tantalizing enough for an ambitious young upstart such as herself to strive toward.

"I wouldn't expect anything less from an Erudite transfer," her former faction head intoned, pleased by the novice's admission. "I'd like to help you toward that end."

"Right, but it won't mean anything if I don't do it on my own," Honey insisted.

"Inter-faction relations are a major part of faction leadership," Jeanine said, using a mildly condescending instructional tone. "Having allies in high places will enable you to realize the future you have planned for yourself. You'd be throwing away a fantastic opportunity for simple vanity. I'd have to advise you against that."

"She's right, Honey," Eric added, firm and encouraging. "You really need to think about everything Erudite has to offer."

Honey frowned at him, annoyed and disbelieving. "I left Erudite knowing everything it had to offer. Not to be rude, but I really have to just say, thanks but no thanks. I'm going to make my own way. At Dauntless."

Her mentor sighed, rubbing the pads of his fingers against his forehead, just above his piercings, disappointed and displeased with her decision. Jeanine's mouth had pinched so tightly, her lips were paler than the skin around them.

"I'm very sorry to hear that," she said in a clipped, dissatisfied tone. "I hope, for your sake, that when you realize your mistake, it's not too late."

The girl just shrugged, looking uncomfortable with the whole situation. Which wasn't an affectation, really. "I'm sorry to have wasted your time."

Honey and held out her hand, awkwardly waiting for the woman to give her file back. With a last little unhappy shake of her head, Jeanine handed it over. Eric stood as well, offering the other leader a slightly helpless shrug.

"I should bring this scroll back to Kent and thank him. If that's okay?" She twisted her voice into something unsure and slightly meek, now that she'd displeased all the powerful people in the room.

"That's fine," Jeanine said, dismissive now that she had no use for the girl. "I need to speak to Eric while I have him here, anyway."

Honey froze. She'd already completely ignored his order to let him speak for her. He'd specifically told her to stay with him. He'd even implied that she shouldn't speak to anyone else on the compound without him.

"I-I can wait," she stuttered.
"I'm afraid this is a sensitive matter," the woman said, gravely. "And there's no reason for you to just sit out in the lobby."

Eric's tight jaw and the fist at his side were the only indication he wasn't indifferent to the whole thing. "Go ahead. I'll collect you when I'm done here."

Honey nodded. She picked up his coat, draping it over her arm, and left the room. *I'll just go thank Kent and not talk to anyone else.* That would be simple enough. There wasn't anyone else in Behaviorism for her to talk to anyway.

The way Kent's fawn colored eyes had lit up when she walked into his lab made Honey's stomach flip over. He was full of questions about her project and so pleased he could help and so nice and treated her so warmly that the girl all but forgot about the high tension encounter she'd just come from. She knew she wasn't supposed to talk alot, but Eric wouldn't tell her why and she couldn't imagine the man from Behavioral Science had anything to do with whatever was going on between the two faction leaders. So, she'd lingered just a bit, enjoying the attention and interest that was far more obvious today than it had been the first time they'd met; as if he'd been thinking about her, hoping she'd come back. But she couldn't just completely ignore the Dauntless leader, so Honey forced herself to cut the visit short.

"Here, I came to bring this back to you," she said, proffering the scroll tablet. Kent took the device, looking confused.

"Oh? We have plenty here, you should keep this one," he insisted. "If they accept your proposal - which, of course they should; you're brilliant - you'll need all the information on here, still."

She blushed brightly at his almost offhand compliment. Brilliant? It had to be sheer flattery, but that didn't stop the urge to bite her lip and inspect the floor thoroughly. His mouth curled into a warm, interested sort of smile.

"Does no one tell you how intelligent you are at Dauntless?" Kent asked, his voice going slightly soft.

"No, they do," Honey insisted, even softer, her shyness feeling painful to her normally fiery spirit. "They just don't call me brilliant like that."

"Like it's a given?" he asked, knowingly. She nodded and shrugged and continued to blush and hated herself for it. "Well, yours is the action faction." He chuckled at his own joke and she did, too. "Maybe they just don't appreciate an impressive brain when there's such a pretty face in front of it."

The girl didn't think her face could get any hotter. No one, not a single person to whom she wasn't blood related had ever told Honey she was pretty. The compliment warmed her like sunshine and made her feel airy and light and an instant later she felt like she'd been slammed into the ground. Why would this man be calling her brilliant when they'd had one and a half conversations where he did most of the talking? She knew she was intelligent, maybe especially intelligent for a Dauntless, but for an Erudite? The brain faction? Brilliant?

The novice swallowed hard and forced a smile around her lip as she bit it. "That's really sweet of you to say. I should get back to Eric. He hates waiting for me."

"Oh," Kent was visibly disappointed. "Well, he does seem the impatient sort. But I insist you take this."

He offered her the scroll again, but only for an instant before he turned it back to himself and started
tapping away at the screen.

"Here, I'm making a note with my ID number. If you need any more information, or just maybe want to say hello," he offered a hesitantly charming smile. "Just emessage me."

Honey took the tablet back, tucking it between her chest and Eric's coat. Refusing it now would be rude and suspicious. "Maybe I'll do that." The smile she gave in return felt brittle on her lips, even as his widened.

Honey breathed the winter air deeply, hoping the cold would help clear the turmoil in her head. She wasn't sure what Kent's game was. Or had Eric's warning, vague to the point of being mystifying, about talking to other Erudite made her paranoid and the tall behaviorist was showing legitimate interest in her? Interest in what with her, that was the question. Given that he was an arguably virile Erudite and she was a fresh, young Dauntless, the girl didn't have to ponder too hard to come up with an answer. But was that a bad thing? As she thought about it, Honey came to the conclusion that, either way, what she really didn't like was being manipulated. If Kent was interested in her for purely carnal reasons, she'd have preferred he be straightforward about it, instead of sweet talking her with false flattery.

Her day had started off so well and now she was stressed and irritated and feeling so incredibly humiliated and stupid. She just wanted to find Eric and go home. She pulled his jacket around herself and hugged it closed. Hunching her shoulders brought the material up around her jaw, the lovely scent filling her nose.

"Hey! H-Honey!" a voice she'd know anywhere called. Pausing on the walkway, she turned to see Randall jogging towards her, wearing a bright grin. And he'd used her name, too. Well, that certainly helped bring her mood up.

"Hey!" she called back happily. He caught up to her and wrapped the girl in a quick hug.

"Fancy seeing you here again," her brother said, rubbing his hands together. "More meetings?"

"Eric is in with Jeanine. I was just thanking Kent in Behaviorism for his help with my research," she explained.

"I'm so glad I saw you. I was on my way to Communications to get in touch with you anyway."

"Why? What's up?" Honey didn't ask what was wrong, because he was too happy for it to be something bad. At her question, Randall practically glowed with happiness.

"Corrine and I are getting married," he grinned, wide and proud and elated.

"Congratulations!" She hugged him again. "That's so great. I'm so happy for you."

"Thanks. We're having the reception next week. You'll come, won't you?" Randall's eyes were a mix of their mother's blue and father's green-brown mud that worked beautifully together somehow and were joyful, but also showed a bit of worry. Honey immediately shook her head and gave him a shove.

"Just try to stop me," the girl grinned. He relaxed, his breath huffing plumes of steam between them.

"Great." He told her the specifics. Then added, "Make sure you wear something nice. For mom's sake, at least."
Honey snorted. "Nope. Underpants and a sunhat."

Her brother laughed, then his face screwed up incredulously. "What are you wearing now anyway? Don't they have coats that fit in Dauntless?"

She looked down at herself as if surprised, then stuttered, "No.. I just.. I-"

Randall's eyes widened with sudden realization. "That's a man's coat! Do you have a boyfriend now?"

"No!" She shook her head vehemently, eyes wide. Too wide. He didn't believe her and started laughing all over again.

"Don't look so scared!" he chortled. "You're not a child anymore. It's good that you're seeing someone."

"Please don't tell mom I've got a boyfriend," Honey pleaded. Too late she realized that her entreaty had been worded so that it functioned as confirmation. Shit.

"You have to bring him with you," her brother insisted, delighted at the idea. "To the reception. I want to meet him."

"Randall, I don't-"

Another voice she'd know anywhere called her name, but far less happily and more sharply than her brother had. Eric was striding towards them.

"Oh, I have to go," she told Randall quickly. He nodded and she hurried towards her mentor.

"You'd better not show up alone!" he called after the girl, laughter in his voice. She waved a hand back at him, but kept her eyes forward.

Eric looked over her head at the other man, who was turning to walk back down the pathway. He frowned down at Honey. "I told you not to talk to anyone."

"That's my brother. You ate lunch with him a week ago," she insisted.

"I know who he is."

"And you didn't tell me not to talk to anyone. You said to stay with you and let you talk, but I couldn't. So what was I supposed to do? Ignore my brother?"

His frown deepened into a scowl, jaw clenching a bit. He lifted his hand behind her shoulder and turned, pushing her forward down the path towards the main entrance of the compound.

"What did he mean, 'don't come alone'?"

Honey huffed, shrugging the leader's hand away, irritated by his oppressive manner. One might think she'd be used to it by now, but she wasn't. The girl hated Eric bearing down on her like this when she was already stressed out.

"He's getting married and invited me to the reception. But he saw me in this-" she lifted her arms, the excess length of the sleeves flopping over comically "-and thought it was my boyfriend's."

"You don't have a boyfriend." She scowled up at the man, momentarily angry that he would assume she didn't have anyone. But then, he wouldn't have to assume, would he? She'd been in the
leadership program for six months, a good chunk of that time spent in proximity to him, and Eric dealt in intelligence.

"Yes, I know that," she snapped. "But I'm wearing a man's coat, so he assumed that was why. I couldn't tell him it was yours, that would have made it worse."

He nodded, not contradicting her. That was something, at least. He didn't think she was a idiot for not correcting Randall. Of course, now Honey had a whole new problem: how to dig up a boyfriend on short notice. They stopped at the entrance, waiting for the car to be brought for them. The snow was still falling around the pair, muting the world as if her ears were packed with cotton. It made it seem as if his voice were the only sound in the world besides her own breathing.

"Did Kent say anything to you?" Eric asked. Her teeth clicked with how quickly her jaw snapped shut. Even if it had been thirty below, the flush on her face would have given her away. His brows raised. "What did he say?"

"Nothing important," the girl insisted through the tightness in her throat. She wished the car would hurry up and get there so she could throw herself under it.

"What did he say?" he repeated slower, each word punctuated on its own, his tone hard and warning. At least Honey didn't have to look at him when she answered, focusing instead on the snowflakes that clung to the front of his jacket.

"He just gave me back the scroll. Because I might still need it. I had to take it, right? I'm all ambitious and gung ho, right?"

"Right," Eric agreed slowly. She knew he was still looking at her with those eyes, a pale, silvery cross between blue and gray out here in the dull, snowy world; she could feel them. "What else?"

He wasn't going to let it go. And he was her leader. Honey puffed out a tense sigh. "He kind of made a pass at me."

"Kind of?"

She growled, pressing her sleeve-covered fists to her temples for a moment. "He told me I was brilliant and pretty and put his ID in the scroll so I could emessage him." She finally admitted sullenly.

The car pulled up just then and she really did feel tempted just to jump under the tires. Only her legs; it wouldn't kill her. Eric didn't say anything, only opened the door and motioned for her to get inside. Honey held tightly to the fact that he hadn't laughed at her, or chuckled, or snorted, or anything like that. She suddenly wished his coat didn't smell so good and that she didn't like it so much. She didn't want to like anything about the young leader in that moment. Every bad feeling she'd had that day was directly or indirectly his fault. For the ride back to Dauntless, she consoled herself by blaming all her troubles on him and he just sat there, calmly scrolling through his mini-tab, smelling wonderful and being a dick.

"Give me the scroll," Eric ordered the instant the car pulled away from Dauntless, leaving them alone in the snow once more. She did so, still wearing the same sullen look she'd gotten into the car with. He quickly started tapping away with his long, nimble fingers and as much as Honey didn't want to talk to him ever again, she always was the curious type. Erudite.

"What are you doing to it, now?"
"He was kind enough to reestablish the uplink to the servers for you," the man said in a falsely cheery tone, lips curled into a sneer. Then, back to his everyday dominance, "And I'm deleting his ID."

Honey frowned. That was a bit imperious. He finished after just a moment and offered her the tablet back. Noting the look on her face, Eric smirked, but not cruelly or even snide.

"There's plenty of men at Dauntless who'll tell you you're brilliant and pretty just to get into your pants," he said. The words could have been sharp and unkind, but weren't. They weren't a soft reassurance, either. Just simply stated as if he were giving her instruction in the office. "And they won't be looking down their nose at you while they do it."

Alright, maybe he wasn't a complete dick. Still, all her troubles that day had been his fault. "Are you ever going to tell me what the hell is going on?" Honey asked, changing the subject. Now it was the young leader's turn to frown.

"I'd rather you not have to find out," Eric told her soberly. "Trust me, you really don't want to be in Jeanine Matthews's sights."

"I do trust you, but I don't like not knowing. It's like I can feel her breathing down my neck and I don't know why and I hate it." Her mentor nodded, his eyes full of understanding.

"The less you know, the better off you are," he insisted.

"How is that ever the case?" the novice challenged, brows furrowed. Even if she hadn't been raised to value knowledge over all else, her mind would have railed against that concept.

"You said you trusted me," Eric reminded her. "So trust me."

"Oh, so I have to trust you, but you don't trust me at all. Even to give me a clue as to what I'm apparently caught up in." Honey's voice sounded flat and harsh against the snowy silence.

"If I didn't trust you at all, we wouldn't be standing here, having this conversation."

Well, that stopped her. She supposed that was true. It didn't make not knowing any easier, however. She looked up at him, her mind a mess of stress and confusion mixed with the anger and embarrassment of what happened with Kent. The man was looking down at her, not scowling or smirking, just looking. Eric's cheeks, ears, and nose were pink from the cold and made him look so much more human, like he was a real person and not a painted steel casting of a Dauntless leader.

"It's too cold to keep standing out here," Honey declared softly, turning to head into the building. His boots shushed quietly through the new snow behind her own. Once inside, she shrugged off his coat, holding it out for him to take. She was letting alot ride on her trust in Eric's judgment and abilities, but the man was one of the most intensely powerful people she'd ever met; so, maybe it didn't seem like such a gamble.

"One more thing, Honey," he said, taking the garment from her and shaking the snow off it. "You were nearly flawless in Jeanine's office. Don't ever lie to me that well."

She nodded. It was odd to feel pride in such a duplicitous skill, but it had certainly proven beneficial. Still, the girl wasn't so confident in her abilities that she thought it remotely possible to deceive the man before her the way she had the Erudite leader. His steely eyes missed very little, his brain probably even less so.

"You can take the rest of the day," her mentor told her. She shook her head.
"No, I've got to finish going through the incident reports you gave me," Honey insisted. One side of his mouth quirked upward.

"It can wait," Eric assured her.

"But it doesn't have to," she insisted. "I'm fine. I am."

"I believe you," he told her. The man was perilously close to smiling a little.

"I'm just going to grab something to eat, first." It was getting on towards lunch by now and her stomach was protesting. "Do you want me to bring you some coffee? Winter blend?"

Her cheeky comment brought that little smile to fruition and Eric chuckled. "No. I'll see you back in the office."

They parted ways and Honey marveled at how easy it had been to speak to him just for that one moment. The tyrant that had crushed them all during initiation was still there, clearly, but there was more to the young leader than impossible demands, harsh judgments, and harsher castigations. The same way there had been more to Four than brooding intensity. She would have to remember that. Never judge a book by the first chapter.

Chapter End Notes

Just wanna wrap yourself up in that coat, don't ya?
"Can I borrow your boyfriend?"

Daisy laughed, confused by the question but still amused. She put two omelettes onto her tray and looked down at the smaller girl beside her. "For the night?"

Honey felt just a touch of heat in her cheeks. "No," she insisted, then stuck her tongue out at her friend. "My brother is getting married next week and I need to bring someone to the reception."

"And you want the most impressive specimen?" Daisy grinned, smug. Honey actually wanted Calhoun because he was nice enough to make a good impression and laid back enough to not be bothered being surrounded by a bunch of noses. But she let the taller girl feel smug and self-satisfied.

"He does make an impression," she nodded.

"It's fine by me. Did he say it was my decision or something?" Daisy inquired, dropping a roll onto her tray and another onto Honey's.

"I didn't ask him yet. We all know you're the boss in your relationship." That brought another grin to the beautiful girl's lips.

"And he'd better not forget it," she chuckled. "But hey, remember, you break him, you buy him. You can afford to get me a new one with all those points you got at the Mats."

Those points were just sitting in Honey's account, taunting her, begging to be spent. On what, that was the question. She barely had any free time these days, with her leadership schedule. When she finally did finish her work, she was exhausted. Even more so, with the bruises from her fight with Ellis. Well, she realized, there was one thing she knew she'd need to go shopping for. Maybe two.

"Does Calhoun own anything nice to wear?"

"What do you think? It's okay, right?" Honey asked, holding up the dress she had purchased. Joseph nodded and shrugged at the same time.

"I guess. Why are you asking me?"

"Because you were Candor and you are an artist and I know if it looks bad you'll know and tell me so," she explained. It made perfect sense, really. His brows went up in a very "ah-ha" way.

Damon snapped off his gloves and tossed them into the trash, then ran a hand through his sandy hair.
"Go put it on."

"Why?" The girl had only stopped into the tattoo shop to get a quick confirmation, not put on a fashion show.

"So we can see how it looks on you," he told Honey as if she were a little slow. "Just because something looks nice on a hanger, doesn't mean anything."

"It looked fine on me," she insisted. He just pointed towards the back room where the supplies were kept. She rolled her eyes and went to put the dress on, because she really wasn't actually certain whether or not it did look okay on her. The girl just knew she liked the way it sparkled when she moved. She came back a few minutes later and Joseph rocked back on his heels dramatically and whistled.

"Oh shut up."

Damon twirled a finger, indicating she should give them the full 360 view, so she spun in a slow circle.

The dress would have been short on a taller person, but at Honey's five-two height, the skirt reached just above her knees, where it flared and swished when she moved. The top portion was fitted nicely, but not overly snug the way most of the other options had been - the Dauntless do like their form-fitting clothing after all. It ended just above her breasts and curved like a heart over her chest and would have been far too immodest for her, but that there was black mesh netting above it forming proper shoulders and sleeves. There were six inch cuffs that hugged her biceps and a small, cute collar she could flip up to hide her throat, both made of the same black fabric as the bodice and skirt. The collar closed with a single button, leaving a small gap of skin between her throat and cleavage; just risqué enough to say Dauntless, but not so much so that it made her uncomfortable. The collar, cuffs, and skirt were all dusted with gold beads and the effect reminded her of that first firework on New Year's night.

"It suits you," Damon said with a critical nod.

"I've never seen you look so... you know... like a girl before," Joseph told her, grinning like a jerk. "You always look like a girl, but this is... you look like a woman in it. Are you trying to break Daisy's heart?"

"Oh please," Honey snorted, twisting her hips side to side absently, just for the feel of the material swishing around her thighs.

"Calhoun's then? Just to show him what he missed out on?" Her face twisted in bewilderment.

"What are you talking about?"

"How he never had the guts to go after you," Joseph explained. But that didn't explain anything as far as Honey was concerned. Damon laid a hand on his more-than-friend's arm and gave his head a little shake. The darker haired boy looked suddenly startled, then guilty.

"What? What is it? Why are you making that face?"

Joseph scratched the back of his neck uncomfortably. "You know Calhoun always had a thing for you, all through initiation."

"Oh come on," the girl scoffed mildly. "He and Daisy have been a couple since Amity, I bet."
"No, they weren't, Honey," he insisted awkwardly. "He was completely over the moon for you forever. Even after the vomit thing."

Her mind was completely blown by the statement. Calhoun? And her? "I kicked him off the train! I literally kicked him off of it."

"Yeah," Damon chuckled. "I'd have had a crush on you, too, after that."

"A bunch of us did," Joseph shrugged. The casual way he said it floored the snowy-haired novice. It must have shown in her face, because he offered her a lopsided smile. "I mean, you're crazy, but that's kind of hot sometimes. You were, like, so Dauntless already and we were all still trying to stop being whatever we were before we transferred."

"And you call me crazy?" Honey huffed in disbelief. "I was at the bottom of the class!"

"Yeah, but that's just points," he insisted. "And it was like ranking didn't even matter to you."

"You are nuts," she declared with a scowl. All the girl could think about through initiation was how poor her rank was.

"Don't you remember that day, after Eric kicked us off the range? I was six spaces above you and you were on the very bottom for that day and you still stopped to help me with my problem." Joseph looked to Damon. "You know, Eric pointed a rifle between her eyes? Daisy said she didn't even blink. My little heart went all pitter pat."

Honey rolled her eyes in disgust at the last remark. The things he was saying were true, they'd happened, but he was twisting them all around to make her seem like something special. It was ludicrous. She had been terrified of not making it through initiation. It was part of her Landscape for fuck's sake.

"Don't get any ideas," the other tattooist said with a teasing smirk. "You're mine now. Better not catch you making kitten eyes at anyone else, not even Miss Dauntless here."

"Oh, I'm yours am I?" Joseph grinned back at him in playful challenge.

"That's right. Now drop your pants so I can tattoo my name on your ass."

"Okay, I'm leaving," Honey announced, heading back to the supply room to get her clothes. She stuffed them into the bag her dress had been in and pulled her uniform jacket on over it, not wanting to waste a second changing. Which was a good choice, because as she was walking back through the parlor, Damon and Joseph were locked in a kiss, laughing as the former tugged at the waistband of the latter.

Monday came so fast Honey couldn't stand it. She'd barely blinked and the weekend was gone and she was stepping into the offices of the faction leadership, dressed in her sharpest, most Dauntless outfit. Snug black pants that were tight enough to fight in, but loose enough to be professional, with a set of pockets on the outer thigh, and above that, a plain, black tee which she covered with her favorite uniform jacket, the kind with a high, stiff collar encircling her throat, and one lapel buttoned back to look sharp. Eric was wearing his vest that had a similar collar today, she saw, and when she took her seat beside him, found that they complemented each other. Particularly because Eric had a fresh bruise on his jaw and the knuckles of his right hand were taped up, going well with the fingerprints that hadn't quite faded from her throat yet.

Max was on her other side, his look always very simple military garb. Where Eric's cream colored
skin and habit of wearing his collars open displayed his leaders' tattoos for all to see, Max always buttoned his shirts and jackets to the top, coupled with his chocolate complexion, his marks were almost hidden. Kai seemed inclined to wear only skin tight tank tops and his chin was always lifted, as if thrusting his tattoos before him.

There were over twenty people in the large conference room: the leaders, subs, a hand full of staff, and herself. Honey sat with the leaders on a slightly raised dais at a long table. Max in the middle, flanked by the others. The subs sat around another long table that formed almost a T shape with the dais; their staff stood or sat nearby and the stenographer sat at his little table just off to the side of the dais.

The meeting began with the reading of old business. Amelia needed to approve requisitions for more sulfur for munitions and new batons for Patrol. Eric gave a briefing on a suspected arsonist in the Factionless sector. Belen went over an updated Patrol schedule, saying some of the streets in the city were impassible due to recent heavy snowfalls and the routes had to be altered. Then Max called for new business and Honey's heart started to pound.

"As her current mentor, I'm sponsoring a proposal by our novice, Honey," Eric announced, setting off a wave of murmuring around the room.

"She's not even staff yet!" someone protested. Eric smirked.

"That's why I'm sponsoring it," he said condescendingly. He gave the novice in question a little nudge and she stood, licking her lips nervously and clearing her throat.

"If you'll open the brief 117863, Canine Assisted Rescue," Honey began, trying to keep her voice steady. Public speaking had never been her strong suit. As they read over her work, she gave an outline of what the proposed unit would be and how it would function. Belen immediately spoke up, since the canines would fall under her purview.

"Explain to me how these dogs are going to make my life easier," she prompted coldly, without so much as looking in Honey's direction.

"There was a building collapse two months ago and we lost three of our members. These dogs would have been able to find them and lead rescue to them in a fraction of the time it took us to dig them out. There's a chance, with this unit, that we could save lives. Those three Dauntless might still be here," the girl explained. "They can be sent into unsafe situations without risking our members needlessly. They're size and agility means they can go places humans simply can't."

Max asked about housing and training. Kai asked about the combat capabilities of a militarized canine unit, because of course he did. Amelia wanted to know what the resource requirements would be for such a unit, the food most of all. Eric had asked about the other uses for a canine nose, prompting her to explain the potential for using the dogs to find Factionless planted explosives or hidden bodies. With each new inquiry, Honey grew more confident in her answers, because she had answers for all of them. She had taken each leader into account separately, focusing on what their concerns would be and how to address those concerns. She wasn't sure if they would accept her proposition, but at least she was confident that she'd given a good showing.

After she was finished, several other issues were brought up until Max finally called the meeting to a close.

"We will deliberate these matters in a closed session tomorrow and come to our decisions then," he told them all before dismissing everyone. As Honey stood to leave, he leaned back in his chair and smiled up at her. "That was a very well planned brief. I'm impressed."
"You should be," Eric intoned, not looking up from the papers he was shuffling through. "There were barely any spelling errors. Not that you'd notice, Max."

The older man chuckled. "Ignore him. He's just mad he didn't think to be so ambitious when he was a novice."

"Well, it was kind of his idea," she shrugged. "I mean, he definitely pushed me in that direction."

Eric turned a conceited sneer at the darker man. "I'm very supportive of my apprentices."

Max laughed heartily, a hand on his belly. "I think some of the subs would disagree."

"Not to my face." The younger leader went back to his stack of papers.

"I'm surprised he didn't dissuade you; use it as leverage so he could try and keep you as staff," Max told her. "His reports have been alot neater this month."

"Bullshit," Eric scoffed. Honey had to fight back a giggle. You don't giggle at a Dauntless leader. Especially the two sitting in front of her.

"He'd be out of luck anyway, if anyone gets you on their staff, it's me," the head assured her with a smirk of his own that was directed at the other man. "How's that sound?"

"I'd be happy either way," the girl said and was a little surprised to find that it was true.

Eric chuckled. "She's already a politician."

Someone knocked on Honey's door as she was getting ready for bed Tuesday night. She was decent, in her sleepwear, so she just went to answer it. When she saw Eric standing there on the other side, she immediately regretted not throwing proper pants on over her pajama bottoms.

"Are you kidding me with those?" he asked straight off, brows up, a laugh in his words. Smiling and laughing in amusement that wasn't snide or cruel, he looked almost cute, even if he was still laughing at her. Her and her green and rubber duck printed pajama bottoms that she'd found in the children's section of a shop.

"They're comfortab- shut up!" Honey flushed, scowling at him, but not really angry. She snarked back, "I suppose you wear your vest and boots to bed."

The man's grin turned haughty. "And nothing else."

Now she was laughing. Really laughing, hand over her mouth, shaking her head. Sometimes, the girl couldn't believe this was the same person who'd humiliated her in front of her initiate class. But only sometimes.

"Wow," she drawled at his audacity. That shifty grin took on a slightly warmer cast that startled her. His piercings glinted as his brow raised.

"You picturing it?" he asked. Her heart slammed against her ribs as she shook her head. She hadn't been and now she was refusing to think about it - with every fiber of her being.

"No, it just surprises me when you make jokes. I thought only people could do that," Honey came back quickly, startled again by her own brazenness. The young leader just chuckled, laying a hand over his heart. Or where his heart should be, anyway.
"Ouch. And here I came to bring you good news," Eric told her in an admonishing tone. That piqued the girl's interest.

"What news?"

"We've decided to implement your canine unit," he declared. Her already pounding heart kicked into overdrive, eyes widening like dinner plates.

"Really?!" Honey gasped, stunned.

"It's not going to be officially announced until next week, but I knew it would be eating you up inside waiting for the decision." He was absolutely right. It had only been a day and the novice was already climbing the walls with impatience.

"Oh my god, thank you!" she beamed. She wanted to hug him. She almost did. But this was Eric and he wouldn't take kindly to that. Not just Eric, really; she wouldn't have hugged any of the leaders. The girl was just very excited. He shook his head at her giddiness.

"Maybe I should have waited until morning. You're not going to get any sleep now," he smirked. His observation was very astute and she grinned widely.

"Nope, but that's okay," Honey assured him. He just chuckled again.

"Goodnight, Honey."

"Bye, Eric. And thank you again," she smiled up at him brightly before he left. She shut the door and ran back to her bedroom, jumping and twisting so she landed on her back on the bed, arms wide, with a little shout of glee.

They were both wrong. She slept like a baby.

On Wednesday Honey walked around on a cloud, smiling at everyone, humming as she did her work. She couldn't tell her friends the good news, yet, and in the pit of her stomach a tiny worm of worry wriggled that the leaders would change their minds about her proposal between now and next week, but for the most part all was right with the world. On Thursday, she wasn't quite as high; the shock had started to wear off and she was coming back to Earth. On Friday, the Earth shifted beneath her feet.

It had started like a normal day - breakfast, Eric's firearms proficiency upkeep which she enjoyed immensely, and onto her station to work on his tasks for her that day - which were fairly light and Honey thought she might finish them just after lunch and maybe leave early for a change. Just before lunch, Max summoned her to his office. He sat behind his desk, big like Eric's, but made of dark wood instead of metal, and looked very serious.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes," instead of indicating she should sit, the head stood. "We need to discuss your future here at Dauntless. Your apprenticeship is coming to an end and you'll have to take up a position in here in leadership. I really had thought to take you on as part of my staff, as I'd mentioned to you. But, after much discussion with the other leaders, I'm afraid that won't be happening."

She swallowed hard, her stomach dropping into her boots. Being part of Max's staff would have been the most prestigious outcome for her. Honey never should have entertained such a thing; she'd known it was outside her reach. She didn't bother to ask if she would be working with Eric, either,
since a place on any of the leaders' staff would be out of the question. Of course, the girl would end up working for one of the crows, plodding away, waiting for her chance to become one herself. It wasn't a bad position, but wouldn't be nearly as exciting or challenging as her apprenticeship had been.

"I understand," she nodded, rallying. Honey would just have to use the same attitude she'd had in initiation. Never give up and do her best and keep fighting and clawing her way up until she got what she wanted.

"Come with me and I'll introduce you to your new assignment." Max walked out the door and she followed him through the offices. Over his shoulder, he inquired, "Eric told you we're implementing the canine unit?"

"Yes," Honey confirmed and the reminder brought a smile to her lips. She had that to curl up with at night, at least.

"Good, then this won't come as too much of a shock." He sounded pleased. So, she would be working with the sub who was in charge of making her proposal a reality? That buoyed her spirits greatly. She'd be able to help see the thing through and that was more than the girl could have hoped for.

Max stopped at a door just down from Eric's office and opened it, motioning her inside. It was about the size of a closet and contained a small desk with a computer station, a chair, a wastepaper basket, tall filing cabinet, and a set of shelves bolted into the wall behind the desk and another beside the door. Whoever she was supposed to be assisting must have gone to lunch, because the office was empty.

"You'll need this," her leader said, drawing her attention back to where he stood in the doorway. He was offering her something and it confused her - a mini-tablet. Honey took the small device from him, tilting her head in question. The head of Dauntless grinned from ear to ear, so tickled by something she wasn't privy to. "Congratulations, you beat out Eric by six months."

Her brow furrowed further, absolutely lost. And then it hit her and the girl thought she might faint. Max saw the realization sweep over her features and let out a booming laugh at her shocked expression.

"I'll let you get settled in," he told her, then left, chortling to himself the whole way.

Honey turned back towards the tiny office. Her tiny office. This was her office. She trailed her fingers over the smooth, black metal of the desk. Her desk. And it matched her filing cabinet. And those were her shelves waiting to be filled. She tucked the tab into her back pocket and rubbed the heels of her palms against her closed eyes.

When she'd told Jeanine she wanted to be the youngest ancillary leader in Dauntless history, Honey had only done so as part of the lie she'd been forced into. The notion was absurd in its ambition and lack of realism. Eric was the one who currently held the honor, that was why she'd mentioned it; using him as fodder for her fiction. The girl had never even once given thought to actually being able to do it.

It was a dream. That's it. She was asleep. She relaxed a little. Right, she'd wake up and Friday would start all over again and Max would assign her to some sub - maybe if she was very lucky, it really would be the person who would be spearheading the canine unit. So, she just had to wake herself up. Pinching was supposed to do that, she thought. That was the old wives' tale, wasn't it? Honey pinched her arm, right over her snowy flames, but all she got was pain. She pinched harder.
A laugh in her doorway snapped her head up with a sharp sound of surprise. Damn him always sneaking up on her! Eric filled the opening, the smallness of her office making him appear even more bulky and tall than usual.

"You're not dreaming," he informed her with an amused quirk to his lips.

"Then I'm dead," she declared, shaking her head, still in disbelief. "I had an aneurism when you came to my room and this is the afterlife."

"And you went to heaven, because you're a good girl?" he teased.

"Well, you're here, so I wouldn't go that far," Honey sniped. The young leader laughed, leaning a shoulder on her doorframe.

"Most people would be pretty nervous in your boots, right now," he informed her, in a lazily warning tone. "I don't like being beaten."

"It's your own fault," she insisted. "If you hadn't pushed me into that proposal-

"That was just the icing on the cake," Eric cut her off. "A convenient reason to keep the other crows from fighting us on it. You earned this office." He looked around, one brow raised in a wholly unimpressed manner. "Such as it is."

"Am I really going to be the one heading the canine project?" The girl didn't know how wide-eyed hopeful and childlike she looked. He chuckled warmly.

"Yes. It's your baby; you've got to nurture it." She ran a hand through her curls, pulling hard at her scalp to try and anchor herself.

"This is insane," Honey muttered, shaking her head and looking around again.

"Go to lunch. Get some air. Pull yourself together," he advised sagely. She couldn't believe Eric had ever been as shell-shocked as she was. He probably had his office picked out already when Max appointed him ancillary. And then he probably appointed himself leader.

"Yeah," the dazed girl nodded. He was right. Get out of the office, get some food, some air, bring herself to ground. Okay. She stepped towards him and he backed out of the doorway politely.

As she passed the leader, she felt a light touch on her backside and froze with a startled squeak. Honey gaped up at Eric with wide, shocked eyes and again came that warm chuckle. He was close, so close to her, close enough that she could smell that scent all over him.

"Don't put this in your back pocket," he said, his voice soft and low and unlike she'd ever heard it before. A sharp tingle started in her stomach and worked its way up into her chest. Eric lifted his arm behind her back and tapped something on her shoulder. The mini-tablet that Max had given her. "If you sit on it, you'll have to replace it. That's a lot of points. Even for the youngest ancillary in Dauntless history."

Honey swallowed hard and took the tab from him, tucking it safely into her jacket instead. The man nodded and she could swear the glint she saw was in his eyes and not off his studs.
Oh my. What's a poor Dauntless girl to do?

The thing I love about Candor characters is you can make them say the shit people really should say. All that unspoken shit gets put right out there.

Stuff's gonna start to ramp up now. Hang onto your butts!
Bad Night Redux

Chapter Summary

Honey goes to her brother's wedding reception

Chapter Notes

The chapter is called Bad Night, so expect uncomfortable stuff for our teen heroine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Honey stepped into the event room where Randall and Corrine's reception was being held with Calhoun by her side and the pair could not have stood out more if they tried. In a room full of blue, they were the single point of black, like a raven against the sky. Erudite is known for their fine clothing: vests and tailed coats and suits and gowns. All the attendants had put on their finest to show off for each other. For once in her life, the girl who had never fit in there didn't feel impossibly inferior. Beside her friend wearing his ambassador's uniform, with his maroon lined jacket, shoulders and chin high, she felt small and feminine in her dress, shimmering whenever she moved.

Her arm was looped around his waist; one of his massive hands rested on her back, more than filling the space between her shoulder blades. She'd explained that her family would think he was her boyfriend and he'd laughed, which set her so much more at ease than anything he could have said. He didn't mind playing the part, he told her, but not to get any ideas or Daisy would kill them both.

Dexter spotted the two Dauntless immediately, rushing over to greet the pair. Of course, it wouldn't be hard to notice them. Aside from the black clothing, Calhoun was the tallest person in the room. Honey had to bite her lip to keep from laughing when her mother looked up and up and up at her friend with wide eyes. The big Dauntless had pierced his ears and a few tattoos, but nothing crazy, and his hair was much the same as it had been when he joined the faction - short copper wool. Honey was so glad she'd brought him. His easy smile and engaging laugh charmed her family and his ability to let annoyances roll off his back kept him pleasant when the Erudite in attendance started to be… well, very Erudite.

Weddings at Erudite are fairly dry, usually attended only by the couple and a witness as the paperwork is signed and certified and filed. Normally, both parties will keep their own last name, so that any works will continue to be properly attributed to them. Children have hyphenated last names - the older parent's surname first - until they decide which one they would like to use permanently. It's all very official and bland and she was so glad this was no longer her faction. But the receptions were nice enough. Nothing compared to a Dauntless shindig - such as her friends were currently planning to celebrate her great accomplishment - but still enjoyable. There was good food and drink and music and conversation. Even dancing.

They talked and ate and wished her brother and his new wife well. They chatted and mingled, because everyone was curious about the Dauntless couple. Honey didn't tell her family about her appointment to leadership, not wanting to steal any of the spotlight from the newlyweds. The news
would keep. For a little while, the girl allowed herself to pretend that this wasn't all just a farce to placate her family and keep from having to explain Eric's coat on her body and that she really was there with Calhoun as her date. It was pleasant. Easy. Comfortable. He was warm at her side and very gentle whenever he touched her arm or her back. When she allowed him to lead her onto the dance floor, he looped his arms around her and let her lean against his massive frame, resting his hands respectfully along her spine.

Honey smiled up at him and he back at her, warm and sweet and she knew. She loved Calhoun; he was her dear friend and she adored him, but she didn't want him. Which was good, since he was absolutely in love with Daisy. The gentle touch of his hand was lovely, but the girl also wanted someone who held her as if they worried she'd slip away. And when they danced, she wanted to be pulled close and tight. Honey realized that she wanted the warmth and comfort, but also someone who would challenge her, excite her. She wanted someone like Four or Eric; someone who would keep her on her toes.

"Mind if I cut in?" Calhoun stopped, looking at the man who'd made the polite inquiry. Kent from Behaviorism looked rather dapper in his shiny lapiz vest and pale, powder blue button up shirt. The big Dauntless looked down at her and whatever neutral expression Honey thought she'd adopted didn't fool him for a second.

"Yeah, actually." No qualification. No apology. Calhoun was Dauntless; he didn't have to be polite or nice, he chose to be, and right then he was choosing not to be. He held her a little tighter, almost possessive, definitely protective. She loved him a little more.

After a moment, Kent chuckled, chagrinned. "Well, maybe the next one."

"No, probably not," Calhoun shrugged, turning them away from the man. Kent left and Honey let out a breath, relaxing against her friend in relief. "You wanna tell me what that was about?"

She sighed and gave him a weak smile. "Not really."

"Old boyfriend?" he asked anyway. She shook her head.

"Someone too interested in the little Dauntless girl," she told him, silently asking him to leave it at that. He did, but rubbed her back gently, reassuringly. It was a good thing she didn't want Calhoun, Honey thought, or she might have fallen in love with him just then.

The evening was winding down and soon they would say their goodbyes. Honey excused herself to the ladies' room, knowing that if she had to go even a little bit, the second she hit the frigid night air she would be miserable. And then to have to run and catch the train back to Dauntless? No thank you. She took care of business and washed her hands and took a moment to look at herself in the mirror. The white curls and tattoo coupled with the black dress might put some in mind of Candor, but she thought she looked very Dauntless. She'd even put on a slash of eyeliner and some golden shimmer at her lips. Her mother had been beside herself with how feminine her daughter looked for once; though she'd lamented the boots and black tights the young Dauntless wore beneath. Honey knew she meant it as a compliment.

"I never did get that dance." The girl squealed and whirled towards the voice. She'd been headed back to the party to say goodnight and collect her date and now she found herself alone in a hallway with a laughing Kent. "I'm sorry. I didn't think it was possible to scare a Dauntless."

"There's a difference between being startled and being scared," she scowled at him.
"But I think both are true when it comes to you and I," he smirked at her. His words were light and teasing, but there was an undercurrent to them that was dark and warm and threatening. Honey felt a pull in her stomach that she didn't quite understand. "I knew you wouldn't message me, even when I put my ID into the scroll. I thought, 'she's seen right through me and knows how badly I want her'."

Her mouth went dry at his candid admission. Her palms felt hot, her shoulders and cheeks flushing. Honey shook her head, unable to speak. His mouth curved into a smile like she'd never seen before, something that went beyond warmth.

"No? Then let me show you," he purred, stepping into her. He cupped her cheek with his free hand, tilting her face up as he bent down, brushing his lips against hers. A shiver shook the girl against him and she gasped. He took that as invitation and pressed his mouth more firmly against hers, his tongue snaking between her teeth to stroke against her own. Kent tasted of champagne and maybe that was why Honey's head seemed foggy all of a sudden.

She gripped his vest, unsteady on her feet. He sighed softly into her mouth and she breathed it in, moving her tongue back against his tentatively. His fingers slid into her hair and her scalp prickled, gooseflesh racing its way down her neck and across her shoulders. He pulled the hand he held up to his waist and left it there, wrapping his arm around her shoulders to pull her closer. The girl went willingly, caught up in the feel of him. Slowly, Kent moved forward, backing her into the wall and Honey gasped again when his body pressed into hers.

The man groaned softly, his hand slipping from her hair and down over her shoulder to cup her breast and squeeze. Her brain was struggling to catch up, every synapse firing as so many new sensations bombarded her nerve endings. The young Dauntless let out a little whimper and he pressed harder, pushed his tongue deeper into her mouth. The hand at her back pulled free, dropping to stroke against her hip. He stooped lower, pushing up beneath her skirt and squeezing high on her thigh.

The sound Honey made this time was less inviting and the fog in her brain started to quickly evaporate. She pushed at Kent's chest, but he didn't budge. She pushed harder. When he still didn't move, she bit his tongue. The man jerked back from her with a bark of pain. He cupped his mouth, staring at her in shock.

"What was that for?" he demanded, but didn't appear confused at all.

"I'm Dauntless, not an escort," she told him coldly.

Honey didn't know if other factions had them, but Erudite did. Men and women who offered themselves to satisfy the sexual wants of others in the faction, usually in exchange for favors. It was accepted, since sexual frustration can cause poor work performance and many Erudite were simply too caught up in their research to find partners through normal socialization.

"I'm not going to fuck you in a hallway outside my brother's wedding reception." She was repulsed by the idea. By him thinking so little of her that she'd do such a thing, too. As far as Kent knew, her boyfriend was waiting back in that event room. "I'm not going to fuck you at all."

He glared at her, all that heat and desire twisting into malice before her eyes. Honey pushed off of the wall and moved to head back to the reception, but the furious man grabbed her and shoved her face-first back against the cold, painted bricks. She reacted instantly, stomping down on his instep and jerking her head up and back into his chin and mouth. Kent shouted in pain, stumbling back. She twisted in place, kicking him hard in the stomach and he went down with a breathless grunt.

"Did you think you could touch me?" Honey snarled at the pathetic creature lying at her feet, curled
up into himself. She reeled back to kick him and froze. She backed away quickly, as cold sweat chilled her spine. The girl bolted, racing back to the reception hall to find Calhoun. He was waiting by the door, holding a glass of water, which he dropped when she crashed into his chest and wrapped her arms around his waist.

"What's wrong?" he asked, alarmed, wrapping his arms around her in a reflexive act of protection; his spine snapped straight, eyes scanning the room for threats.

Honey shook her head. She shook her everything, shivers wracking her small frame. "I need to leave. Now."

"Alright. Do you want to say goodbye to your brother?" She didn't, but she should. Leaning heavily on her friend, the shaken Dauntless made her way to her family. She'd had too much champagne and needed to go home, said her goodbyes and let Calhoun lead her out of the building. He asked if she needed his help getting onto the train, but she told him she'd be fine. And she was. She was just terrified.

When Honey had been through her Landscape and beaten the simulation Daisy apparently to death, she'd thought her fear was that she would hurt one of her friends in training. Now, the girl knew better. She sat beside Calhoun, taking comfort from the solidity of his strong form beside her more than his warmth against the cold, and tugged at the silver ring in her ear. She'd told Four it wasn't a trophy.

It was a shackle.

Chapter End Notes

I know it's a short chapter, that's why I'm posting two today. Second one is on its way!
Dare Day

Chapter Summary

The best Dauntless holiday EVER.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

That first month of the new year slipped by faster than any in her life. This was what Honey had spent so many years yearning for: the challenges of Dauntless. Her new position was demanding and she relished it, putting her all into the canine project. Her project. Not something assigned by school or one of the leaders, but her own, something she was truly passionate about.

The trip to Amity had been a long, bitterly cold one, but so very worth it. Most of the old dog breeds were just a part of history now, but the German Sheppard was thriving. Amity used them to tend their livestock and keep coyotes and foxes away from their chickens. They were gorgeous beasts, huge and strong and fast and loyal. Perfect. The young ancillary had reviewed bloodlines and spoke to trainers and arranged breeding and went home satisfied.

There were kennels to be built and gear to be designed and meetings with veterinarians and applications from the Patrol officers who volunteered for the unit to be reviewed. So much to do and Honey gathered the tasks to her greedily, gluttonously. Her dedication and fervor polarized the other crows. They had either grown to respect her as an equal, impressed by her fast ascension and hard work ethic, or they despised her for the same reasons. It didn't help the latter camp that Max favored her. It didn't garner her more allies that Eric was among their number.

Honey never saw any of the other subs down in the Mats. She saw plenty of Patrol, some of whom had applied for her unit. The girl had considered those fights part of the interview. She didn't always win, but she won often enough that Dante was happy to keep letting her fight without guilt - win or lose, he made a profit off her blood. People continued to call her the kid and she blamed Baldy for that, since he seemed incapable of putting her real name up on that board of his.

She saw Four there sometimes, too. They'd never fought each other again and Honey wondered if that had been Dante's call or the dark, broody man's. She liked to watch him fight. He moved with such power and grace, holding himself back with a steely will she admired and coveted. She longed to know what that tattoo of his was that she could only see peaking from beneath his clothes, like fingers caressing his neck and shoulders. But he was impossibly far beyond her reach.

The next month brought with it an excited buzz for a holiday the Erudite-born girl had never heard of: Dare Day. The extra day every four years, leap day, was celebrated by Dauntless more exuberantly than any other. An extra day could not be wasted. They had to make the most of the precious time. To that end, members challenged each other, sometimes to insane degrees. Dares ranged anywhere from streaking the Pit to hanging from the Chasm. Sometimes people died on Dare Day, but that risk only seemed to increase the frenzy. There was no reward, only bragging rights, only stories to be told for years to come; the only penalty for refusing a challenge, the shame of your friends laughing at you, possibly also for years to come.
Honey had barely made it to breakfast when Hotdog was daring her to eat a whole chocolate cake. Luckily, he wasn’t the only one who had thought of that particular challenge and there wasn’t a crumb of cake to be had in the entire compound by that point. There were plenty of apples, though; so instead, she agreed to let Four throw a knife to knock one off her head. He had needed to be dared, too; reluctantly giving in only because he knew he wouldn’t hit her. Honey dared Joseph to really let Damon put that tattoo on his rear end, but apparently she was too late; so the man added "Property of" instead. Daisy dared Calhoun to something very naughty they refused to tell anyone about before rushing off into the lower tunnels. Jasper dared Honey to come back to the room he now shared with Gertie, but the white-haired girl felt just fine turning that one down.

It was a wild mess of abandon. Someone fell from the rock wall while climbing it blindfolded, but wasn’t seriously hurt. Several couples were kicked out of various shops and parlors after being caught in the middle of completing a dare. An entire Patrol squad ran through the Pit clad in only their helmets and boots - it was not the Mudhumpers. There were eating contests that ended messily and drinking contests that ended much the same way. There was laughing and cheering and chaos and everything the other factions suspected about life at Dauntless, but were afraid to ask.

Honey was happily making her way from the Pit to the kitchens, intent on getting a hold of some chocolate cake one way or another, even if she had to bake it herself, when she saw Eric. In the middle of Dare Day and all the madness, he was walking down the hall, thumbing through his mini-tablet like any other afternoon. It seemed offensive to the faction. Honestly, though, the girl couldn’t imagine anyone but Max daring Eric to do anything. Maybe one of the other leaders; maybe Kai, but who would ever agree to a dare made by Kai?

He glanced up as they passed, then paused, "Enjoying your first Dare Day?"

Honey grinned a little, stopping as well and turning back to face him. "It’s certainly exciting."

"Anything too exciting for you?" Eric asked, knowingly. She knew what he was implying and, yes, she had been challenged to sexual activities by people other than just Jasper. It had occurred to her that losing her virginity on a dare on Dare Day would be the most Dauntless way to go about it, but just couldn’t bring herself to do it. If the right person had asked her, perhaps. After the game of William Tell, Four had vanished, but she couldn’t imagine him daring anyone in that manner, anyway. Honey definitely didn’t have the balls to challenge him.

She shrugged, bobbing her head side to side noncommittally. The leader smirked, looking oddly pleased by her response.

"What about you?" she asked before thinking and cursed herself for it. "Does anyone dare the leaders?"

He shrugged. "Max gets the brunt of it. He’s much more inviting than I am."

Yes, she could see that. Eric was definitely not what one would call approachable on the best of days. Still, it was a shame that he would miss out on the fun and stupidity of the holiday. Honey opened her mouth, but caught herself this time. He might tolerate some comments here and there when he was in a good mood, but she absolutely could not challenge Eric. And what would she even dare him to do? Eat cake until he was sick? Drink until he passed out? Streak the Pit? The girl couldn’t imagine him doing any of those things; they were ridiculous. And she really wished she hadn’t even referenced that last one, because the idea of him naked sent little tingly feelings of both carnal curiosity and terror through her system. That was forbidden stuff.

"Well, I’m in search of cake, so…” Honey motioned down the corridor in the direction she had been headed.
"I saw that look," Eric informed her, eyes narrowing slightly under low brows.

"What?" she blinked at him, her heart starting to beat faster. His lips curled upwards in a little sneer.

"You know," he insisted softly. His expression of almost cruel enjoyment reminded her very much of the incident on the knife range. The girl swallowed hard and shook her head. "No? My mistake."

She wanted to feel relieved that he was letting it go, but Eric was still looking at her that way and it sent a chill up her spine. He tucked his tablet away and crossed his arms, looking at Honey appraisingly. She fought back the urge to fidget.

"As a leader, I suppose I should participate in all faction holidays, no matter how asinine. And it's your first Dare Day, so I'd be remiss if I didn't help you make the most of it." He spoke in a deceptively smooth voice that put the girl in mind of a knife wrapped in silk. His eyes, so stormy gray here in the dim corridor, dropped to her mouth and her heart skipped a beat. Eric unfolded his arms and stepped towards her, slow and sinuous like a snake. Like a snake ready to strike.

Honey stepped back to find she was far closer to the wall than she'd thought and all but fell against it. His lips curved into the same kind of dark smile Kent had worn at her brother's reception, only far more threatening because this was Eric. He loomed over her, huge and imposing and close enough she could feel the heat coming off him in the chilly air of the Dauntless tunnels. He lifted his hands, placing them on the wall beside her shoulders, and Honey couldn't help but notice how thick his biceps were as they flexed just slightly, straining against the soft cotton of the shirt he wore beneath his vest.

"I dare you…" Eric breathed in a low rumble that rolled through her like thunder. He leaned in closer still, until his vest brushed against her tshirt and her breasts felt strange and tight as her nipples hardened the instant his chest had touched hers. His breath fell on her jaw and the side of her throat, raising goosebumps on her skin. Honey was on fire, heart pounding, hands shaking. Heat coiled low in her belly, even lower than that. He continued in that breathy purr, directly into her ear, "I dare you to dare me."

Honey gasped, sucking in his scent along with the air. Shock and fear locked her in place. God, he was too close, too intimidating. Her mind raced, trying to think of something, anything to get him to back up. She couldn't make her lips work, couldn't get any sound through her vocal cords. Her breaths came in short, soft pants that she couldn't slow or deepen; she could feel them washing back onto her from where they hit the place his throat and shoulder met.

Eric drew back, just a bit, just enough, and those steely eyes filled her world, all smug enjoyment of the effect he was having on her.

"Nothing?" he asked, soft and airy, his breath falling against Honey's slightly open mouth and she could almost taste it. His tone feigned disappointment, but it was obvious he was feeling anything but. "Shame. Maybe next time."

Eric pulled slowly away from her, his hands sliding down the wall to hang at his sides. He tilted his head to the side, smirking at her in that superior way she knew so well.

"You should get something cool to drink," he advised, amused and condescending. "You look a little flushed."

And then he was gone, walking away down the corridor as if nothing had happened, leaving the shaking, throbbing girl to stare after him.
At first, Honey couldn't bring herself to even look at Eric after Dare Day, let alone speak to him. She avoided him like the plague and when she was forced to be in the same room, she turned into a blushing idiot. The girl wracked her brain, trying to figure out why, why the leader would do such a thing. He didn't want her. If that were the case, he would have dared her to do something instead of pushing her to dare him. The young ancillary saw his eyes, his smirk when she tried to sleep at night, could almost feel him so close to her. That left Honey with some very persistent throbbing in some very embarrassing places. That didn't help with her blushing problem.

Eric had so enjoyed the effect he had on her, the way she'd been so very overcome by him. It took Honey nearly a week to realize that enjoyment was the reason. She'd been thinking about the look on his face in the hall and how it reminded her of the knife range and was struck by how very similar the situations were - Eric imposing his will upon the vulnerable girl, drinking in her fear and submission. He couldn't very well do that sort of thing now; now that she was an ancillary leader. He knew she had no fear of being kicked out of Dauntless. She had a secure place in the faction and Max liked her, respected her; Eric could do nothing on that front to torment Honey. So he had found a new way.

Using her inexperience as a weapon, playing on the naturally high hormonal responses of her teen physiology, he turned her burgeoning sexuality against her and he'd done it spectacularly well. There was nothing the girl could do about her physical response to his very muscular, very appealing form, but she could control how she reacted otherwise. Honey's pulse might quicken and she might tingle, blush, even shiver, there was no helping it, but she wouldn't cower and clam up like a schoolgirl with a crush. The next time Eric teased her, she'd ignored him. It took every ounce of her self control but she'd just given him a bored look and gone about her business. It didn't dissuade him, unfortunately, but it certainly made the girl feel better about herself.

One day, Honey found herself firing back. She'd absentmindedly tucked her mini-tablet into her back pocket, a habit she had trouble breaking. Eric wasn't the only one who had warned her not to do so, but he was the only one with that particular way of correcting her. She'd been leaning over a table, looking at the designs she'd been given for different sorts of dog harnesses when she felt the light brush of fingers against her behind.

With a squeal of surprise, the girl jerked upright, bumping hard into an unyielding surface. Eric chuckled in amusement and plucked the tab from her pocket.

"I'm starting to think you do this on purpose," he teased, offering her the device. With a scowl, Honey snatched it from his hand and put it away properly in her jacket. He was so arrogant, so satisfied with himself at both startling her for the thousandth time and the flush his touch had brought up in her cheeks and along her collar, she just had to wipe the look off his face.

Puffing out a soft scoff, the girl smirked up at him with an exaggerated haughtiness of her own. "Maybe I do and maybe I do," she quipped, surprising herself with the smoothness of her own voice. His eyes widened and for the first time, Honey felt the pleasure of legitimately shocking Eric into silence.

He quickly recovered, of course, smirking right back and telling her, "If you want me to really touch you, it's not going to happen in the office."

He left her to her work, then, just as confident as ever, but the girl had that moment. That one moment where she had gotten to him, where she had shown that he couldn't manipulate her just any way he wanted. Honey wore it like armor and when Eric teased her, she teased back. It actually became sort of fun, like a game of wits. A game she played with one of the most dangerous men in the faction and if that wasn't Dauntless, she didn't know what was.
Chapter End Notes

Jinkies, those Dauntless tunnels are gettin' a bit steamy.
The teasing game with Eric and her own thoughts were all well and good, but Honey was starting to realize she not only wanted more, but needed it. She had gotten by with just her mind and fingers to bring her release all her life, but she wasn't a child any longer. She was a part of the Dauntless leadership and confident in herself and was tired of only her own touch to ease her desire and the taunting words of her superior for male company. It was time to stop playing pretend about Four and actually step into the ring, as it were. Unfortunately, unlike a trip to the Mats, she had no idea how to go about finding an opponent in this particular arena.

When Honey told Daisy about her issue, her friend had laughed. "You're going to have more trouble picking just one." The girl rolled her eyes. "I guess that's also a problem. How do I know who to say yes to? I don't want to waste my time with someone I'll never even want to kiss."

She'd told Daisy she wanted to start dating, not about how restless and frustrated she was getting sexually. It wasn't as though Honey was asking for advice on choosing someone to take her virginity. Though, really, she may as well be, since everyone surely knew she was woefully inexperienced. Unfortunately, what experience she did have wasn't positive and maybe Kent had left her a little cagey when it came to the attentions of men.

"You want to hold interviews?" Daisy chuckled. "Review some applications like with the canine unit?"

Honey huffed and poked at her bruised knuckles with her fork. "It's easy for you to say, you got to watch Calhoun all through initiation and see what kind of person he was. He practically had 'amazing' tattooed across his forehead."

Her friend smiled, love and pride all over her sweet face. "I guess you're right. Isn't there anyone you work with who shouts amazing at you?"

Yes, but he terrifies me, too, and for good reason. "I'd never go near any of those crows," the girl insisted, wholly truthful. Even the ones who respected Honey were still crows and she didn't think she could trust any of them completely. She told Daisy as much.

The squad leader nodded in understanding, then took on a thoughtful countenance. "Do you trust
Honey narrowed her eyes. "You have a boyfriend." And she didn't really like girls.

Daisy snorted and shook her head, "No, stupid. I mean, do you trust my judgment?"

"I guess so," the young sub said, tilting her head curiously.

"Cause I've got this guy in my squad. Nice guy, good officer, and he's always asking me about you," her friend explained. "He says he's seen you down in the Mats. He thinks you're pretty impressive."

Honey chewed her lip, continuing to poke absently at her bruises. "Is he smart and fun, too?" Why beat around the bush? 'Nice' could mean a lot of things.

"He's pretty smart." The young woman nodded, then grinned impishly. "He got plastered on Dare Day and went around kissing everyone like it was New Year."

That seemed to qualify as "fun" and made the shorter girl smile. What could it hurt, really? If she didn't like him, she just didn't like him. "Is he cute?"

Daisy's impish grin widened and she winked. "He's somethin', alright."

He, Kappa, was, in fact, something. As tall and lanky as Four, but thicker and with more angular features. He reminded Honey of Jack Kang, the head of Candor. His dark eyes were narrow above sharp cheekbones, his lips thin, but not unattractively so. He had thick, shiny black hair that fell across his forehead in jagged spikes and an a golden-copper skin tone that gave her the impression of warmth and sunshine. Kappa had a quick smile and relaxed manner, but beneath that was a sense of readiness, of strength and speed waiting to be called forth. She could see how he'd be a good Patrol officer.

Their first meeting had been the epitome of casual, just lunch in the cafeteria. He'd found her and introduced himself, saying Daisy had told him she was interested in meeting him. Honey had been worried she would be awkward and blushy, but all the time she spent dealing with Eric and his teasing had given her a pleasantly surprising amount of confidence and self control. She'd thank him if he weren't so Eric.

Kappa was smart, fairly quick witted and liked to laugh. They had chatted easily back and forth. The longer Honey spent with him, the more at ease she felt. She thought she might be like to get to know him better, that it wouldn't be a waste of her time. She also thought, most importantly, that if she decided she wasn't interested, that he would take it in stride. That soothed the girl's nagging doubts more than anything else. Because he had evening patrols that week and she worked all day, they made plans to see each other again that Saturday, after she finished at the office. A proper date with a proper Dauntless man. Her stomach was all aflutter.

On Saturday morning, Honey was down at the loading dock, checking over a shipment of the materials that would be used to make the dog harnesses. As she poked through the boxes, she noticed there was a lot of activity a few bays down from where she stood. There were at least a dozen workers hurriedly unloading equipment from a truck. Computer equipment. Why had they gotten a shipment of computer equipment? The girl couldn't recall anything about new tech in the staff
meetings. Even if it had been a closed session issue, she should have known about it. Curiosity got the better of her and she went to ask. She was an ancillary leader, after all; there was no reason for her not to.

The worker Honey stopped had only shrugged. He didn't know, he just knew it needed to go to an empty space near the security office. New security equipment? Four would know; she'd ask him. The girl went to finish with her own order, signing off on everything and sending it on to manufacturing, then headed towards the security sector. The door to the room they were filling with electronics was open, workers moving quickly back and forth - black ants instead of blue. Honey let herself into security and found the man she was looking for.

"Hey, Four, got a minute?" she asked in lieu of greetings. He gave her a tight lipped smile, looking stressed.

"Sure, what do you need?"

"You guys getting new consoles or something? I was down on the docks an-

"No, nothing new," Four quickly told her. His voice was normal, but his shoulders looked so tight they were about to snap. Honey narrowed her eyes in question. The muscle on the side of his jaw twitched. Something was clearly wrong.

"I need to talk to you about maybe having a canine officer in security. Can you stop by my office later?" The young ancillary didn't need to talk to him about any such thing and she knew the man could tell. But that was good, because she wanted him to know it was an excuse to get him alone.

"I probably won't be able to, sorry," Four shrugged. Now Honey really wanted to know what was going on inside his head. Was it because he didn't want to tell her or because he didn't want to tell her in her office?

"Okay, well, when you get a minute, just come find me," she told him, keeping her tone light as well. Then added, with the same tone, but hard eyes, "Or I'll find you. Either way is fine by me."

Four nodded. His expression was blank, unreadable, but his eyes were darker than she'd ever seen and full of tension, maybe even fear. That scared her. If something frightened the legendary Four, she definitely needed to find out what it was.

As she left the security office, a flash of blue immediately caught Honey's attention and drew her eye. A navy blazer under blond hair that bobbed with a familiar gait adorned the woman walking into the room where the computer equipment had been taken. What the fuck was Jeanine Matthews doing at Dauntless?

Honey's answers would have to wait. Faction secrets and intrigues aside, she had a date that evening. Whatever was going on with Four or between Dauntless and Erudite would keep, for a night at least. Besides, Four hadn't come to find her and giving him a little time to mull it over couldn't be a bad thing. If the girl didn't see him by Tuesday, she would go hunting for the broody man. Until then, she put it from her mind. Or tried to, anyway, which was as good as any Erudite-born could expect.

Honey met Kappa in the Pit and from there they went to dinner. He wore a black, long-sleeved shirt that looked like it had been painted onto him, outlining every bit of muscle on his torso and arms beautifully. There was a tattoo on the back of his right wrist that just peeked out onto his hand and, like the one that teased Four's neck, she very much wanted to see what the rest of it looked like. As
for Honey, she wore a snug v-necked tee that showed just a hint of cleavage and a pair of fleece-lined, black leather arm warmers that covered her from bicep to knuckles so she could comfortably go without a jacket. It was chilly in most of the Dauntless compound, even moreso in winter, so her pants were the loose, multi-pocketed kind. She had thought about wearing something tighter, but decided against it. The shirt was enough for a first date, she thought. Kappa seemed to appreciate it well enough.

They ate in a small specialty diner that served things like chicken with parmesan and tortellini. It was delicious and might have reminded her of Erudite fare, but was so rich and hearty the girl didn't feel it out of place at Dauntless. Laughter came frequently, as did Kappa's wide smile. He had been Dauntless-born and gotten his first tattoo at the age of ten, a shark on his bicep. Honey, who had always been intrigued by the ocean had immediately asked to see it and Kappa told her he'd have to take his shirt off for that to happen. It took very little egging from her for the man to peel off the garment right there in the diner.

Absolutely gorgeous. Lean and taut and impressive and he knew it, too, judging by the smile he gave her. That was alright, she didn't mind a little arrogance. The shark was a hammerhead, olive toned and curled like a C. It must have been huge on a ten year-old's arm given its size now. Before her date pulled his shirt back on, Honey managed to catch the ink on the back of his wrist. A sunburst, black and hollow with some writing above it. Well, now she wanted to know what that writing said.

When they'd finished their meal, Kappa challenged Honey to climb the rock wall. It was a good match up. She was faster, but he had a much longer reach, so they'd been nearly neck and neck the whole way up. When she'd beaten him, the man grabbed the girl and feigned outrage, threatening to throw her from the wall. Honey had laughed and clung to his arms, which she knew had been the point of his little farce: giving her an excuse to touch him and feel his strength. A little tricksy, but the young sub couldn't say she hated it.

Then Kappa had asked her about the hole.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"I know you go to the Mats. I've seen you fight," he expounded. "Have you ever been to the Hole?"

Honey shook her head. She had no idea what he was talking about. The man grinned, something less than friendly flashing in his eyes.

"C'mon, I'll show you," he said, suddenly eager. She let him take her hand and lead her away from the Pit. As they went deeper and deeper into the lesser trafficked tunnels of the compound, a sense of anxiety started to well up within her. Kappa was not Kent. He was much bigger, much stronger, and far more experienced with fighting than she was. If Daisy's judgment had been wrong, Honey would be in very big trouble.

When she heard the unmistakable sound of shouting up ahead, the girl's anxiety turned to intrigue. This was a very disused part of Dauntless. The walls were cracked, water dripped from the ceiling making the floor slick. They entered a chamber and Honey immediately understood why it was called the Hole - that's what it was. The room wasn't overly large, maybe twice the size of the conference room where the staff meetings were held. It was packed full of people like seeds in a pomegranate. Packed full of men, Honey realized; she might be the only female in the room. They were shouting, cheering, shoving at each other and waving yellow slips around. Betting?

As Kappa forced his way through the crush, he kept her firmly at his side with an arm tight around her, lest she slip away. He pushed his way to the inner edge of the crowd, positioning Honey safely in front of him, his hands moving to rest securely on her shoulders. In the middle of the room, the
ground had been broken and dug out into a wide, arguably round pit about three or four feet deep. It was filled with sand and sawdust, a good portion of which was currently stained a red that was garish under the single, harsh fluorescent light mounted above. Now Honey understood why Kappa had brought her. In the pit, two men rolled on the sand, viciously striking at each other much to the delight of the crowd.

The larger of the two men gained the upper hand, pinning the smaller to the ground and pummeling him mercilessly. His opponent grabbed for his throat, but the larger fighter caught his arm and twisted it with a loud pop, causing the smaller man to scream in pain. "None of that hole shit here, fucker!" So that's what the ref had meant when Ellis tried to break her ankle. This was nothing like the Mats. This was brutal and cruel and there were no rules. Honey couldn't look away.

With one more savage blow, the smaller man went limp, unconscious, beaten. The taller fighter stood, backing away as a couple of Dauntless rushed into the pit to drag the fallen combatant out and disappear behind the wall of spectators. She could only hope they were taking him to the infirmary. The tall man bent over, resting his hands on his knees to catch his breath for a moment. His shirt was torn and sawdust clung to his wildly disheveled hair and clothing. He wiped his face and spat onto the sand, then stood straight and defiant.

"Next!" he shouted. The crowd roared in approval. Honey froze, every muscle in her body snapping taut. She hadn't recognized him from behind, covered in dust and sand and blood, his hair anything but perfectly in order, his clothes anything but clean and smart. The voice she'd know anywhere, in any tone.

Eric turned in place as he waited for the next idiot to drop down into the pit with him, hands on his hips, sneering at the crowd. He didn't have to wait long. A giant of a man thumped down onto the sand. He had several inches on the young leader and at least thirty pounds of muscle more. He looked like he could snap an oak tree in half. Honey's heart leapt into her throat, frantically trying to escape. Eric only grinned, eager to begin.

The big man peeled off his shirt and charged her former mentor like a train; she could almost feel his footfalls as he rushed across the pit. Eric caught him hard in the midsection with his boot, then threw a barrage of punches and elbows that were too fast for her to keep up with. The giant bellowed as his opponent kicked the side of his knee with another sickening pop, taking him to ground. He grabbed Eric's leg, yanking it from under him and dropping the other man down to the sand as well. Massive hands closed on the leader's throat, but Eric thrust his palm hard into the other man's nose with the same squelching crunch that Ellis's had made under Honey's own elbow.

The bigger man let go, rearing back, bleeding all over himself. Eric sat up and aimed a fist at his face, but the giant was quicker than he looked and caught it, pulling his opponent close and landing his own punch. The young leader's head snapped back and aside one, twice, and again, and the larger fighter shoved him onto his stomach, twisting his arm up behind him. Eric rolled as far as he could to his side, throwing a handful of sand into his adversary's face. The big man released him with a furious grunt, wiping at the grit in his eyes. He reached for his opponent blindly, but Eric was already squirming away. He kicked out, his boot connecting with the giant's chest.

Two massive hands closed around his calf, hauling him back within strike range. Eric's legs were splayed open, the man between, pinning one of the leader's arms to his chest and punching him again and again in the ribs, his blood streaming down onto the young leader's face. Eric hooked his boots together and squeezed, arching up, crushing the other man's midsection. The giant shouted in pain. He clawed at Eric's legs, trying to dislodge him, but the smaller man just beared down harder, grunting between clenched and bared teeth with the effort.
The giant pulled Eric up by his arm and shoulder then slammed him back against the ground. The legs stayed locked where they were, painfully constricting his ribs and kidneys, blocking his diaphragm and limiting his oxygen. He pulled Eric up again, intending to break him against the unforgiving sands and stone beneath, but the young leader grabbed the other fighter and pulled himself close, sinking his teeth into the man's cheek. The giant screamed, trying to pull Eric back. He managed to force the leader off him, but Eric took a chunk of flesh along with a bestial snarl.

With another scream, the larger man cupped his torn, bloody cheek. It was a mistake. Eric grabbed him again, snapping forward in a brutal headbutt that obliterated the bridge of his adversary's nose and knocked him out cold. Both men slumped to the sand, the giant limp as a rag doll atop Honey's former mentor. With a grunt of disgust, Eric spat out the hunk of meat and skin and rolled the big man off of him. He lay there panting for a moment as the crowd lost their minds.

This time, it took four people to haul the giant off the sands. Eric struggled to his feet, exhausted but victorious. Honey couldn't breathe. She'd never seen that type of violence, not even in the Erudite video archives. He had literally torn into the other man and destroyed him. Honey shivered, the hair on the back of her neck standing on end. He stood in the center of the pit, dirty, bruised, panting heavily, and drenched in his opponent's blood like some kind of battle god.

Eric arched back, cracking his spine, and rolled his shoulder as if he'd done nothing more strenuous than rise from the couch. He lifted a hand to his ribs, wincing slightly as he palpated them; checking for breaks no doubt. It struck her then that he was taking stock of his injuries and deciding if he wanted another fight. How many had he had before she'd arrived? Rolling his neck, Eric took a deep breath and sighed, then looked at the crowd. He was going to call for another. Was he even human? Honey now truly understood why the aura of power and danger emanated so strongly from him, why the whole of Dauntless seemed to fear him. Eric was a monster.

But the call never came. He had stilled, like stone, like marble. He had seen her.

The room reverberated with the low pitched roar of the crowd's displeasure as their champion stalked across the sand and boosted himself out of the pit. His eyes were locked on her own and, despite the pounding in her ears, Honey couldn't feel her heartbeat. Kappa seemed to melt away, the crowd was nothing but a soft buzz at the back of her mind. Eric stopped in front of her, glaring down at her, his eyes wide and bright against the deep crimson that stained his skin. His chest and shoulders rose and fell with each heavy breath and Honey found herself matching his cadence. He was a beast in man's form and terrifying.

Honey never ran from her fears. Foolish. Worse, yet, she took a step towards him - to what end, she didn't know.

If Eric glaring at her from beneath a mask of blood had been terrifying, there wasn't a word for how it looked when he smiled.

But he didn't allow her to get any closer. He turned and walked away, the crowd parting before him and closing in behind, cutting him off from her view.

Honey vaguely recalled Kappa leading her from the Hole, apologizing. She thought she had told him it was alright, the violence didn't upset her. She'd gotten home somehow, possibly showered, changed for bed. Maybe had a glass of water or a snack. The only thing Honey remembered clearly was the way her thighs had shuddered while her hand worked between them and that when climax slammed through her, it was Eric's name she gasped.
Chapter End Notes

Poor, Honey, what has she gotten herself into?

Well, now we all know where Eric's been getting those bruises of his. You like?
A Storm Rolling In

Chapter Summary

Clouds on the horizon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sunday came and went, Honey's stomach a knot of apprehension. She knew Eric wouldn't say anything about their encounter in the Hole, the same way he hadn't mentioned her bruises and she had never mentioned his. He wouldn't say anything in the office. But he could find her anywhere. Find her for what purpose, she didn't know. She had no idea why she was so anxious and, so, no idea how to quash the feeling. The girl couldn't get him out of her head; his power, the violence, the way he shook it off and demanded more.

When Daisy found out Kappa had taken her down into the Hole, she was livid. Angry with herself for her part in their meeting, angry with Kappa for taking his date there, and even angry with Honey for not leaving the instant she saw what was going on down there. The girl said she'd been caught up in the moment, but promised not to go back. She didn't promise never to go back, however - an important distinction. Even with the inner turmoil plaguing her, she wanted to. She wanted to see Eric unleashed again. More and more, Honey was learning new things about herself that told her Dauntless was the only place she could ever have belonged.

It was Tuesday and Four had still not come to her. So, Honey had started looking for him. It would do no good to catch him at work, the one place she knew he would be, because there were too many people there and even if he wanted to tell her what he knew, he wouldn't be able to. The man was a fucking ghost. She'd even gone to his quarters, but either he wasn't there or refused to answer. She had seriously considered breaking the door in, but decided against it. For the moment.

She had such a scowl on her face when she returned to the office, her secretary, Marta, had been concerned. Honey insisted she was just in a bad mood and Marta, who was only four years older, had tried to cheer her up by insisting the best way to get in a good mood was some angry sex. Then had started suggesting suitable candidates. Suitable in the very loosest sense.

"Dominic is very friendly with you," she told Honey with a grin. The girl rolled her eyes.

"He's also twenty years older than me and I'm pretty sure he only likes guys," she replied. Marta thought that over for a moment.

"Maybe he'd let you watch." As irritated as she was, that had made the young sub laugh. Scenting blood in the water, her secretary pushed further. "Or Kai. I heard he let you-" in a salacious hiss "-touch his guns."

"I think he's the only one he'll let polish that particular pistol," Honey quipped and they both laughed at that. She liked Marta, was so happy when the young woman had applied to be part of her staff. Her only staff, actually. Honey was allowed more, but preferred to do her own dirty work.
"What about Max?" Marta asked.

"What about him?"

The woman gave her an exasperated look. "Everything about him! Don't you just want to bite those leadership tattoos?"

"Oh God!" Honey laughed through her cringe. Sometimes she thought maybe she let Marta speak a little too freely in an office setting, but she liked the woman's humor and her outrageous remarks too much to stop her. She was Honey's staff, anyway, so who was she going to offend?

"I bet he'd be like a big teddy bear," the secretary insisted with a big, silly grin. "All snuggly and cuddly afterwards."

"I don't want to know," the girl declared, chuckling. "Ugh, now you made me think about it! Get out!"

Marta laughed maniacally all the way out the door. The sound cut off like a switch was flicked and Honey's brow furrowed in concern. The cause of the sudden silence stepped into her doorway a moment later.

"If you're planning on sleeping your way to the top of Dauntless," Eric began, smirking at her. He cast a furtive glance over his shoulder before finishing, "My bed is always open."

Honey could see the bruises on his jaw and cheek from his foray into the Hole just days before; remembered the way his eyes had locked into hers. She swallowed hard and forced herself to lift her chin and ignore the way her stomach clenched with ice at the same time heat spread across her thighs.

"They only way I'd go to bed with you, is if you were tied to it," she scoffed. He grinned wickedly and her heart skipped a beat.

"Kinky. I like it." He winked and left as quickly as he'd arrived. She got up and shut the door, then slumped back against it, a hand to her forehead. That man would be the death of her.

It was one in the morning and Honey was pounding on Four's door. If she couldn't sleep, neither would he.

"I swear to God, Four, if you don't open this door, I will kick it in," she barked at the wood just an inch from her face. "I'm small, but I can do it!"

There was no reply. Okay, I warned you. She stepped back and kicked hard just beside the knob. Nothing. That was fine, she had all night. Honey kicked it again. The door shuddered, but still didn't pop open. She was just winding up for the third kick when Four yanked the door open, hair mussed, cheeks flushed from sleep, wearing a skintight tshirt and sleep pants.

"What is wrong with you?!" he demanded in a low growl, looking back and forth down the hallway to see if anyone was there to witness the scene.

"I told you I wanted to see you," the girl scowled at him, pointing a finger at his chest. He made a sound of frustration and ran a hand through his hair. "We can do this in the hall or in your room, I'm fine either way."

Four stepped aside, motioning sharply for her to enter. "I get why they call you Badger, now," he
grumbled, shutting his door behind her.

His room was bigger than hers, with just as many windows, but neat and tidy and with very little of him present in it. Or maybe that was his presence; the order, the sheets on the bed tucked so tight that they still had sharp corners even though he'd been in it moments before, the spotless kitchen area that smelled of cleaning fluid - his bathroom probably smelled the same; you could probably eat off the floors in there.

"Yeah, Honey cause I'm sweet. Badger cause I'm not," she smirked at him. "Are you gonna talk to me now?"

"Talk to you about what?" That blank look was on Four's face again and she scoffed. Honey waved her finger in front of his chest.

"Oh no, don't try that with me," she warned. "I know you know something and I want to know it, too."

He just stared at her, silent and unyielding. If that's the way you want to play. The stubborn sub would get her answers out of him, one way or another. If he didn't want to do it easy, she'd go hard. Now, Honey couldn't actually force him to give her any information. The broody man was stronger and a far superior fighter than she was and, even if she could physically overpower him, the girl wouldn't have done so. That wasn't who she was. But she couldn't just let it go, either. He knew something, something that might have everything to do with her and why Eric was so concerned with Jeanine Matthews.

Honey took in the tightly ordered cocoon he'd made for himself. If she couldn't affect Four's body, she would try his mind. Something that would catch him off guard, that he wouldn't expect. Torture it is. The little Dauntless sauntered over to Four's bed and yanked the blanket off it, letting it parachute to the floor behind her.

"What are you doing?" he demanded, bewildered by Honey's action. But, she was pleased to see, he was also angry she'd touched his bed. Of course he was. Control was Four's middle name. He was miles beyond her in that department. She picked up a pillow and threw it at him, then another towards the door to his balcony. "Stop that."

"Oh, you want something from me?" Honey smirked, then shoved his mattress off the bed altogether. "Maybe I'm the one not feeling cooperative now."

He stalked over to her and she stood her ground. The man wouldn't hurt her, she knew that. He might throw her into the hall, but then she'd just resume kicking his door and drawing attention he didn't want. She didn't really want it either, but he didn't know that. Four glared down at her with all the intensity he possessed radiating from those dark, dark eyes. Honey just crossed her arms and waited.

"You're better off not knowing," he warned her in a soft, serious voice. He was as bad as Eric! She threw up her hands in frustration.

"Why do people keep saying that?!" she shouted angrily, spinning away and heading into his bathroom. Yup. Like a hospital. Honey opened the medicine cabinet and started knocking things off the small shelf, one at a time, like a cat.

"Would you stop wrecking my room?" the lanky man huffed wearily, frowning hard at her.

She picked up a bottle of mouthwash and spun the cap off it. "What do you know about the
Nothing." Well, that was the wrong answer. She flicked her forearm and hand outward, the movement projecting the bottle's contents in an arc that splashed the sink, wall, across Four's own chest, and the door beside him with minty blue. He scowled at her and growled softly, like an angry dog. So she did it again, flicking her hand back the other way. This time the spray caught him across the face and he winced as the liquid stung his eye.

"I'm going to find out on my own," Honey told him, tired of playing around. He was frustrated and thrown off by her actions, but not enough to give in. So, she would push that little crack hard with the one thing she did know about the situation - the same thing she knew about Eric: he didn't want her involved. "You know I don't give up. I'll start asking around, digging into files I shouldn't, making a nuisance of myself. Who knows who I might piss off?"

That got him. Rubbing the mouthwash out of his eye, with an agitated intonation of frustration, Four snatched the bottle from her grasp. "I really don't know what it is. I just know it's not the first shipment. It's been going on for months. Jeanine Matthews has been here four times since New Year. Techs from Erudite keep coming and going. I don't know what's going on, but it can't be good."

He picked up the cap and screwed it back on, looking more angry now that he'd told her than before when she was making a mess.

"You're right about that," Honey agreed. She bent down and started picking up the things she'd thrown to the floor. "Has anything else come in, besides computers?"

He shook his head. "Not that I know of."

The girl chewed her lip, standing beside the tall man stacking things neatly inside the medicine cabinet.

"Four, I'm going to tell you something that I think I shouldn't, but I trust you," she said haltingly. It almost felt like betraying Eric, but he wouldn't tell Honey what she'd been caught up in and she couldn't figure the mess out on her own. She'd tried. Four looked at her, expectant and concerned, but also wary, like he wasn't sure he wanted to know. The girl chose her words carefully to avoid any mention of her mentor's involvement.

"When I was apprenticing, Jeanine took some kind of interest in me. I don't know what, because I didn't want to know; I know her. I grew up watching her. I knew I didn't want anything she had to offer. But because of that, I don't know what it was." She chewed her lip. "I feel like this whole thing is a part of it and I don't know what to do."

Four sighed, leaning back against the sink, gripping the edge with both hands. "Don't do anything. Just lay low."

Honey gave him an incredulous look. "Lay low? I'm the youngest ancillary in history; nothing about that is easily overlooked. Everyone's watching me to see if I screw up, to see if I don't. I've got Max on one side and Eric on the other and that's not going to help me blend into the background."

She scrubbed her hands over her face. All the things she'd worked for, all the great positives in her life were also the things that drew attention to her like a magnet. Being on a pedestal made a person into great target. He was silent. He knew she was right.

"Maybe I should..." the girl began, scowling at the scars on the backs of his knuckles. "I could go to Jeanine. I could-"
"Don't," Four cut her off with the firm order.

She pressed the issue, "I could get inside this thing and see-"

"No, Honey," he commanded, stepping away from the sink and catching her upper arms. "Stay away from Jeanine. Whatever this is, I don't think you'll be able to get back out once you're inside. Not alive."

His words hit Honey right in the chest. Her throat tightened and she swallowed hard, ice running through her veins. Knowing so little about the situation, it was absurd to jump to such a dramatic conclusion, but the girl couldn't help but feel he was right. Why else would Eric - powerful, dangerous Eric - be worried? Whatever game Jeanine was playing with Dauntless, it was a deadly one.

The puppies had arrived! The loading dock was a mess of people. All the members of the unit had come, along with the alternates, in case dog ownership didn't work out for anyone. It was the most adorable chaos Honey had ever seen. Little bundles of fluff running all over, barking, playing. Several people had brought their children and invited the children of others to meet the newest members of Dauntless. The puppies didn't have to jump off the roof, though.

Daisy had wanted to apply, but she would have had to give up her place leading the Mudhumpers and couldn't bring herself to do it. Honey had told her to come and see the pups anyway. She could do that. She had pull. Just now, her friend was pinning an elated little brown ball of fur to the floor and rubbing its belly vigorously. The white-haired girl sat back on a crate, watching the madness with a big smile. A small bell sounded from her pocket and she pulled out her tab to check the message.

NEED TO SEE YOU.

It was from Eric. Her brow furrowed. She sent a missive back, asking if it was important enough to leave her new recruits.

LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU'RE FREE.

She could do that. Not that Honey was fully comfortable being around Eric anymore. Just the thought of him was sometimes enough to send a tingle through her and set her pulse racing. But, they worked together, so she'd learned to deal with the feelings. Alone in her room, they were harder to ignore. Impossible. Maybe she should have found Kappa and insisted Daisy wasn't the boss of her and she could date whomever she pleased. And Kappa was certainly pleasing.

A sharp bark brought Honey's attention back. One of the puppies was chasing a toddler around and around, trying to tackle the small boy. Thoughts of men and bedrooms evaporated for the moment. Give the tiny mutts a week to get settled and then they'd start the training. She'd brought in a consultant from Amity, Aster, one of their dog trainers. What Dauntless wanted from the animals and what Amity used them for were different, but the animals were the same. Aster had been working with herself, Belen, and the unit to get the handlers prepared. It would still be months and months before the dogs could be used in the field, but it was all coming together and Max was pleased. Honey had already started to wonder what she would do once the unit was up and running on its own. She'd have to come up with a whole new project and start from scratch. She couldn't wait.

It was nearly dinner time when she'd finished getting the handlers and puppies settled in. Feeding schedules had to be gone over and guidelines set by Aster had to be reviewed. And the little messes the pups left behind had to be cleaned. Honey might have just supervised that bit. When she was
finally finished, she was starving, but first had to send a reply to Eric. *Took longer than expected. Meet me at mess?* She headed that way, assuming he would agree. A few minutes later, the young leader responded.

SENSITIVE INFO.

She sighed. *Don't suppose it can wait until tomorrow?*

Instead of standing in the corridor, waiting for him to get back to her, Honey headed to the mess hall anyway. She was famished and even if she had to leave, she could at least grab something to take with her. The girl saw her friends and sat beside them, taking burger and making it up quickly in case she had to rush off to meet Eric. Daisy was telling Calhoun all about the puppies and how badly she wanted one. Pets weren't verboten in Dauntless, but it was hard to care for them properly in the tunnels, so most people didn't bother. The ones that did usually chose smaller creatures, things kept in cages like rats and snakes and songbirds. She knew of one Amity transfer that frequented the Mats who had snuck his pet weasel in with him during initiation.

Honey was just putting up her tray when her message alert sounded.

**TONIGHT'S BETTER. JUST LEAVING THE OFFICE. FIND ME.**

"Dammit." Since he'd sent her a message instead of coming to get her from the docks and it had waited all day, it couldn't be anything too worrisome. She just hoped he was easier to find than Four.

Chapter End Notes

Two chapters again today. Come back later for the next thrilling installment!
Honey figured Eric would have headed from his office to the mess hall to get his own dinner, but she
didn't run into him going the opposite direction. If the leader had been on his way to one of the
eateries along the Pit, he'd have specified. He must have eaten at his desk and gone to his quarters
instead. That didn't put her at ease. Honey had never had any reason to go to Eric's room, but she
knew where it was. She fought down the fluttery feeling in her belly as she made her way there. He
probably wouldn't even invite her in. Just tell her the intel or give her a file and send her on her way.
Oh, he'd tease her about coming in, but he wouldn't actually mean it.

It took less time they Honey felt it ought, but there she was, standing in front of Eric's perfectly
innocuous door. She knocked and waited for him to open it. Instead, his voice called from inside,
"It's open!"

The girl just blinked at the wood before her. She felt the ridiculous urge to run back down the hall
the way she'd come. That was insane. Pull yourself together, for sh*t's sake! She lifted a hand that
she was proud wasn't shaking and turned the knob, letting herself into the lion's den.

Inside it looked much like the other quarters she'd seen, dimly lit and sparse. It was smaller than her
own and there were no windows at all, since it was lower in the compound. Honey had thought all
the leaders and higher ups had better accommodations this. The only explanation was that Eric chose
to stay here because he liked it. The walls were the same charcoal as her own, but the man seemed to
be fighting against the room's inherent monochromia. There were two bookcases that were so stuffed
with books it reminded her of her old faction - though she doubted the Erudite would have exactly
approved of the questionable nature of some of the contents. They were made of some deeply
colored wood, similar to Max's desk. Where did he get his hands on those?

There was a maroon couch, overstuffed and plush. A plant - an actual plant - some kind of leafy,
white-barked tree in a pot was set a corner; a UV lamp hung from the wall above it. A small desk
that wasn't quite the same color as the bookshelves, nor the chair that was tucked beneath it, stood
against the wall beside her. His paperwork was half order, half chaos; much like Eric himself, she
thought; the same way Four's room had evidenced his need for tight control. Beside the dresser stood
a black filing cabinet and on the wall to her right was a tall, metal storage closet, also black. The
cold, hard floor - the same color as the walls and ceiling - was mostly covered by a green and tan woven rug, which broke up the normally cave or box-like feel of the lower apartments.

The room spoke of Eric, but did not contain the man, himself. There were two doors that led off the main area and both were open. The left was the bathroom, easily identified despite the light inside being off. Which made the right his bedroom. Honey waited for him to emerge, looking anywhere but that doorway. The minutes ticked by and she started to wonder if somehow she'd made a mistake. That he wasn't there at all.

"Eric?"

"Are you going to stand out there all night?" he called through the open doorway. She tilted her head in bewilderment. Maybe it wasn't a bedroom? She walked over to the doorway and every muscle seized.

The room was practically empty. A simple analog clock hung on the wall. There was a lamp sitting on a dresser and a rug that matched the one in the room she was still currently standing in. And a bed. It was simple enough, though more than twice the size of the single cot the initiates slept on, bigger than her own bed. Understandable; Eric wasn't a small man. There was a dark green blanket spread over the mattress and on top of that was the man she was looking for. Eric lounged on his pillows against his headboard - metal bars set vertically into a half circle frame - his arms up, hands stacked behind his head, legs stretched out and his bare feet crossed at the ankles. He looked comfortable. He was also not wearing a shirt.

For all their wild ways and tight clothing, the Dauntless weren't really all that into showing off skin. It was cold down in the tunnels, after all. The only bare flesh she'd ever seen of the man was his head, neck, and arms. Honey stared for a long moment. His skin was smooth and taut, peppered with scars; pale cream, though not so pale as her own complexion. He was all lean muscle piled upon muscle, thick and strong. The little curls that peeked over the collars of his shirts were on full display here, dusting his chest and abs. There were more tattoos, ones she'd obviously never seen. The girl would have expected geometric shapes and patterns done in the blood brown color he favored, similar to the ones on his arms, but instead there was a pair of black marks. On his upper chest, just below where his shirt collar would end, was a closed fist, which she imagined represented power or violence. Knowing Eric, it was probably both. A sleek, wicked snake slithered over his ribs.

"Is this the sensitive information?" Honey asked, brow furrowed, lips pinched and quirked up on one side. The tightness in her voice gave her discomfort away. Her expression quickly shifted into something more sarcastic, trying too hard to cover it. "Your chest?"

The half-naked man smirked smugly, no doubt gloating over the way she was obviously appreciating his brazen display of flesh. "You said the only way you'd go to bed with me was if I was tied to it."

Eric lifted his hands from behind his head. The movement was accompanied by an unexpected scrape and jangle of metal on metal. It was so surprising, it took her a moment to comprehend. He'd cuffed himself to his bed - wrist to wrist, the metal chain between looped through the bars of his headboard. The air whooshed out of her lungs.

"Are you kidding me?" Honey hissed.

"Can't take a shirt off with cuffs on, so I kind of gave us a head start. I didn't think you'd mind. You'll have to get the pants, though." He lifted his hips for emphasis and the movement caused a burst of heat in her thighs and her head spun. She should pinch herself to wake up, because this couldn't be happening. Eric teased. Eric taunted. Eric didn't actually want her.
God, but he was there. Chained. She could have him. Right now. Under her, hands bound, at her mercy. Honey's teeth ground against each other, mind whirring to work through the situation. Eric wasn't the type to give up control, not like this. It had to be some kind of trick. Her eyes narrowed, some focus snapping back into place.

"Just like that?"

"I don't play hard to get. C'mon over here," he grinned invitingly. "I dare you."

Honey didn't buy it. There had to be some angle. There was no possible way the man expected her to strip him and herself and just have sex. Just like that. She'd negated the effects of his teasing in the office and now he was trying something new to torment and humiliate her. But they were alone, so what good would that do? Unless. "There's a camera, right?"

Eric actually looked legitimately surprised by her question; like he really had no idea what she was talking about. "Why the hell would I have a camera in my bedroom?" The moment the words left his mouth, he laughed. "Okay, maybe there's a reason to have a camera in a bedroom, but I'm not into that."

He sounded sincere. Like the whole thing was funny and sincerely like he thought she was nuts. The thought, now put into her head, stuck like a burr. Why else have a camera but to show someone? Visiting Day burst into her mind; standing stripped before the rest of the transfers, Eric's look of satisfaction at her total mortification. The memory still made the girl sick with humiliation. It had even become a part of her Fear Landscape. And he had orchestrated it. Honey never ran from her fears. She could overcome it; go to the bed and give him what he wanted, give herself what she thought about alone in her own bed with only her fingers.

No. She couldn't do it. She was Dauntless, but this was beyond her. The sub steeled her spine.

"No way. You're on your own," Honey said shortly and spun from the doorway.

"What? Wait!" Eric barked, alarmed. The cuffs scraped the bar, clanking against the metal. She all but ran from the sound, as if he would break free and come after her. "My hands are cuffed!"

Honey started to say that it wasn't her problem; she hadn't meant it when she'd made the comment before about him needing to be tied up. She grabbed the door handle.

"Atleast unlock me!" he demanded.

Damn. She huffed, thunking her head against the door. She couldn't just leave him there; who knew how long it would take for someone to miss him and come looking? And she couldn't send someone else in to… Honey grinned suddenly. Oh, how the tables have turned.

With the heady feeling of confidence surging through her, she made her way back to the bedroom. Pausing in the doorway, the little crow leaned against the jam and crossed her arms, smirking at Eric the way he'd done her a thousand times before - superior and smug.

"I guess you are kind of stuck, huh?"

Eric scowled at her from the bed. His anger had caused him to tense and for the first time Honey could see the effect that strain had on his body - the skin pulled tight over every rigid muscle. She had to swallow before speaking again.

"It would be cruel to just leave you here, but you did trick me into coming," the girl reasoned thoughtfully. He opened his mouth to say something, but she spoke first. "I could send someone to
help you. Max, you think? He'd get a kick out of this."

Eric’s jaw snapped shut; Honey could practically hear his teeth grind.

"Don't fucking do it," he growled. *Fuck.* Her eyes wanted to flutter shut. The sound of his voice did things to her inside; this was a whole new level of angry and he was completely helpless to her. She was startled by how much she liked that. Eric at her mercy.

"Don't fucking tempt me." Honey smirked insolently. But she wasn't going to get Max and she really did need to leave the room as quickly as possible, so she stepped towards him. He relaxed immediately, knowing she wouldn't make good on her threat. "Where's the key?"

Eric nodded to the side, still frowning. "On the floor somewhere; by the bed."

As she walked towards him, Honey shook her head admonishingly. "What were you gonna do if I didn't show up here?"

"I knew you'd come," he said, too smoothly. So self assured. She rolled her eyes and sank down to one knee, searching for the small silver key. In the dim lighting, it wasn't readily visible, so she had to run her hand over the rug and find it by touch.

"Did you really think this would play out?" the girl couldn't help but ask. "I'd just jump on you? I thought you were smarter."

"*I didn't think* you'd be such a coward," Eric challenged thoughtfully. "You've never passed up a chance to get something you wanted before."

He couldn't see her face, so Honey went ahead and scowled at his carpet. "Don't flatter yourself," she insisted flatly.

Key in hand, she stood again. He was in the center of the bed, so she had to rest one knee on the mattress to keep her balance as she leaned over to undo the lock. Grabbing the cuff nearest her, she tilted it up a bit so she could get the key into the hole easier.

"Still time to change your mind," Eric offered in a husky purr. She couldn't keep her eyes from slipping shut that time, not with him so close. She could smell him again. His amazing scent must be all over the bed, making it stronger there than anywhere else. He was warm; she could feel it against her leg where it rested by his hip, against her arms wear they were so close to his. He shifted and his skin brushed her own. The girl shuddered, the heat in her thighs concentrating between. She had to get this done *now* and get out of here. Honey turned the key with a metallic snickt. The clasp slid free.

"Maybe in a million years," she snarked, rasping through the tightness in her throat. Thank God her hands hadn't shaken.

"I hate waiting," the man said quickly. She should have remembered his performance in the Hole, paid more attention to the tattoo on his ribs, because he struck as quick as a snake. Eric grabbed her wrist and before Honey could pull away, he'd snapped the open cuff onto her. Now they were both chained to the bed; her left arm, his right.

"What?" she chirped, tugging at the metal once, not processing what happened. She looked to his face and their eyes locked for an endless moment; hers wide with shock, his hooded and dark.

"Now you're in trouble."
Honey jumped back off the bed, but there was only so far she could go and, as it was, she was bent
over the mattress. Eric followed her, so much as he could, grabbing the waist of her pants and
hauling her right back onto the bed. Honey aimed a knee at his gut, earning a satisfying grunt as it hit
home, but she didn't have the force there to do any real harm. He released her pants and knocked her
leg to the side, across his own. This move left her half straddling him, which seemed to be his goal,
as he caught her opposite hip and pulled her atop his pelvis. The girl's small fist connected with his
jaw, his cheek, his ear, rapid strikes that did little in the way of damage, but were meant to distract so
he would let go. She had forgotten the key to the cuffs was in that hand, the metal tip peeking
through her knuckles, and it cut into his cheek.

"Bitch!" Eric snarled, bucking up against her, and easily flipped them over. His weight crushed
Honey into the mattress. She couldn't breath; his breath was hot on her face. His face was too close
to strike with any force, so she went after his ribs instead, hoping they were still tender. The girl
probably wasn't strong enough to crack them with so little room to gain momentum, but he'd be
feeling it for a few days.

Eric grunted, his head falling against Honey's collarbone as he fought to catch her arm. She writhed,
pushing up against him in a futile effort to throw off his balance. Instead he groaned into her shirt and
ground his pelvis into hers. Honey froze, simultaneously hit with a shot of ice and an intense heat
that confused her. He pinned her bicep to the bed, sliding his hand down her arm to take hold of her
wrist with a grip like a vice. He yanked it above her head to where they were both cuffed to the
headboard.

"Now, I gotcha."

Honey quickly opened her hand, flicking the key away. It plinked off the metal frame and fell behind
the bed with a soft clatter. She'd assumed the man was going to take the key to free his other hand
and lock her fully to the frame, rendering her all but helpless. Eric laughed as he switched his hold,
gripping her free wrist with his hand that was still restrained.

"Shit." She was all but helpless anyway,

but at least he only had one free hand. However, that seemed to be all he needed as he leaned up,
smirking triumphantly down at her.

"I'm sure we'll find it later," Eric assured the wide-eyed girl, as if that were her main concern. He
pushed his hand under her head, grabbing a handful of white curls. "Much later."

Then he pressed his mouth hard against hers. If not for his hand in her hair, Honey would have
turned away, fought the kiss, even with the heat she didn't understand surging through her veins.
Even with all the time she had spent imagining the brutish leader above her as he was now, so hard
and hot and powerful, she'd have fought. But Eric held her fast and she couldn't stop it. Honey tried
to keep her lips closed, but he rocked his hips against her again and she gasped involuntarily. His
tongue plunged into her mouth, stroking against her own; even his kisses were entitled, dominating.
He tasted sweet, which she hadn't expected. Nothing about Eric was sweet. She couldn't say she
didn't like it. Honey's mind was railing at her that this needed to stop, but she'd wanted it so badly her
body was rebelling.

His breath came heavy, washing over her face, flooding her mouth. It was the only sound in the
room and she'd caused it. She could feel his heart pounding. She could feel his erection pressing into
her. That wasn't a tease. That wasn't a trick. That was him wanting her. Eric wanted her. God,
Honey wanted him, too. She was panting, herself, from the struggle, from the kiss, from the feel of
his body against hers. He pulled back, lifting his head, but the girl followed with a soft protest,
wanting to keep the contact, wanting more. He gave her what she wanted and more besides,
groaning into her as he pressed forward again. Honey answered in kind, the sound coming out of its
own accord as her toes curled in her boots.
Eric let her hair go; his hand first dropping down to slip under her, pulling her body impossibly closer against his. He released her wrist and her arm immediately curled over his shoulder, fingers splayed widely on his back. The young leader's skin was so smooth under the girl's touch and feverish. The scars raised up to her fingers like a Braille accounting of every injury. Honey pawed at it, desperate to learn every inch. Eric's hand then moved up her side, pushing its way under her shirt, which had come untucked in the struggle.

His palm was warm as it skimmed over her ribs, rough the way the girl had always fantasized a Dauntless man's hand would be; the antithesis of the baby softness of an Erudite. She gasped as he cupped her breast, groping roughly, nothing like Kent. Honey knew his touch was harsh intentionally and didn't mind, not when it felt so good. Eric groaned again and when he moved his body against hers, she could really feel him hard against her core, even through the layers of clothes. Honey's mind snapped into focus, reminding her what he wanted and where this was ultimately going.

She turned her head, breaking the wonderful contact of his mouth on hers, panting out his name. Instead of pulling away, Eric's lips and tongue seared her jaw and down her throat and she arched into it in spite of herself. His teeth scraped harshly at her collarbone and she let out a high, yelping moan. Honey should have known he'd know all the right buttons to push; Eric always knew what buttons to push. He released her breast and shifted his body, leaning to the side, and she felt cool air on her stomach, then higher as he shoved her clothing up out of his way.

"Eric, stop!" Honey finally gasped. He ignored her, nipping sharply at her clavicle, then soothing the hurt with his tongue. As much as she loved it and wanted more, she shoved at his broad, meaty shoulder. "Stop!"

"That's not what you really want," Eric purred, so sure of himself he didn't even look up, didn't even open his eyes.

Honey couldn't even say he was entirely wrong, but that wasn't the point. "It's what I told you to do," the young sub said, as firmly as she could given the circumstances. He started kissing his way down over her sternum, between her now bare breasts. Goosebumps rose under the hot, damp air he continued to pour onto her skin and her nipples hardened like stones.

"If you wanted a good boy who does as he's told," Eric smirked to himself. "You wouldn't have picked me."

He squeezed her breast, not hard enough to hurt overly, and nuzzled the in-side of it. Again, he wasn't wrong; not completely. But the man didn't understand. Honey's heart started to pound faster, like a bird's; not from the struggle and not from the way her nerve endings were on fire. His mouth settled over her nipple, hot and wet, and the girl jerked like he'd stuck her with a pin. Scalding heat from his mouth, his touch fought against sharp cold from the alarm rising quickly in her chest.

"I said stop it!" Honey insisted harshly, her voice high and sounding disturbingly pleading to her own ears. She sounded weak. Eric finally listened, lifting his head to look her in the eyes. The little Dauntless didn't know what she expected him to say at that moment, but she certainly hadn't expected what did come out of the man's mouth.

"Are you afraid?"

"What? No!" the girl snapped angrily. That was beside the point.

"And you don't want me to stop," he repeated what he'd said before, as sure as ever, as if she hadn't been telling him to all along.
"I need you to stop when I tell you to stop!" That was the crux of the issue. Eric nodded, looking for all the world like he thought that was entirely reasonable.

"Okay," he said simply. "Tell me you're afraid and I'll stop."

Honey scowled up at the infuriating man. "But I'm not afraid." Her voice was hard, like steel; no weakness this time.

"You don't have to be; you just have to say you are," the leader informed her, his upper lip curling mockingly. Then he sobered. "And you would, if you really wanted me to stop."

There wasn't an ounce of doubt or derision in the statement; it was a simple fact. She glared up at him, trying to come up with a response to that, and he gazed down at her expectantly. Eric only waited a moment before apparently deciding Honey had nothing to say and dropping his head to seal their mouths together once more.

God, he tasted good. And he felt so good. He brushed his thumb back and forth over her nipple, which was wet from his mouth and that wetness made the air in the room like ice. The girl whined softly as he toyed with her nerve endings and felt him smile. He chuckled arrogantly against her mouth. She bit his lip hard in retaliation, but that just got her a lusty groan as reward.

Honey decided she'd take it.

Eric pulled his mouth from hers again, returning it to her breast eagerly. Now he returned the favor, catching her already sensitive nipple in his teeth too tightly. She cried out at the pain, back arching up, and grabbed his hair to tug him back. He was stone, strong, immovable and the girl realized she found it incredibly arousing.

Taking pity, the man released her. "Did that hurt?" he cooed breathily, then placed tender kisses on her abused flesh. She should have known better; Eric never showed pity. He bit her again, harder, and she shrieked. Her back bowed upwards, lifting them both for a moment, but he pressed her back down with superior weight and strength and Honey liked that, too.

"Eric!" she whimpered his name and he let go, suckling her sharply aching nipple. "Oh my god," she groaned, eyes rolling behind their lids. His mouth could kill her. Just his mouth, alone. And she'd die happy.

His hand reached down, cupping her backside and lifting her pelvis against his. It wasn't a vague grind or a lazy rocking motion, this time Eric deliberately thrust himself against her, his own hips rolling smoothly. Honey clenched inside, an intense throb of lust backing an insistent, familiar tingle. Familiar in the sense that she recognized it, but far stronger than she could recall experiencing before. It obliterated her lonely nights of frantic stroking.

"Oh, fuck," she barely whispered and he did it again, then again. Honey planted her boots on the bed and pushed up to meet him, moaning his name low in her throat. If he kept doing this, she wouldn't need anything else. He would push the girl over the edge and never actually touch her.

Eric was not so easily satisfied. He let her go and reached between them, making quick, easy work of her fly, despite their mutual undulations. He pulled back as Honey rose up, pushing his hand into her pants, into her undershorts, his finger slipping slickly between her labia to slide against her clit. An intense jolt of sensation rushed through the girl, nerves firing, synapses overloading. It was too much; far too much. She didn't know if it felt good or bad. She thought she might pass out.

He groaned, she gasped.
He moved his fingers against her, she grabbed his wrist.

"Fuck, you're so wet," he growled deliciously.

"I'm afraid," she blurted hoarsely.

Eric stopped, completely still for a moment, not speaking. Their breaths came and went in unison.

"Are you afraid of sex?" He finally asked, his tone clipped. Honey couldn't quite pin down his emotion, though mostly he seemed irritated, maybe. "Or are you afraid of me?"

She wasn't really afraid of either. She thought not, anyway. Her head was a bit of a jumble at the moment, which was entirely his fault.

"I'm just not ready," the girl admitted, breathlessly. She'd really thought she was, but this was far more intense than anyone said it would be. "It's too much, too fast."

Then Eric groaned in dismay and his head dropped to her sternum. His hand slid out of her pants and he sighed greatly. The man muttered something she couldn't understand and rolled to the side, dropping heavily onto the bed to her right. She was almost surprised. He'd actually stopped. Immediately. Honey looked over at him, opening her mouth to... apologize? To say *something*. But then Eric lifted his hand and proceeded to lick his fingers clean and it came out as a disbelieving groan.

"I can't believe you just did that." The embarrassed girl shook her head, looking away. His response was a soft, pompous kind of snigger.

"When I get around to it, you won't mind so much. Trust me."

Honey believed him. The thought of what he could do to her with that mouth made her shudder with anticipation. But not yet, not today. The girl would have expected him to be angrier. Kent had been very angry. *No*, she scolded herself. Eric was not Kent. Kent was a scummy puddle next to the Dauntless man's raging sea. She'd never compare the two again.

They lay silently, side by side, a mirror of each other; Honey's left arm bent up above her head, her hand touching Eric's right one, his own arm tucked beneath his head. Soon enough, they'd have to start looking for that key she dropped. Eric must have been thinking the same thing, since he shifted beside her.

Or maybe not, as the sound of fabric rustling came to her ears. Eric shimmied his hips a little, which perplexed the girl, then huffed out a relieved sort of breath and took hold of her hand. All at once, Honey understood what he'd done and snatched her appendage back, looking at him with astonished eyes.

"What?" the man frowned at her, irked, but not angry. "Are you afraid of this, too?"

"No," she retorted with her own frown. She wasn't, but by having said she was afraid before, the girl had been telling him to stop. And he had. He'd stopped the second she spoke, just as he'd said he would. And she wasn't afraid.

"Then give me your hand." Eric grasped her again and she didn't pull away this time. He wouldn't force her, Honey thought; not further than she would let him. He wasn't trying to manipulate her by saying his hardon was her fault, either. Though, technically, it was and she really liked that it was. He wanted her to make him feel good; that simple. And Honey really wanted to.
Eric hissed in a breath as he wrapped her fingers around his shaft. It was so hot and hard in her hand, the girl had to look; almost like she had to be sure of what it was. *Yup. That's a dick.* She'd seen others before, obviously, in text books and things she wasn't supposed to be looking at, but this was *Eric's.* And it was *in her hand.*

"Wow," Honey breathed out, giving him an experimental squeeze. He moaned softly, letting her hand go to shove his pants down a bit further. She wasn't much good at size comparison, never had been, but it looked bigger than she would have expected somehow; heavy in her grasp, deeply flushed and glistening. He throbbed against her palm, reminding her fancifully of some kind of primal drum beat.

"Start slow," Eric ordered, his voice low and velvet in Honey's ear and her eyes slipped shut. It made her clench inside again, just the sound. She licked her lips and did as he asked, slowly sliding her hand up, then down his length. A breathy moan slipped passed his lips and on her second downstroke, Eric lifted his hips up to meet it just slightly. The girl bit her lip on a whimper. He murmured, "m' so fucking hot, right now."

"I know how you feel," she admitted in a near silent whisper. Honey thought she might light the bed on fire. He turned more towards her, lifting his hand to tilt her chin upwards so he could kiss her. It wasn't as hard as the ones before, but just as intense. She could feel the powerful man holding back and that excited her, urged her to make up the deficit, to press harder, deeper. Her hand moved faster as her pulse picked up and Eric moaned louder into her mouth, rocking his hips into her rhythm. He grunted against Honey's lips, then pulled back, laying fully on his back again, his head close to hers. She thought it was because the pleasure was too intense or maybe the angle of his leaning too awkward with his arm cuffed the way it was, but she was wrong. Eric immediately started pushing her pants down further. While Honey was deciding whether she wanted him to touch her again or not, he snaked his hand into her clothes.

"Oh, fuck!" the girl yelped softly as his fingers slid along her most sensitive nerves.

"I wish," he scoffed ruefully, rubbing the pad of his index finger against the top of her clit almost in sync with her now faltering rhythm on his dick. He'd barely touched her and Honey was panting and squirming already. Eric laughed softly, low in his throat, rolling her clit in a circle with his finger. "You have come before, right?"

"Of course!" Honey huffed indignantly, scowling at the ceiling.

"You touch yourself?" His tone was less ridiculing this time; warmer, more inviting. Honey nodded. "Yeah."

"Do you think about me when you get yourself off?" The question was asked in a full, lusty purr that made her clit twitch under his fingers. He had to have felt it. She licked her lips. "Yeah." What harm to admit it? He rumbled in his chest, sounding smug and pleased. "Sometimes."

"Sometimes?" His body tensed beside hers. Eric didn't seem to like that addition. Maybe that was why she'd said it. "Not every time?"

"No," Honey confirmed breathlessly. The jealousy in his tone was blatant; he didn't even attempt to cover it. Jealously and possessiveness. "Not every time."

"Who else, then?" He demanded; commanded. When she didn't answer him fast enough, he pinched her clitoris between his thumb and forefinger, making Honey cry out in the strangest agony she'd
ever felt. "Who else do you think about that makes you come?"

"No one!" the girl insisted, whining in the back of her throat, writhing under his assault. She abandoned his hardon, digging her nails into the back of his forearm. He let up some of the pressure, but not all of it. "No one real. Just in my head."

"But I'm the only real one? Just me?"

Honey nodded several times, quickly. "Yes!" Eric relaxed again, fingers so gentle now as he petted her aching clit.

"Good. Not great, but good." That was such a prickish, Eric thing to say. Like something he'd have said to an initiate in training. As she noticed that parallel, he moved his hand lower, easily slipping a finger inside her. Honey squeeze it tightly by reflex, letting out a shocked little gurgle, and Eric's breath left him in a sound that was part incredulous laugh and part moan. "Shit, you're tight. You'll kill me with this."

Now it was her turn to moan. Part of her - a big, throbbing, needy part - wished she hadn't stopped him. That could have been his cock inside her, instead of his finger. She could be killing him right now, instead of him tormenting her so wonderfully. He pulled it back, then slid in again and it felt like an ocean was surging between her legs. He pushed a second digit into the girl and she grunted. Eric's fingers were thicker than her own and the invasion caused a twinge of discomfort that Honey relished deeply.

"You're not doing your part, you know," he reminded her. It took real, concentrated effort to pry her fingers from his arm. If his hard, throbbing dick hadn't been waiting for her touch, she would never have been able to do it. Her fingers curled around him again, immediately starting into a sloppy, unskilled stroking rhythm. Eric huffed out an obscenity, his breaths far shorter than a moment before. The girl was practically gasping for air, heat and electricity overwhelming her system. Her thighs parted further, unabashedly, and she rolled her hips up against his touch.

"God, Eric, don't stop," Honey panted. The irony was lost on her. Maybe on him as well, at the moment.

"After today, you're gonna think about me every time you get off," Eric growled. She wasn't sure if it was a command or merely what he believed to be a fact. Either way, she was certain it would turn out to be true. He curled his fingers, rubbing hard and fast against a spot Honey hadn't known existed inside her. Stars exploded behind her eyelids and her spine arched up off the bed. Her hips rocked frantically as intense waves of pleasure slammed through her body. Her breath came and went with no control, moans and whines and half formed sentences tumbling out without reason.

"Don't stop, don't stop!" Honey begged and he didn't. Her body was an instrument and the man was a virtuoso, working her through her climax until she was left shuddering and gasping on the bed beside him. Only then did Eric stop. He carefully withdrew his fingers, pulling his hand from her pants completely. His touch was so light, he had to know every nerve was fried. Residual waves of sensation lapped luxuriously at the breathless girl's senses. Her skin tingled wonderfully. "Oh, God, Eric."

The next thing Honey knew, the man was wrapping his hand around hers - his fingers slick and damp against the backs of her own. She'd stopped stroking him when she came, but had not let go, and now he forced her into a much faster rhythm than she had set herself previously.

"Fuck," Eric panted, drawing air in between his teeth. His muscles were straining beneath her arm, tensing, winding up like a spring. It happened much faster than the girl anticipated. All at once, his
whole body stiffened and he let out a sharp bark of release. In her hand, his shaft pulsed hard, feeling unbelievably alive. Honey looked down, watching the thick, whitish fluid spurt out. It made their hands impossibly slick and slippery as they slid over his turgid flesh.

Eric let out a guttural grunt and a raw shout in rapid succession and she tore her eyes away to look at his face. Absolutely breathtaking. His eyes were squeezed shut, jaw clenched, teeth bared. His abs flexed sharply with each pulse of his orgasm, making him hunch in on himself slightly. His mouth dropped open as his head fell back. He stopped their frantic jerking motion and squeezed her hand hard, milking his cock from base to tip as the last of it surged through him, groaning her name like she was, in fact, killing him.

It was heady and intense, having done this to him. Having done this to Eric. He collapsed against the mattress, the same way she had - albeit with less whining or shuddering - panting just as heavily. He took her hand off his dick, but didn't let her go. They lay there, side by side, for long, wonderfully wordless minutes; recovering, basking.

"God, I'm a mess," Eric's voice finally broke the reverie, amused and disgusted. Honey lifted her head, taking in his torso, all spattered with semen, and snickered. For once, she was the one so pleased with herself. Eric snorted. "Laugh it up. I should have made you swallow it."

"Oh, whatever," she scoffed. His expression said he was serious and it sent a thrum of heat through her, despite the fact that the stuff looked anything but appetizing. Though, the girl had to admit she was curious. And why not? He'd licked her slickness from his fingers, after all. She leaned over, sliding her tongue over his skin, just under his breastbone where a splash of cum glistened in the dim light. He sucked in air sharply, lifting his arm to push her back.

"Shit, don't!" Eric insisted, huffing. "You'll just get me hard again."

Honey didn't persist, too caught up in what was going on inside her mouth. She couldn't really think of a comparison, which bothered her analytical centers, but it certainly wasn't a pleasant taste. Not like his mouth had been. But the girl couldn't say she entirely disliked it, either. Given the right incentive, she could learn to tolerate it. If that incentive was the man beside her, she could probably learn to crave it.

Now that all the heat and sensation was no longer bombarding her system, Honey became aware of the ache in her shoulder and elbow. Her arm had been in the uncomfortable position too long and was protesting mightily.

"Eric, we need to find the key. My arm is killing me." No reason to hold the truth back. He lifted his head, looking up at their hands.

"Right. Hang on." Instead of maneuvering into a sitting position or rolling over to reach behind the bed, Eric just reached up to grip the bar the cuffs were looped around. "Lift your arm a little."

She did so, allowing him to raise his cuffed arm easier. He took hold of the thick, half circle part of the frame and, with a minimum of effort, popped the bar out of place. Honey's jaw dropped. He slipped the chain over the top of the bar, then put it back in place with a metallic clang.

"You son of a bitch!" she accused angrily, completely shocked. Eric was grinning at her, so amused by her reaction, so fucking pleased with himself. "Seriously, you're an asshole!"

He laughed, sitting up easily now that their hands were free. He reached up to rub the ache out of his own shoulder, but stopped short with a snort of disgust. Shifting again, he pulled back his side of the blanket, using the corner to wipe his hand and then chest clean.
"You didn't think I'd really cuff myself to something and not be able to get out of it, did you?" The infuriating man smirked down at her, gray eyes practically glittering with humor and haughtiness. Well… no, Honey didn't really believe that of him. Hadn't she specifically thought there was no way the very dominant man would put himself in that situation when she'd first entered the room and found him there? Maybe the foolish girl just liked his rationale - that he knew she would come - a little too much for her own good. "There could have been an emergency. A fire. Who knows?"

Something inside Honey was very pleased his reasons didn't include doubt of her. Eric took her hand and cleaned the cum off it, then tossed the blanket aside. She could see him better now that he was sitting up and noticed a small smear of blood on his cheek. Right, she'd cut him with the key; not exactly an accident, but it wasn't what she'd intended to do. Honey felt a deep, primal urge to lick it away, but held herself in check. There were only two outcomes for that, either it would disgust him or turn him on all over again. She didn't want either of those. Well, the little Dauntless wanted the second one, but didn't think she could handle it right now. She reached up, regardless, brushing her thumb against the stain, but it was dry now. Eric didn't flinch, but didn't smirk either, only watched her closely.

"How's it look?" his tone was guarded, waiting. She shrugged, stroking his cheek again, slower and more firmly.

"Just a scratch. Does it hurt?" Honey wasn't sure which answer she wanted more. He only snorted and rolled his eyes a little. She could also now see a faint bruise on Eric's jaw - no doubt there was another one under the blood smear - and his bottom lip was swollen on one side, turning a dark purple. Right. She'd done that, too. The girl brushed her thumb gently over the hurt she'd caused, feeling no remorse, only a deep satisfaction. That was her mark. And it wouldn't be gone tomorrow.

He parted his lips, nipping at her thumb. She giggled, snatching her hand away before he decided to make it a real bite. He reached down and quickly untied one of her boots, tugging the laces to loosen it.

"If I'd known you were going to get so violent…" Eric smirked down at her, letting the remark trail off into vagueness. Moving on to the other boot.

"It's your own fault," Honey countered. "Should have stopped."

"Didn't we cover this?" he asked, boredly. He lay down, stretching on his side, facing her, his head propped up on his free arm. His other hand moved to rest on her belly, in a way that seemed casually possessive somehow.

"How did you know I didn't really want you to stop? You just know women that well?" It irritated the girl, his sureness. She might not have wanted it. What then? What if he'd been wrong?

Eric pursed his lips, the swelling making the bottom one pout outward, and shook his head. "I just know you that well."

"Oh, bullshit. No means yes? Punch in the face means yes, too?" her tone was angry, biting. Honey wasn't sure why it upset her so much. After all, he had been right. And he had ultimately stopped when he believed she was serious. The girl just kept remembering that hallway, those cold, painted bricks on her cheek.

"With you? Probably." She scoffed and turned her face away, scowling at his stupid lamp. Eric pressed his palm against her stomach, giving her a little shake to draw her attention back. "You weren't trying to really hurt me. That's how I knew."
"What?" Honey's eyes were wide with astonished disbelief. He wasn't smirking now. He was dead serious.

"I know what you can do, hand to hand. This-" his face "-wasn't even close. When you need to win, you don't hold anything back. You didn't go for my eyes or my throat; when I kissed you, you didn't bite me. You were just nervous, that's all. You don't like being caught off guard."

Eric said it all in a simple, matter of fact tone, like he was recounting why he'd chosen what to wear that day. It was disturbing. In that he knew her psyche that well; he could read her, dissect her actions so readily. In that Honey was wired that way inside. In that the man would still pursue her, knowing what he did. What the hell was wrong with him? Why did she like it so much? And she did like it.

"You're twisted." That was what the girl had intended to say, anyway. Instead what came out was, "We're twisted."

Eric laughed, then leaned in to kiss her with the laugh still on his lips. It wasn't nearly the same as before. Light and slow; lazy, like he was savoring her. It hit Honey harder and deeper than the violent kisses somehow. His poor lip, so swollen and sore. Her chest thudded, a cozy tenderness blossoming there. She kissed his lip softly, lifting her cuffed hand to cup his uninjured cheek. He held her wrist loosely, sighing quietly to himself as the girl's mouth left his and she dusted his bruised skin with feather soft kisses. His cheek, his ear, over his jaw. Poor, bruised Eric.

Honey didn't regret the injuries. Didn't want them gone, exactly. But she felt a deep, visceral need to soothe them, to show they mattered to her. They mattered greatly, in a way she couldn't really articulate. She pushed his shoulder and the Dauntless leader gave to her pressure, obediently rolling onto his back. The young sub leaned up, trailing her fingers down Eric's body to the side closest her, where more bruises shown against the natural paleness of his skin, the black snake tattoo woven amongst them. These, Honey kissed as well, stroking her fingertips over the marks with no small amount of reverence.

With a huff that could have been impatience, or maybe something else, he wrapped his free arm around her shoulders and pulled her against his body to cease her ministrations.

"Stop that; I'm ticklish," Eric commanded lightly, but his voice betrayed him. As did the thudding of his heart under her ear. Honey smiled, catlike, to herself. He drew a deep breath and let it out all at once, like a tired dog. "I don't feel like looking for the key. Go to sleep."

Her cat's smile widened into a Cheshire grin, which, thankfully, he couldn't see. That was wonderful in so many ways. Eric wanted her to stay. He wanted to leave the cuffs on, so she couldn't slip away. He wanted to hold her. And she wanted all of it, herself. Honey kicked off her boots and wiggled her toes, then snuggled closer to the most dangerous man in Dauntless.

Chapter End Notes

So, just a follow up note. I know the characters had this conversation, but I want to be clear, everything sexual that happens between Honey and Eric only occurs because she allows it to.

... was it worth the wait? Pleeeeease comment and let me know.
Breakfast and a Shower

Chapter Summary

Honey and Eric have a lovely morning.

Chapter Notes

Just a note, the next several chapters are going to be very smut and relationship heavy as Honey and Eric learn each other and work on boundaries.

Honey awoke to the sweet, unfamiliar sensation of fingers gently caressing her wrist. Her aching wrist. She smiled, but didn't open her eyes. Not yet. She just wanted to savor this. Eric's warm body against hers, the smell of him surrounding her, his heart thumping under her ear. Bliss.

"I know you're awake," the man in question informed her in a nicely gruff morning voice, but didn't stop his light stroking of her bruised skin. Who would have guessed Eric knew how to be gentle? That he would even want to be? She certainly wouldn't have just hours ago.

"Shhh. Five more minutes." The girl nuzzled his chest, the soft curls tickling her nose and lips. A pleasantly masculine sound rumbled from beneath her cheek and made Honey's smile widen. Well, if he liked that… She kissed his skin, still flushed and soft from sleep, and toyed with the short hairs on his belly, where her hand rested. Eric's abs tightened as she tugged lightly, which amused and pleased her. She continued to place soft kisses against his flesh. His other hand, the one not stroking her wrist, lifted from the girl's shoulder and he combed his fingers through her hair, scraping his short nails against her scalp lightly.

Honey shivered, purring at the lovely little electric shocks his action sent down her spine. Eric chuckled; a soft, husky sound. Lifting up on her elbow, she languidly traversed his chest and shoulders with her lips, learning every curve and plane, every scar and tattoo. Their hands were still cuffed together and her wrist raw and sore, so she let it lie, just stroking her fingertips against his stomach, teasing the curls now and then. She liked this Eric who let the inexperienced girl touch him at her leisure, who made soft sounds of pleasure when she did.

Finally, after long minutes of tender exploration, Honey made her way up the side of his throat, climbing the ladder of his leadership tattoo. Her mouth trailed over his jaw and he turned his head, unwilling to wait the last two seconds it would have taken for her lips to reach his on their own. The mouth that had been so hard and cruel the night before was soft and pliant now. Eric let her lead, waited for her tongue to seek out his before lazily painting his sweet taste onto it. Honey sighed against his lips. Her heart was thumping beneath her breast just as hard and fast as the first time, but without the confused frenzy his previous kisses had wrought.

Her shirt and bra were still rucked up against her collar and her breasts pressed against his flesh, nipples hardening from the light friction their breathing caused. On a whim, she moved her cuffed hand just a little, brushing her fingers against one of his nipples to see if her body had the same effect on him. The little dark circle pebbled under her caress. Eric chuckled into her mouth, gently pulling
her hand away and lacing their fingers together. That one small act sent a wave of tender warmth through her from head to toe, which was followed by a slower flush of heat rising it its wake. Honey deepened the kiss, slanting her mouth against his, letting a heavy breath out through her nose, and pressed herself more firmly against him.

Eric's fingers in her hair curled into a loose fist and he carefully pulled her head back. The girl fought him with a whine, but he was so much stronger and she ultimately acquiesced. Looking down at the man, Honey could see the blush in his cheeks, whether from sleep or her mouth she didn't know. His eyes were heavily lidded and there was no mistaking the heat in them. It fanned the embers inside her to flame.

"It's been five minutes," he told her. Honey was about to protest when Eric rolled towards her, easily reversing their positions and bringing his massive frame above hers, pushing her back into the mattress. He took her lips for his own, his mouth harder and more possessive, but not yet harsh as he kissed her deeply. He rested his weight on his elbow, lifting their joined hands up beside her head to pin them there against the pillow. Honey's arm snaked beneath his, flattening against the back of his ribs to hold him against her. And he was against her, flesh on flesh from chest to thighs, since both their pants were still shoved down out of the way.

Eric pushed one of his muscular legs between her own and she curled her calf behind his knee, arching up a little, seeking more of his weight, more of that delicious friction she remembered. Honey could feel his dick low inside on her hip, pinned between their bodies; it was hardening, growing hotter and hotter. She was getting hotter and hotter, too; wet and slick where she suddenly missed his fingers like an ache. No, it was an ache. The girl moaned pleadingly around his tongue and Eric groaned in reply, rocking down against her, pressing his thigh against her core.

He broke away and Honey felt like he was tearing his mouth from hers. She whimpered at the loss, lifting her head to try and catch him again, but he was moving down over her throat, kissing and teasing her with sharp little nips on her skin.

"Eric, come back," she whined. He laughed against her clavicle and lifted his head.

"I let you have your five minutes," the amused leader reminded her. The girl huffed up at him, wearing a pouty frown. He just laughed again and returned to his task. Eric kissed her skin once, then bit sharply at her collarbone and got an equally sharp little cry in return. He snaked his tongue over the marks he'd left, then further down, over her bunched up clothing and between her breasts. Honey's breath caught in her throat and she pulled her arm from under his, gripping his hair instead in anticipation.

A low growl emitted from Eric's throat as his teeth scraped firmly against her sternum, almost like a warning. She squeezed his thigh between her. He kissed his way to her nipple and the girl gasped sharply at the sting his touch produced. She lifted her head and looked down at her own body, seeing the dark marks of tooth impressions ringing her nipple, the surrounding skin bruised deeply. He swirled his tongue around and around over the injury he'd caused, the wet warmth stinging, then soothing, then wonderful. Honey's eyes fluttered shut and her head fell back to the pillow as she groaned from a deep place in her throat she was unfamiliar with.

Eric suckled her very, very gently, his tongue flat against her nipple, massaging the abused bit of flesh languidly. When she let out a breathy moan and scraped her nails against his scalp, he released her, leaving a wet trail across her chest as he sought out and claimed the other nipple in turn. He pressed his teeth against her and Honey gasped sharply, arching and tensing, her fingers fisting tightly in his hair, bracing herself for that exquisite pain from the night before. The bastard only chuckled, carefully closing his jaws and pinching the peak between his teeth. He only gave it a single
playful tug before releasing it altogether.

The girl slumped back against the mattress with a disappointed puff of breath, panting and scowling at the ceiling, and pulled his hair hard as payback. Eric let out a soft, teasing sort of half-growl and kissed just beneath her breastbone. He plotted a course across her stomach using open-mouthed kisses that left a trail of saliva behind to cool against the air of his room. It wasn't until the man reached her navel and circled it with his tongue that Honey realized his ultimate destination. Her pulse started to race, fast and hard and frantic, and her skin burned like she'd spent too much time in the sun.

"Eric," she whispered his name, harsh in her uncertainty. He didn't answer her right away, finishing one more circuit with his tongue and nipping at the skin at the top of the loop before lifting his head once more.

"Something on your mind?" Eric's voice was a smooth ribbon of silky desire that coiled up in Honey's belly. The girl licked her lips, unsure of how to express what she was feeling. His eyes, the color of an oncoming thunderstorm, searched her face with lazy curiosity and her trepidation seemed to amuse him. "Trust me; you're going to love it."

His promise made her throb anew and her hips shifted of their own accord, pressing her ass against the mattress, her inner muscles tensing and relaxing involuntarily. Honey bit her lip and nodded. He hadn't been wrong yet. Eric smiled slow and wide and - causing another involuntary twitch within her - hungry. Sitting up on his knees, he removed his leg from between hers and tugged her pants and shorts down and off, leaving her bare from the breasts down. Even if she was already on fire, Honey felt her skin flush deeper at being so displayed. She pressed her legs together, knees lifting slightly, her arm hugging her belly as if that would shield her nudity from his gaze.

"No," Eric scolded in a hard, unyielding tone, urgently pulling her arm aside. "Open them back up."

She did squirm then, biting her lip harder to hold in a whine of embarrassment. Honey tried to comply with his order, she really did, but the need to hide her body was so deeply ingrained in the little Dauntless, she couldn't do it. Eric let out an irritated growl and loomed over her, putting his weight on their still joined hands for balance as he removed his own pants. He rose back up onto his knees, not quite glaring at her, but not far off either.

"Look at me," he commanded.

"I am looking at you," the girl protested in a small voice that only seemed to make him angrier.

"No, at my body. Look at all of me," Eric clarified his order, as forceful as any he'd giving Honey during initiation. So, she did, moving her gaze over his fully exposed form with systematic thoroughness, as if this were a task he'd set for her.

God, he was glorious. The thick ropes of muscle, the scars, the tattoos. His thighs were thick and powerful, his hips narrow. The curls trailing down his stomach tapered to a V there and continued between his thighs in a slightly darker shade. He was fully erect, arcing proudly up towards the ceiling. His torso lifted and fell with every breath; his powerful chest expanding on each inhale, his abs tightening slightly with each exhale. His left hand was in a tight fist at his side, but his right arm stretched towards her and, whether it was his intention or not, his firm grip on her hand was reassuring.

"There is no reason for you to hide yourself from me." Another man might have said it in a gentle, caring tone, but Eric was starkly authoritative. That was somehow also reassuring. "Open. Your. Legs."
Honey's knees straightened once more and her thighs fell apart easily. His stormy gray gaze trailed over her slowly, taking in every inch in the same way she had done with him. It wasn't pleasant for the girl, uncomfortable bordering on torturous, but she didn't try to cover up. What did Eric see when he looked at her? Honey knew what she saw. Short, but decently muscled arms and legs. Soft, milky skin marred here and there by ugly blotches of various shades of bruising. Adequate breasts; round, but not firm enough, tipped with nipples the same darkly flushed shade as her lips. Stomach flat, but soft. Hips too round, jaw too soft. Everything too soft. Hair white on her head, dark on her brow, and absent between her legs because she hated the feel of it there. No wonder they call me kid.

But Eric wasn't looking at her like she was a kid. His eyes were devouring Honey like a starving man falling upon a meal. His left hand relaxed and he reached for her, trailing the tip of his middle finger along the inside of her thigh so lightly she could barely feel it.

"Wider. Let me see your pussy," he ordered, still demanding, but quieter. Honey's toes curled and she gripped his hand hard, her right hand a fist at her side now as his left had been a moment before. She spread her thighs apart. It took all her will power to do as he asked, so the girl had none left over to keep her eyes open and they squeezed shut tightly. Eric's finger made its way back down her thigh, then up again as he just looked at her for long, agonizing moments. Finally, he let out an anticipatory kind of hum and smacked his lips. "Looks good enough to eat."

Honey gasped, eyes popping open at his words. She'd known what he was going to do, of course, but hearing him say it out loud was another matter. He pulled her left leg towards him and pushed it firmly to the mattress with an unspoken command. Stay. Then Eric maneuvered himself between her legs, pushing the right one further aside and splaying her wider than the girl thought had to be necessary. He slithered down onto his belly and brushed the side of his thumb against the seam of her labia and she immediately shut her eyes again.

Eric used his fingers to open her up, exposing her clit and her entrance and blew on her lightly. Honey was holding her breath, grinding her teeth against the strange new sensation. He rubbed his cheek against the inside of her thigh. The feel of his slight stubble scraping against the sensitive skin made her quiver. He kissed where her thigh met her pelvis, then across the top of her mound to the other side and rubbed his cheek against that thigh, too. The girl let out a shuddery sigh, the muscles in her jaw unclenching little by little. Then Eric planted a soft, wet kiss directly onto her clit and she gasped again - audibly, almost a squeak.

He did it again and a third time before siding his tongue against the little throbbing bundle of nerves and Honey couldn't hold back a groan. She shouldn't hold back her groan. She shouldn't hold back anything. Eric slowly lapped at her clitoris and it felt so ridiculously good, she felt every bit the foolish virgin for ever having had a doubt. She reached down and wove her fingers into his hair, which made the man hum in approval. He wrapped his lips around the tiny nub and suckled it firmly. The pleasure of his soft little licks was nothing compared to this and Honey cried out sharply, arching up against his mouth. That seemed to be all the incentive Eric needed to stop taking it easy on her.

He slid his finger up inside her. She was so very wet and slick and it went in so easily, he immediately added a second. His teeth grazed her clit and she moaned, loud and wanton. She should have let him do this last night. She should have begged him for it. The girl had never felt such intense sensations. Heat and pleasure coursed through her. Electricity danced along her nerves, shooting away from his mouth and fingers like lighting. Honey's whole world had become Eric's mouth, his tongue, his teeth, his hot breath on her moist flesh. Her pelvis rocked up against his ministrations and the movement made him groan against her. The vibrations of the groan made her arched up harder and cry his name like a prayer.
"Oh, God, Eric, it feels so good," Honey said in fast little breathy pants. "I didn't know it would be so good. Please, don't stop!"

A single grunt told her the man had no intention of stopping and she groaned out a long, low, endlessly grateful, "Thank you. Oh, thank you."

Honey felt that tingle, that telltale tingle deep within her, coiling tighter and tighter. She tightened around his fingers, panting uncontrollably as her orgasm built and built. She tugged his hair and squeezed Eric's hand so hard her knuckles hurt.

"Oh, oh! I'm gonna come!" Honey whined, the words close together and desperate, feeling like she needed to tell him or he might stop and he couldn't stop because she was so close. "Please, make me come, Eric; I need it so bad!"

She'd never needed anything so badly in her life as she needed him to keep doing what he was doing with his mouth and fingers and oh, God, yes, there it was! Honey shrieked as her inner walls snapped closed around Eric's thrusting fingers and a massive throb of pleasure exploded between her legs, spreading out over her body like a shockwave. She had no idea how hard she was pulling his hair, she couldn't even feel her hand; all she felt was his tongue and the friction of his fingers being squeezed inside her pussy. Another throb and she broke into short, desperate, pleading moans - his name, over and over, as her climax crashed through her system.

Eric brought the girl higher than she'd ever been and eased her back down to earth until she was a shivering mess of flesh and tingles on his bed. Her grip on his hair finally loosened and Honey found herself running her fingers through his soft, now wild locks, the feeling of it doing much to help ground her in her body again.

"Oh, my god, Eric," she panted. He carefully slid his fingers out of her and gripped her thigh, giving it a firm squeeze. He kissed her labia softly, then her thigh. Then blinding pain as Eric sank his teeth into her flesh and bit down. Honey screamed, her nails digging into his scalp, her back arching so hard her shoulders lifted off the bed. As suddenly as he'd bitten her, he released her again, nuzzling and kissing the still burning wound. The girl slumped against his mattress once more with a high, keening sound.

"Eric!" she called his name, both a question and an admonition.

The man hummed pleasantly into his kisses, stroking her inner thigh with his thumb soothingly. He blew on her there, too, raising gooseflesh down her leg and up her hip. Eric pulled back a bit and gave a little satisfied grunt, murmuring, possibly to himself, "Oh, that's a nice one. Gonna feel that for a while."

Honey knew he was right. Every time her thighs brushed when she walked, every time she sat down she'd feel the burning ache of that bite. Something very like anticipation sprung up in her belly at the thought. He gave her one more kiss, then leaned up. Honey could feel his gaze on her and lifted her head, looking down at him. Smug, as expected, and quite satisfied with himself. She released his hair, stroking her hand down the side of his face and the amazing man leaned into her touch with a lazy smile.

"You're gonna make me start every day like that, aren't you?" Eric asked in a lusty, teasing tone.

"I wouldn't survive a week." Her voice was slightly raspy, since her vocal cords were just a bit overworked, not used to so many loud exultations. He chuckled, happy with that estimation.

"Now, it's your turn," he grinned, moving to get up on his knees. Honey's eyes widened and the
reflexive look of terror on her face made Eric stop. Then he laughed. And laughed and laughed, leaning forward over her, his head dropping onto her stomach as his shoulders shook. She shoved him, scowling now; embarrassed and angry because she was embarrassed.

"Shut up! Get off me!"

"I just got you off!" Eric insisted, still laughing.

"You're not funny!" God, the girl was mortified. She covered her face, but only with her right hand, because he refused to let go of her left, still. The jerk chortled as he kissed her tummy.

"I'm very funny." Eric contradicted, giving her another kiss. "Honey, I didn't mean you're gonna suck my dick right now. We don't have the time for that."

Honey pulled her hand down enough that she could peek at him passed her fingers. "Then what's it my turn for?"

The man grinned lecherously down at her, leaning back up onto his knees. "I'm going to make a mess of you."

Her stomach clenched and her embarrassment evaporated. The girl thought she knew what he meant and found the notion very much appealed to her. She didn't feel the need to examine that at the moment.

"Oh, you like that idea, huh?" Eric asked, voice dropping back down to a lusty rumble as he took in the look on her face. Honey bit her lip and nodded, getting up on her elbows, no idea how arousing it was for him to see her so innocently eager about something so deviantly wanton. He lifted his brow, his piercings catching the light. "Do you want to watch me or help?"

That stopped her. What a choice. She chewed the lip she held, trying to make up her mind. Eric puffed out a breath, but it wasn't the impatient kind. The man held his hand out toward her face, but didn't touch her and the girl tilted her head to the side, unsure what he expected of her.

"Wow, you really haven't done anything, have you?" Before Honey could even frown, he spoke again. "It's a rhetorical question. Don't worry; I like it. Lick my palm."

Honey blinked at him for a moment at the rapid subject change, but did as he asked, leaning up a little to run her tongue along his palm. Tasted strange.

"Good; again. Get it nice and wet," Eric told her. The girl was halfway through the third swipe of her tongue when she realized what she was tasting on his hand was herself. She flushed brightly all over again, but didn't stop until he pulled away. Then she forgot all about it when he wrapped his hand around his shaft with a hiss. Eric gave himself a squeeze, his tongue darting out to wet his lips. He slowly moved his fist up towards the head of his cock, milking a bit of clear fluid from the tip. This he swirled over the already glistening flesh and using it to slicken his grip further.

Eric slowly started to work his cock, hand simply sliding up and down at first, but after a moment, he gave his wrist a little twist and let out a soft moan. Honey's eyes had been glued to his hand until that point, but they skipped up to his face at the sound. She expected to see him lost in pleasure, eyes closed, the way she got when she touched herself, but instead he was staring at her; watching her watch him. The little Dauntless gave him an enthused, encouraging smile instinctually - she was enjoying the show already. Eric let out a breathless, near silent chuckle and drew a shaky breath that she could almost feel in her own lungs. His hand moved faster and he licked his lips again.

Honey almost asked him if it felt good, but realized how stupid that would be. Of course it felt good
or he wouldn't do it, his breathing wouldn't have started to deepen and quicken. She wanted to say something, just not sure why and not sure what. An eruption of butterflies was set off in the girl's stomach as a question she really wanted to ask came to mind and she struggled to summon up the courage to force it from her lips.

"Do… you think about me?" Honey whispered. "When you do that?"

The magnificent man kneeling over her slowly smiled, lustful and so approving of her inquiry a little thrum of pride reverberated through her. "Oh, yeah," Eric drawled the words slowly, in a deep, husky tone. The butterflies melted into liquid warmth and pooled lusciously in her belly. "Do you want to know what I think about?"

She nodded with unabashed enthusiasm. He seemed to enjoy that.

"Let's see, I think my favorite one is walking in on you working on your upkeep away from prying eyes in the initiate training grounds. Of course, you get all flustered, because you always do."

Honey bit her lip, ducking her head just a little. She did do that. Terrible startle reflex, the bane of her existence. He certainly enjoyed using it against her and she couldn't very well punch him in the throat like she had done with Hunter.

Eric went on, "I offer to help you with your form. But, of course, I have to touch you, move you this way or that, and you shiver and blush. Oh, Honey, you don't know how happy it made me that you react just the way I'd hoped."

Another wash of pride; so pleased to have pleased him. He paused his stroking, squeezing the head of his dick with a soft grunt before pushing his hips forward and forcing his slick member through the constricting ring of his fingers.

"And you get so breathless and pink, I can't help but offer to teach you some more advanced techniques." Eric was panting softly now, eyes nearly closed, but still locked on her, gaining further arousal from her reaction to his words and the sight of him pleasuring himself. "By then I'm so fucking turned on, I just tear off your clothes and shove you down on the mat; so hard I can't think about anything but getting inside you. Then, I fuck you until you scream."

He was panting heavily now, chest rising and falling beautifully, and his hand was pumping away hard and fast. The sound of Eric's fist moving over his slippery cock, striking his pelvis over and over made Honey twist up inside. She was imagining him atop her on the mat herself now, that sound being caused instead by his skin hitting hers as he thrust into her.

"Oh, God, Eric," she whimpered, absolutely unprepared for how hard it hit her to known he does this and thinks of her. The man's eyes fluttered shut at her words and he groaned heavily. Eric pulled his lips inward, pinning them between his teeth and grunted through his nose and it struck Honey how very open he was being with her, letting her see his every reaction, his private mannerisms. He was giving her a show, but it was all real.

She sat up quickly, reaching for him without thought. Gripping the back of his neck, she pulled him down and kissed him even as he groaned into her mouth. Letting go, the girl dropped her hand between their bodies, curling it over his fist. Eric shuddered and released his erection, grabbing her hand and forcing her to take over as he had the night before. Forcing in the very loosest sense, as there was nothing Honey wanted more than to stroke him just the way he wanted and bring him off. He broke from her lips, his forehead resting against hers, his ragged breaths falling on her open mouth.
"Tell me you want it," Eric growled. It was less of a command than anything he'd asked of her since she'd arrived at his door, yet the most compelling of all. "Tell me y-"

"I want it," Honey hissed without shame, so wanting to give him what he asked for. Anything he asked for. "I want you to make a mess of me. I want your cum on me, Eric."

To call the sound he made a grunt wouldn't do it justice; it was far more bestial than that. He jerked back, tall on his knees above her, head back with abandon. His hips bucked forward and she gasped as the first of his release spattered hot and slick against her sternum. After the first spurt, he hunched forward again, face screwed up in a look of pained bliss as jet after jet of his cum splashed against her breasts and stomach.

"Fuck, Honey," Eric panted as the last of his climax ebbed away. He pushed her back, flopping down onto the mattress beside her. Honey couldn't get enough of watching his broad, burly chest heave. That Cheshire smile was back on her lips as she waited for him to calm down once more.

After a scant couple minutes, because of course the man she'd seen down in the Hole would have that sort of recovery and stamina, Eric leaned up again. Resting on his elbow, fingers still twined with hers, he looked her over as an artist might inspect his work. One side of his mouth bowed upwards in a satisfied kind of way.

"I wish I really did have a camera set up in here. That's an image I'd like to keep." Honey rolled her eyes, but his words still made her skin warm and her stomach dip. He shook his head, mocking regret. Or maybe he wasn't mocking. "You need a shower."

She did need a shower. His cum was already starting to dry on her skin and the feeling of debauched pleasure she'd gotten from him ejaculating onto her was fading quickly into a general sort of discomfort. It itched. Yuck.

At this point, Honey was neither surprised nor angered to find that Eric had taped a spare cuff key to the back of his headboard. Quite the opposite, as it only reaffirmed that the man had really wanted to make sure she stayed with him until he was ready to let her go. He quickly freed their wrists and tossed the handcuffs aside. Instead of immediately rising, he paused, taking her hand in his and looking over her very bruised and friction-burned skin.

"I've got some cream for that," Eric told her softly, not looking up as his finger brushed over the injured area - too light to hurt really, but firmly enough to be uncomfortable. The girl didn't mind one bit. "After, though, or you'll just wash it off."

Eric led Honey back through his small apartment and into the bathroom. He gave her a towel and one last once over with his eyes before stepping out and shutting the door behind him. She didn't waste any time getting under the hot spray, giggling to herself over the phrase and how it was her second "hot spray" of the day. As she washed away the evidence of their encounter, Honey thought about what it would be like to take a shower with the man on the other side of the door. She sighed heavily over the image of him under the shower head, eyes closed, head back, the hot water cascading over his broad shoulders and sluicing its way down the landscape of his muscles, forming little rivulets and tributaries, matting the curls against his chest and abs and further down.

Honey grunted in appreciation of the mental picture, but pushed it away before she got herself in trouble and grabbed the bottle of shampoo. As she worked the suds through her hair, she realized that while the soap had been the same sort of plain stuff she used herself, the shampoo was different from her own. She recognized the fragrance as a part of the whole that was Eric's scent. A very pleased smile curved her lips upward. While the shampoo didn't make Honey smell like Eric, it did make her smell reminiscent of him and she liked that very much.
The girl finished speedily, not wanting to linger too long with slick skin and stroking hands and thoughts of the gorgeous leader in her brain. This was a work day and Honey didn't even know what time it was. Stepping out of the shower, she quickly rubbed the towel over her body before she dripped all over the floor. All the towels at Dauntless were far more abrasive against her skin than the soft, fluffy ones she'd grown up with and the young sub didn't normally mind, but when she scrubbed the rough fabric across her breasts, it caused a jolt of pain that made her yelp softly.

She stepped in front of the mirror - a large, full-length thing big enough for someone of Eric's size to use. The only time Honey ever felt truly comfortable looking at her own reflection was when inspecting an injury she'd sustained. Then the too soft curves didn't register, only the deep shadow of a bruise or puckering of a cut that had begun to heal, black stitches against pale skin or the swath of a scrape across the supple flesh. Just now, she was focused on her breasts. One was perfectly normal, healthy and deep pink at the tip, but the other was topped by dark purple, her nipple swollen slightly and sore, surrounded by the darker hash marks that had been made by Eric's teeth. Honey brushed her fingers over it with feathery lightness, but it still stung and she knew it would for days.

Her eyes and fingers dropped down as she turned her leg outward, exposing her inner thigh. Another deep eggplant bruise, bigger and darker even than on her breast. The shape of Eric's bite was so perfectly clear it looked like he'd drawn it on; he'd bitten so deeply the marks were still red. Honey wouldn't let herself touch this one. It was too close to where she tingled and any stimulation there would set off an undeniable need that she just did not have time to sate. She tore her eyes from the glass and got back to the task on hand.

Once dry, Honey ran a fast comb - Eric's comb - through her curls and wrapped the towel around herself, tucking it securely in place. The main room was even colder with damp skin, the floor like ice under her bare feet. Her host was sitting on his couch, legs stretched out and crossed at the ankles, thumbing through his tablet. It would have been completely normal, as if nothing had happened, save for the fact he was still completely naked and his hair was a wreck from her fingers. Honey envied the man the comfort he had in his own skin. But then, with skin like that and the body it covered, who wouldn't be supremely confident? And he wanted her - the short, soft, crazy Erudite transfer. It was enough to boggle the mind.

"I pulled out a shirt for you," Eric told her without looking up, but he was smirking in amused self-satisfaction. That was nice of him, since it was his semen on her shirt. Honey went back into the bedroom and pulled her clothes on. The garment he'd left for her was a simple, plain black tee, but so worn in it felt like butter against her skin. The shirt hung off the girl, far too big, but if she tuck it in… who was she kidding? The thing was a tent on her small frame, even tucked into her pants. But it was so soft and under the fresh, clean scent of detergent, it still smelled like him.

When Honey stepped into the living area once more, Eric stood and motioned her into the bathroom again. Sitting her on the closed toilet, he procured a small tube of something from his medicine cabinet and squeezed a bit of its contents onto his finger. He took her hand and bent over it, carefully smoothing the cream over her wrist, working it gently into the raw skin. When he was done, he pulled her to her feet and back to the main room.

"You've got about an hour before work," he told Honey, guiding her to the door. "Plenty of time to change and eat something."

Eric paused before opening the door and his expression turned serious.

"I don't care what you tell your friends, but this-" he circled a finger between them "-stays out of the office."
The girl nodded in ready agreement. He didn't even have to tell her that, really. The thing about her friends was nice and made her feel both elated and incredibly apprehensive about how they would react to her new accord with the man who had ridden them all so brutally during initiation. But Honey implicitly grasped that sex and the workplace do not mix, especially not in the Dauntless leadership. They needed to keep their minds focused on running the faction.

"Of course," she affirmed. Eric seemed pleased. She liked pleasing him. He tugged the fabric of his shirt.

"You can keep this." Honey didn't know why that made her heart thud so insistently in her chest, but it did. He opened the door and sent her on her way with a little pat to her bottom. The girl practically skipped down the hallway. She had no idea what this meant, what had happened between them, or where it would lead, but she was more than happy to go along for the ride for now.
Honey works some things out in the wake of her night with Eric - who continues to be very Eric.

Eric had said she could tell her friends whatever she wanted, but when faced with four of them - two happy, loving couples - that morning in the mess, Honey found she had no idea what that was. *I spent the night getting off with Eric and he wants to fuck me, but is being uncharacteristically patient - thoughts?* She didn't know what he wanted out of her aside from the obvious. If it was just a physical arrangement he was seeking, she would be just fine with that. More? The girl couldn't even comprehend what that would mean with someone like the young leader.

Undeniably, Honey wanted to talk to Daisy and Beth about sex and what it was like and why hadn't they told her how shattering cunnilingus was?! If that was considered foreplay, what was the act itself like? She was overwhelmed by just the *thought* of Eric above her and inside her. Would it hurt? Would it hurt too much to enjoy? The sexual health texts she'd read back in Erudite were less than helpful on that, indicating it varied from person to person and partner to partner. That didn't tell her how it would *feel*. Would it sting? Would it burn? Tear? He'd been so big and hard in her hand and commented on how tight she was; what if he simply didn't fit into her vagina?

The snowy-haired Dauntless hated not knowing vital information and going into something half-blind, but she couldn't bring herself to ask; not yet. No, Honey would wait until she better understood what Eric expected of her. Then she'd grill her friends for every crumb of experience they had.

No one asked about her wrist. Anyone who knew the wild, white-haired kid was used to the girl showing up with fresh bruising by now, but she could tell they were curious. It was clearly a ligature mark and that wasn't the sort of injury one would get fighting in the Mats. Thank God they couldn't see the other bruises.

Eric had been right, as Honey had known he would, and the bite on her thigh ached and stung with every step and twofold when she sat down, though the coolness of the bench helped just a bit. That was another thing she wasn't sure how to explain. She didn't think it would surprise anyone that Eric had hurt her. What was problematic would be easing their inevitable concern and explaining why she hadn't stopped him: not because he was bigger and stronger than she was, but because she had enjoyed it. Honey liked the pain he'd inflicted on her. She liked seeing the bruises and feeling the sting of every movement reminding her they were there.

*It was the sort of thing that got you sent for evaluation at Erudite. She knew.*

Despite the near constant twinges of discomfort her thigh and breast caused her, Honey found it surprisingly easy to focus on her work. She was so relaxed and at ease; such a nice side effect of strong sexual release. If Eric kept it up, she could probably double her workload. That would be an
entertaining conversation to have. "You've really been going above and beyond, Honey; aren't you exhausteds?" No, Max, Eric's been giving me regular orgasms and I'm relaxed as a cat all day. She chuckled to herself as she fired off an emassage to Belen giving an overview of the first week's training for the pups as reminder.

As lunch rolled around and her stomach started to remind her how good food was, the young ancillary wondered what Eric would be doing for his afternoon meal. If he intended any sort of social aspect to their... whatever it was, taking meals together would go without saying. Not everyday, but sometimes, surely. Or did lunch count as part of work and thus make it off limits? She mulled this quandary over while double-checking requisitions for supplies.

In the end, there was only one way to find out. Honey stood and left her office, telling Marta she was going to get some lunch. Unfortunately, Eric's office door was closed, which meant either he wasn't in or he didn't want to be disturbed. As an apprentice, she'd have had no trouble knocking or letting herself inside, but that was work and what she was about was definitely not. She was only slightly disappointed and went off to the mess on her own. Maybe dinner, then.

Honey hadn't seen Eric for dinner either. In fact, she hadn't seen him all day; not once since leaving his room that morning. It wasn't odd in itself; she didn't see him every day anyway. Perhaps it stuck out so much because she very much wanted to see him. The girl had been tempted to send him a message with her tab, but had ultimately decided against it. It seemed to violate the no-office concept, even though he'd used his to get her to his quarters in the first place. His quarters - there was an idea. But the thought of just showing up unannounced filled Honey with anxiety. He might have people there. Max might be there. Or Eric might simply have had a long day and gone to bed early. Men might talk about loving the idea of a woman waking them for sex, but since she didn't actually plan to have sex with him, it would probably frustrate him more than anything else. She didn't want Eric to think she was a tease.

So, Honey had donned the shirt he'd given her and lain in bed and let her hands roam over her body, reliving the previous night in her mind's eye. She'd barely gotten to the point where Eric wrapped her fingers around his dick for the first time when she lost it, groaning his name loudly and rocking her hips up against her hand. It was good, but not nearly as good as when he'd done it for her. His fingers were thicker and longer than hers and he'd been able to stretch her channel and reach that spot, oh that spot that had assaulted her with pleasure. And, God, his mouth.

Honey moaned, getting hot all over again. Her imagination was anything but focused the second time, merging the reality with Eric's fantasy with reality again and his head was between her legs on the raised mat of the gym where he'd found her the night after her Landscape. The second orgasm was better and sent her off to sleep feeling warm and relaxed and looking forward to tomorrow.

Eric was not in the office the next day. His secretary, Ryland, told Honey the leader had gone out with a Patrol to inspect part of the Factionless sector and would be gone all day. Damn. It was slightly more difficult to stay on task that morning, but she managed, pushing through her work with her usual fervor. Marta brought her a hot chocolate, because the young sub had never been fond of coffee, and she sipped it idly while reading through her messages.

With a belly full of warm cocoa and sugar, the normally comfortable temperature of the room seemed suddenly stifling and Honey shrugged off her overshirt, tossing it to rest on top of the filing cabinet, and leaving her in a plain tee. Much better. She brought up the Dauntless archives, intending to briefly look into the kind of combat oriented activities a militarized canine unit would be expected to engage in, since that seemed to be the next logical progression and Kai was still pushing for it. Her
eyes fell on the personnel icon by chance and paused. Faction members' personality profiles, medical information, birth and marriage records, disciplinary reports, commendations, and any other pertinent information on every person within Dauntless was kept in those files. As an apprentice, Honey hadn't been allowed access, but as an ancillary she had her own passcode.

It hadn't escaped the girl that she knew very little about the young leader whose marks adorned her body. Honey knew how he smelled, how he tasted, how he sounded when he came, but not something as simple as his last name or birthday. She hesitated, concerned that it was an invasion of privacy to look into Eric's files. It wouldn't tell her his favorite color, but so much about the man would be laid bare before her. That was true, she reasoned, but he'd had access to her files for months and there was no doubt he would have scoured every document of her history. His forte was intelligence, after all, and she'd chosen to become part of the leadership of his faction. Eric probably knew everything from Honey's shoe size to her first year grade average.

*Turnabout is fair play.* She opened the icon and entered her code, searching through the member roster for his name. Without pause, she opened his file. RESTRICTED. Damn. Of course it would be; he was a leader of Dauntless. Max and Amelia and the others would be restricted as well. Out of curiosity, Honey brought up her own file. As an ancillary, only her basic information was available - transfer date, faction of origin, her parents, her scores in initiation, her current placement within the faction. Her medical records, personality profiles, non-existent disciplinary reports, and the footage from her training sims and Fear Landscape were restricted; only the leaders would have access to those. She smiled as she looked at her Choosing Day results.

**Badger, Honey**

**Faction of Origin:** Erudite

**Faction of Choosing:** Dauntless

**Birth Name:** REDACTED

"I've got the schedules for the dogs' vaccinations," Marta said as she entered Honey's office just before lunch.

"Ah, thank you," the girl said pleasantly, reaching for the file the woman held. As she took the folder, Marta hissed between her teeth sympathetically.

"That one looks like it hurts." Honey looked at her wrist, for she'd taken the file with her left hand and the still raw ligature mark was now in full view. Taking for granted that people would just chalk it up as another of her random injuries, the girl hadn't even thought to keep it covered.

"It looks worse than it is," she assured her secretary with a dismissive shrug. Marta didn't look convinced and shook her head.

"How did you even get that, anyway?" Honey opened the file and looked inside, absorbed in its contents or that's how she hoped she appeared to the concerned woman.

With an ambivalent shrug, the crow muttered, "Misadventure. Nothing serious."

"It's funny; I saw Eric yesterday and he has the same kind of mark on his wrist, too." Shit. Honey's head snapped up, her gaze lifting quickly to Marta's. She had to nip this in the bud before it became office gossip. The woman's eyes rounded at the sub's knee-jerk response. "Oh, my God, you *didn't*!"

The girl hopped up from her chair, crossing the room in a second and shutting the door before Marta
could say anything else.

"You and Eric?" The secretary's eyes were wide and bright with shock and mischievous glee.

"Shut up!" Honey hissed.

"Oh, this is too good," Marta declared, sitting herself right on her boss's desk and leaning forward eagerly. "Is he huge? He looks like he'd be huge."

"No. Stop. Stop talking," the girl ordered in a harder, more commanding tone than she'd ever used on anyone before. Her secretary blinked in surprise and stood up again, no longer teasing, but concerned.

"What's wrong? He didn't-"

"Marta, stop," Honey said again. "There's no talking about my sex life in the office. Period. Not to me and not to anyone else. I don't mind you making jokes about bullshit and being inappropriate; it's fine. But anything between me and Eric or anyone else is off limits. Understand?"

The woman nodded immediately, sobered and serious. Honey was almost surprised. She'd never given an order before. The girl might not have expected anyone to listen to her at all, given her size and age.

"I understand," Marta assured her, completely sincere. The girl relaxed, relieved it had been that easy, which made the woman relax and lean her butt on the desk. A little bit of her normal cheek returned and she asked, "I can still talk about me and Max, though, right?"

Honey rolled her eyes and made a sound of disgust. "I wish you wouldn't."

An hour after lunch the next day, Eric strode into her office without a word of greeting and shut her door behind him. Honey smiled brightly. It was the first time they'd been in the same room since the other morning, two days ago. Two and a half, really. He locked her door and the girl's smile faded.

"What are you doing?" she asked, her head tilted in confusion.

"It's been two days," he said in place of an answer to her question. "You haven't come to see me."

Now, Honey frowned, unsure of herself. She'd thought her reasons for not seeking him out were logical and sound, but if it bothered him, maybe she'd been wrong. The girl pointed out, "You didn't come see me, either."

"I'm here, now," Eric said in a husky tone that made her thighs tingle. He crossed the room in half a heartbeat. Honey barely had time to pulled her chair away from her desk before he was turning it towards himself and kneeling between her knees.

"Wait," she told him, putting her hands on his shoulders to waylay any move towards her. The man just grabbed her ass and pulled her to the edge of the chair, his hips splitting her thighs apart. The bite mark throbbed painfully. "Eric!"

"Didn't you miss me?" he asked, feigning injury, rubbing his thumbs against her hips. Awareness shuddered through her and her heart started to pound. Eric turned his head and nuzzled her injured wrist. The girl's breath left her body all at once and her eyelids dropped halfway. She licked her lips
and nodded.

"I wanted to see you, but... I don't know how this works," Honey admitted softly.

"Like this," the man between her thighs purred as he lifted a hand to cup her neck and pull her forward where he could claim her mouth. She sighed heavily into the kiss, all but melting into him. Her fingers gripped the thick padding of his vest shoulders as his tongue stroked against hers, bringing that sweetness she'd been missing for over forty-eight hours. Felt like longer.

Eric groaned softly. The hand on her hip moved back to cup her ass, pulling Honey almost off the chair altogether and pressing her body against his more firmly. Her arms started to circle his neck, but she stopped herself. No, this wasn't right. They were in her office. Marta, whom the young sub had specifically ordered not to so much as talk about her and Eric, was right outside and here Honey was with his tongue down her throat. The girl pushed at his shoulders again, pulling back and ending the kiss.

"Stop, Eric," she panted. He growled in annoyance, the hand at the back of her neck tightening as he pulled her forward determinedly. Honey quickly knocked her forearm against the inside of Eric's elbow and jerked to the side, breaking his hold on her spine. She caught his jaw in a tight grip, tight enough to hurt most people. "What do you think you're doing?"

It was the same hard, authoritative tone the sub had used on her secretary the previous day. His piercings glinted.

"It's called kissing," the man told her insolently. Her glare intensified.

"You know what I'm talking about."

Eric scoffed softly, squeezing her ass. His other hand dropped to her knee - the knee on that leg.

"Rules are made to be broken, Honey."

"Not this one," she told him firmly. Honey was very proud of the fact that her voice didn't quaver at all, even though his hand was making its way up her thigh and his thumb was on a collision course with the painful bruise he put there.

"I know you want me to touch you," Eric informed her without doubt, his voice deep and heavy with want.

"Oh, I do," the girl admitted freely. She caught his hand, bending his finger back until he removed it from her person. She leveled her most unyielding, stony gaze upon the man. He might be a leader of the faction, but right now, Honey was in control. "But not in here. Not ever. Do you understand?"

All at once, his face split into a wide grin. "I understand perfectly."

Eric sat dutifully back on his heels, his hands resting respectfully on his own thighs now, as he smiled up at her, looking almost impressed. Impressed and incredibly pleased. Honey's eyebrows drew together in confusion. Why was he so thrilled to be rejected? She didn't understand what he was playing at.

Playing at. Her brows furrowed further and her frown grew mighty. He was playing. He'd come in there, kissed her, used that rumbling purr he knew affected her, and went after her bruises all to test her! With an incensed sound of disgust, the girl released him and pushed back into her chair. She planted a foot in the middle of his chest and shoved hard. The move actually surprised him and Eric toppled back against her filing cabinet. He laughed, delighted.
"Get out," Honey ordered, beyond irritated. He didn't argue, but he didn't look contrite at all, either. The young leader just got up and left, still chortling to himself. *Asshole.* She was so very sick of his shit, of him pushing her to see how she reacted and then acting like her responses were all his doing. As if he held her strings.

The instant after Eric left her office, Marta's head popped into the doorway, a curious expression on her face. She took one look at the girl's scowl and disappeared again without a word.

Sometime during dinner that night, Honey had calmed down about Eric's obnoxious actions in her office. She'd looked at it logically from his viewpoint. She was very young for her position and he was her first sexual partner. It wouldn't be unfair to doubt the willpower of a teenaged girl, especially when she was up against not only her own hormones, but the pressure of her older, more experienced, very intense partner and the fact that said partner was a leader of the faction and had been an authority figure to her since her arrival there. It was reasonable to wonder if the girl had it in her. It was just a dickhead thing to do, as, being the older, more intense, authority figure side of the equation, he could have taken responsibility for making sure nothing happened between them in the office.

She did like that she'd pleased him, though. Honey had always sought Eric's approval, but this was different. This wasn't just an initiate trying to live up to the demands of her instructor or the novice trying to impress her mentor. God, it wasn't, was it? She hadn't just shifted laterally into a different sort of authority figure/subordinate relationship, had she? This prospect worried Honey greatly, sending her Erudite-born mind into high gear as she worked the problem over and over.

Hours later, she lay restless in her bed, frowning up at the ceiling as if it held the answers she sought. Honey wouldn't allow herself to think about Eric's hands or mouth or body, even though his scent wafted up from his shirt every time she moved. Her body very much wanted her to think about him, to relive those moments and give it some satisfaction, but her mind refused. Not until she understood.

Then, all at once, the girl did understand. Ironically, it was the battle of wills between her insistent genitalia and her resistant brain that sparked her epiphany. The difference was that as an initiate and a novice, Eric had complete control over her. He gave orders, she followed orders. He set the example, she copied the example. He had all the power. But in this - this whatever they had growing between them - Honey was an equal authority. Yes, he had much to teach her, but only if she chose to learn it. If she said stop, he stopped. She could end it outright, completely, and he'd never touch her again. She absolutely had no intention of doing so - she wanted him far too badly - but she could. And, she might not have his experience or confidence, but Honey just bet Eric's body would respond to her attentions just as strongly as her own did to his.

That thought made her grin as her hand slid down her belly to brush against the far too tender flesh of her thigh. This time, in her replaying of that night, she didn't unlock Eric's cuffs and the bar didn't pop out of place. All that power was at her mercy. She came so hard it was almost as good as the orgasms Eric had given her himself. Almost, but not quite.

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter means another two-fer, so be sure to stop by later.
"Are you feeling okay?" Hotdog asked out of nowhere.

Honey looked up from her eggs. "Yeah, why?"

"You've been really quiet and you're not eating," he told her, sounding very much like her father in that moment. She chuckled and told him so, just to assuage any concerns. It seemed to work and he let the topic drop.

He was right, though, the girl had barely touched her food. Her stomach was a mess of tension and apprehension about seeing the young leader. Honey dearly wished she could speak to Beth and Daisy about what was going on between her and Eric, but she still didn't have any answers to the questions she knew they would ask about their understanding and she wasn't up to explaining her the ligature on her wrist and everything that went with it.

There was a separate eating area for the leadership of Dauntless one level up above the regular mess. The canteen was on an open balcony that overlooked the rest of the hall and Honey had seen it from below, but had never gone inside. She could if she wanted to; as ancillary she had access, but she didn't want to. Eating with her friends or just by herself amongst the throngs of faction members was more appealing than trying to choke down her meals while half the crows glared at her and the other half tried to ingratiate themselves into her good graces.

It was where Eric took his meals most of the time, which was why Honey had been loitering just down the hall for the past eight minutes. There was still over thirty minutes before they were expected in the office of a morning and she really hoped he'd stick to his normal schedule of going in just a bit early. She hated standing there and doing nothing. The inactivity pushed her to pull out her tab and start looking through it, checking for emessages and rereading reports she'd already reread half a dozen times.

"I wanted to talk to you about yesterday."

"Alright," Eric said, unsurprised, tucking his tablet away and looking at her expectantly.

"I don't appreciate being manipulated," the girl told him in a firm tone of displeasure. "In fact, I hate it. But I understand why you felt the need to push me."
"I figured you would," he nodded. "Once you got over being pissed off."

"What I want to know is, are you going to trust me now?" she demanded. "If not, I don't think this can continue."

"Oh?" The young leader's brows lifted. He appeared both surprised and apparently tickled by her statement.

"Stop laughing at me," Honey scowled. "I'm serious. I'm not going to waste my energy dissecting everything you say and do because it might be another test you've decided to give me. Either you trust me or you don't and if you don't, I don't need the hassle."

Eric touched her arm and stopped, looking down at her, still clearly entertained, but sincere. "You're right. I should trust you," he agreed. "No more tests. Alright?"

She nodded, greatly relieved. The girl had been so worried he would just take her at her word and call the whole thing off or he'd ignore her and she'd have to end it herself. It would be for the best, but it was not the outcome she wanted.

"And I'm not laughing at you," Eric went on, though his light tone and the amused curl of his lips seemed to say otherwise. "I'm enjoying your assertiveness. Most people don't talk to me the way you did yesterday or how you are right now and I don't fucking want them to."

"I hadn't noticed," Honey deadpanned dryly, crossing her arms. He chuckled and laid his hands on her biceps, rubbing them lightly.

"You used to be terrified of me," he reminded her, a bit brusque. "Now, you're a strong Dauntless woman. Do you know how impossible it is to find someone who won't take any of my shit? I'm not laughing; I'm just happy. I need that in a lover. Max isn't really my type."

His earnest, slightly irritated tone gave credence to his words. The man wasn't just paying her lip service or telling her what she wanted to hear. Honey was smiling now, too. Eric thought she was strong. She was strong; the girl didn't need him to tell her that, but she was happy he appreciated it. He wanted her to be strong. He'd also called her his lover and that sent all kinds of good feelings through her. Eric gave her arms a little squeeze, then released them.

"What are you doing after work tonight?" he asked as they started walking again. Honey shrugged.

"Dinner. I haven't been to the Mats in a few days, so I might head down there."

He nodded, but didn't say more. Of course, he wouldn't be interested in the Mats; not with the kind of fighting he preferred. A chill went up her spine remembering how easily he'd shaken off the battle with the giant man; standing in the pit, covered in blood, and looking for more.

"What time is it?" Honey asked.

"We're still early," Eric assured her, not bothering to check.

"How early, though?" He fished out his tab, not pointing out that she could have easily done the same herself.

A quick glance at the device and he tucked it away again. "Twenty-five minutes."

Plenty of time. Honey waited a few paces more, until they approached one of the darker offshoots that were so common in the Dauntless corridors. Two of the lights were out, leaving the hall in deep
shadow. If someone came by, heading from the canteen to the leadership offices, they might not even notice anyone there in the dark. Perfect. She grabbed Eric's wrist and tugged him into the blackness. Thankfully, he went willingly and let her shove him against the wall.

The girl pressed her body into his and rose up. Even on her toes, she wasn't nearly tall enough to reach his mouth, so she pulled his head down by force - force the young leader didn't resist. His mouth was firm, but yielding under her assault; Eric let Honey control the kiss, but gave as good as he got. She pulled his vest open, the snaps popping easily apart, and pushed her hands inside. The shirt he was wearing wasn't as soft as the one he'd given her and she smiled against his lips over that fact. She tugged it free of his pants, wanting to get at his skin - his smooth, luscious skin that she already missed so much.

Eric groaned into her mouth as Honey's hands stroked his flesh greedily and returned the favor, pulling her shirt loose in turn and flattening his palms against her back. A moment later, he snaked his fingers under the waistband of her pants and shorts, sliding a hand down to cup her bare cheek. She moaned, pushing harder against his lips, sucking his tongue into her mouth and curling her own around it. Sharp nails scraped across his ribs and the man gasped. She felt a shudder roll through him and pressed her body ever more firmly against his as if to chase away the chill when she really just wanted to make him shake harder.

Honey could feel Eric's erection against her belly, half hard and growing, and boldly drew her hand from his shirt to cup him through his pants. The leader's mouth broke from hers, his head falling forward to rest on her shoulder. He moaned, pushing his hardon against her palm, and squeezed her ass harder. The girl all but purred over his reaction, rubbing her hand against the bulge beneath it. Eric bit her shoulder, not hard enough to bruise through her jacket, but it still made her moan loudly - far louder than she should have if she wanted their liaison to remain clandestine.

Honey's palm itched, craving the velvety feel of his cock against her skin. Even if they were spotted, it wasn't as though public sexual encounters were exactly a rare occurrence at Dauntless. She quickly opened his fly, but before she could reach inside, Eric had yanked his hand out of her shirt and grabbed her wrist to stop her.

"Don't," he panted the order. Honey whined like a child denied a treat.

"Why not?" she demanded. She turned her head and nipped at his ear. Then, in a matter of fact way, she said, "Your dick is hard and I want to touch it."

He groaned, half pleasure and half frustration, then stood up straight and removed his other hand as well, pushing her back a step. The girl frowned up at him, confused by his rejection. The man huffed at the look on her face, bending to take her mouth again as if he couldn't stand it. Once he'd thoroughly kissed the frown off her lips, Eric straightened again.

"I don't have time to go change my clothes because you got cum all over them. And neither do you," he told her with a lopsided smirk. Then his brows lifted meaningfully. "So, unless you plan to get on your knees and swallow it down like a good girl...?"

Honey licked her lips and immediately regretted doing so. She shook her head.

"I don't want that taste in my mouth all morning," she insisted. It was true; she hadn't particularly enjoyed the taste of his ejaculate the last time. That wasn't the only reason she didn't want to do what he was suggesting, but it was a factor and the least embarrassing one to admit to. She gave him an insolent smirk of her own. "Unless you have a mint?"

He sighed in disappointment and shook his head. "Sorry; fresh out."
She snapped her fingers, mimicking his bummed out expression. "Darn."

With a shrug, he zipped his pants back up. "No dick for you, then."

Honey's feigned disappointment became genuine and Eric laughed at the look on her face. "You're going to be such a handful once I actually fuck you."

Something in the offhand way he said it, as if it were a given, as if there were no doubt, plucked a chord within her and it thrummed across her senses. The girl's pulse skittered and her stomach clenched. A blush lit her face and curled secretly over her shoulders and between her breasts. She wasn't ready to do it, but she was so ready to be ready.

Marta had seen her walk into the offices with Eric and noticed how much more relaxed and happy the young sub was that day, but hadn't mentioned a thing. Honey was so very glad. Giving an order and having someone follow it without dissent was such a novelty for the girl, she marveled over it whenever the thought arose. She knew she'd have to get used to the fact that, as an ancillary, she was an authority figure in the faction now, but the concept was so foreign to the small former Erudite. Honey had never been in control of anything in her life; always answering to teachers and her parents and then Four, Lauren, and Eric. Even the other initiates at times - like the way she'd just gone along with the others during capture the flag. Now, she had power over almost the whole of Dauntless, the warrior faction. It was too big to think about all at once.

Obtaining birth control as a woman in Dauntless was incredibly easy and judgment free. Honey imagined it was that way in Erudite as well, though there was probably far more preamble than, "Name?". A quick records check, then a shot, and she left with a card to remind her come back in three months. She'd gone to the infirmary during lunch and hadn't even had to rush through her meal afterwards. As unremarkable as it had been, the girl still blushed hotly all the way through the ten minute interaction.

Since she was ready to be ready, Honey wanted to make sure she was ready the moment she was ready. She had even contemplated getting some condoms, as embarrassing as it would have been for her. Unfortunately, she'd always been terrible at size comparison and had no idea if Eric was actually huge or if she just thought that because she was so inexperienced. There were too many options to just guess. She'd leave that portion of things in his hands for now.

Hotdog was happy Honey appeared to have her appetite back at dinner that evening. She knew, because he told her so. He really was quite sweet and she wondered if he'd always been that way, hidden behind his Candor bluntness or if Beth's inherent soft caring was rubbing off on him. Honey had teased him that he sounded like her father that morning, but now she found herself thinking that he would be a good father himself. Calhoun would, also, of course. That was an adorable image: the big Dauntless with several tiny facsimiles of Daisy and himself hanging all over his massive frame, the lot of them giggling like idiots.

But one day those children would turn sixteen and take their aptitude test and make their Choice and might leave Dauntless for another faction. They might fail initiation and end up Factionless. The girl's stomach turned and she violently shoved the thought away. Choosing Day was coming up in the not too distant future and Honey's thoughts often drifted towards the next class of initiates. They would be elated and terrified, as her own class had been. Four and Lauren would intimidate them, Eric would ride them, training would push them to the breaking point and some of them wouldn't make it. Like Shay.
Where was she now? Did her family ever see her after she left Dauntless? Again, Honey pushed the thoughts away. There was nothing she could do for Shay or any of the incoming initiates. It was their choice to make and their consequences to live with. Instead, she focused on the people around her, those who had come through and proven themselves.

Daisy was still trying to convince Calhoun that, between the two of them, they could absolutely take care of a dog. The big man wasn't quite so keen on the notion as his girlfriend. Hotdog was playing both sides and enjoying the turmoil he caused in doing so.

"Just think of the fur everywhere!"

Calhoun threw a hand towards their friend, brows up. "See? Fur. Everywhere. We only wear black, darlin'."

Honey might not want the massive ambassador for herself, but she certainly enjoyed the way he called Daisy "darlin". It was affectionate and teasing and loving all at the same time. She couldn't imagine Eric using an endearment like that. He didn't seem like a nickname sort of man, so the girl would have to continue to live vicariously through Daisy. Daisy, who was protesting mightily, but with a happy smile.

"So, we'll get a black dog!"

"That does seem to negate your argument," Hotdog told his taller friend, earning himself a playful glower.

"You know, Hot Stuff, you're gonna end up k-" Honey's sentence cut off mid-word as something dropped onto her tray, landing right in her mashed potatoes.

"What the hell is that?" Hotdog asked, frowning at her food and then up over her head. The girl was flushing brightly as she followed his gaze up to the canteen balcony. The balcony where a tall man currently stood, smirking down at her. Her heart started to pound.

"Did Eric drop that?" Daisy asked, confused. Honey snapped back around to face her tray, plucking the plastic wrapped mint from her food.

"Yes," she admitted, licking the potatoes off the wrapper. She looked up at the young leader again and very deliberately tucked the mint into her jacket's breast pocket. Eric's smirk turned into a grin and he disappeared back into the canteen.

"What was that about?" The white haired girl gave her former-Candor friend a shrug and rolled her eyes.

"Eric thinks he's funny," she told them by way of explanation. Honey had no intention of telling them the truth. Even if she'd come clean about her relationship with the intimidating man, she wouldn't have told them about their conversation that morning. But the girl hated lying to her friends, so she kept it as vague as possible.

Daisy frowned, ever protective. "What, does he say you've got bad breath?"

"He's mentioned it." Which was entirely true. He'd mentioned it that one time in the car on the way to Erudite, so it wasn't a lie.

"What a jerk," Calhoun said with a frown, sounding disgusted. The others nodded in agreement.

"How do you stand to work with that guy?" Hotdog demanded rhetorically. Honey shrugged again,
but felt the need to defend the leader.

"He's not so bad," she insisted, definitely not wanting them to start thinking about how much they all hated Eric. Her friends all looked at her like she was insane - this was not a rare occurrence. "Really. You thought Four was bad, too, remember? But now that you work with him every day, you know that's not true."

"I dunno what you're talking about," the security officer insisted airily. "I've always loved Four like a brother."

They all laughed at the blatant falsehood, then more as Hotdog expounded on how close he and their instructor had always been. It was always the funniest when a Candor lied. However, even as she giggled over the birthday cards her friend insisted Four had been sending him since childhood, Honey could feel that mint burning a hole in her pocket.

Chapter End Notes

Looks like things are getting back on track.
"I suppose you think you're very clever," Honey asked sardonically as Eric fell in step beside her. She'd been heading towards the Pit, intent on making her way to the Mats. He chuckled.

"I have my moments." The leader shrugged, smirking away. "How honest was your explanation?"

"I haven't told them yet. About us," she admitted. His brows rose and Honey immediately wished she hadn't kept putting it off. "I'm just not sure how to explain it."

"You mean excuse it," he accused, his teasing demeanor slipping away behind furrowed brows as they made their way through the usual sea of bodies flooding the core of Dauntless life. Eric didn't seem angry. He seemed disappointed in her, as if she'd failed to meet some expectation. The girl frowned at him.

"No, I don't," she told him firmly. "I'm not ashamed. I'm confused."

Now he frowned as well. "Confused about what? You want me, I want you; it's pretty simple."

"That part is simple," Honey agreed, flushing brightly that he was just saying so in the middle of the Pit where anyone could overhear. "Until this morning, if you recall, there were some things between us that weren't so clear."

The young leader didn't comment on that statement, knowing she was right. Instead, he asked pointedly, "Is there anything else you need clarified?"

Pushing her way out of the mob and heading for the eastern corridor, the crow pondered his question. They were obviously attracted to each other - a fact that still boggled her mind. Sex was the key factor in their personal interactions, but was it the only factor? Eric said he enjoyed her assertiveness, but that didn't have to mean anything deeper.

"Do you like me?" It was what she really wanted to know. Was there anything in his consideration of her beyond the physical. The man at her side let out a scoffing laugh and looked down at her incredulously. It was a very similar expression, in fact, to the ones the girl's friends had given her just two hours before.

"Yes, Honey, I like you," he chuckled with a little exasperated shake of his head. Then his smirk returned for a moment before dissolving behind too wide eyes that blinked fragiley down at her.
"Do you like me?"

Of course he was mocking her. That's what Eric did; he pushed buttons. She almost snarked back at him. Almost, but didn't, because that was what he expected and Honey had found she enjoyed defying his expectations.

"Yes." As surprising as it was, when he wasn't being so damn Eric, the girl did actually like being around him. His smile was smug and confident; he never doubted himself for a second. "Will you eat breakfast with me tomorrow?"

That one threw him a little bit. She could see it in his eyes and the way the corner of his mouth twitched for just an instant. This would give her the other answer she needed, letting her know if their interactions would be limited to carnal pursuits. It wouldn't deter the young sub, but it would disappoint her.

The man didn't hesitate, however. "If you want." She did want. Honey smiled widely up at him, happier than she expected to be at his easy acceptance. Eric's smile didn't match her own, though; his was expectant and heated. "Will you stay with me tonight?"

Her step faltered as her heart skipped a beat. The girl nodded eagerly. Was he kidding? Of course, she'd stay with him. She'd live in his quarters if it meant she'd get to feel his mouth on her again. She'd curl up right under his desk. His expectant grin blossomed into something deeply hungry and Honey felt a gush of heat between her legs that made her blush hotly.

Eric suddenly grabbed her arms and shoved her backwards, pushing her down a hall she hadn't noticed since her focus had been on his mouth. Unlike the one she'd chosen that morning, this corridor was as brightly lit as any of the others. The man fixed that with a quick twist of his wrist; he'd reached up and grabbed the fluorescent bulb that flickered above them and turned it. The break in the circuit caused the entire row to go out, plunging them into shadow.

"We have some unfinished business to take care of," he told her in a low voice, crowding her smaller body against the wall. Honey's hands immediately lifted to the waist of his pants. Eric's shuddering growl told her he hadn't anticipated her to comply quite so quickly and that made her grin.

The girl had all day to reconcile herself to the idea of performing oral sex. Yes, she was nervous and had very little idea what to do, but she wasn't afraid. The morning she'd woken in the young leader's bed and he'd so willingly allowed her time to explore his chest and shoulders, to really grow comfortable touching his body assured her the man could apply that kind of patience to anything she would require it for. Eric had a steely resolve and was willing to do what was necessary to gain the things that he wanted, so if it was necessary for him to be patient with the little virgin he wanted to suck his dick, that's what he would be.

This time, when Honey opened his fly, Eric didn't stop her. She pushed his pants and brief-shorts low on his hips and reached inside to pull his half-erect cock free. His head dropped to rest on her shoulder again as she started to stroke him to full hardness. Honey watched with fascination as he thickened and lengthened for her like magic. He turned his head and kissed her neck, his breathing growing heavy and deep. Offering her throat up to him, she moaned softly. Eric's mouth was hot and wet as he sucked where her pulse beat closest to the skin; so good she almost forgot what they were there for. Almost.

"You'll have to tell me what to do," the girl whispered, licking her lips. She grinned to herself in the darkness. "But you like that."

He rumbled against the sensitive spot where her neck met her shoulder. "I do like that," the leader
agreed in a husky voice. Honey swallowed hard and pushed Eric back, sinking down to her knees before him. She was now on eye level with his cock and wished there was more light so she could see him better.

Lifting her other hand to join the one still gently stroking his shaft, her touches turned into tentative caresses. Thick, heavy, and slightly longer than she could hold in both hands, it arced upwards when fully engorged. The head was deeply flushed, darker than the shaft, and she enjoyed that contrast. It had also started to weep that clear fluid that was so nice and slippery against the velvety flesh when she slid her fingers over it.

Honey looked up to find Eric watching her, his jaw tight, breathing heavily. He had one hand planted on the wall behind her and was leaning against it, looming over her. Her heart pounded against her ribs.

"What do I do first?" she asked softly, unsure how to start. His nostrils flared as he took a deep breath in and licked his lips.

"Use your tongue," Eric instructed, his voice hoarse with anticipation. He then traced a finger up the underside of his shaft, from base to tip, in illustration. That put her in mind of watching him stroke himself and made the girl press her thighs together against the onslaught of tingles between them. Okay, she could do that.

Tilting his dick upwards a bit, Honey leaned in and ran her tongue along the path he'd set for her. He tasted salty and strange, but not unpleasant. The clear fluid was sharp on her taste buds and that she wasn't so sure about. Eric let out a rumbling growl above her as her tongue glid over the head and flicked off the tip. She wondered if this felt as good for him as his tongue had against her clit. It must. Emboldened, she repeated the long, slow swipe of her tongue, slightly aside of the first. This time, she found the bite of his precum to her liking.

She lapped at his dick with short, light strokes, as he had her clitoris. The head of his cock was oh so soft and slick and when he groaned over her ministrations, Honey knew. She could definitely grow to love this.

Again, Eric showed that steely resolve, letting her learn the feel and taste of him. She listened closely to every sound he made, kept her eyes open to take in every twitch and shift. She even grew so brazen as to stroke her fingers against the soft skin of his balls and weigh them in her hand. That certainly got a reaction from the man.

Strong fingers wove into her hair, drawing her eyes back up to his face. Honey had been hot and tingly before, but the look of unadulterated lust on Eric's face set her on fire. She gasped and when her lips parted, he urged her forward. The girl opened her mouth as wide as she could, taking the head of his dick between her lips. It filled her mouth, pressing down against her tongue.

Hissing in a sharp breath, he admonished, "Teeth."

She didn't think it was possible to be embarrassed with a penis in her mouth, but she was wrong. Honey quickly pulled her lips in, shielding the sensitive flesh from the scrape of her teeth. She tried to look apologetic. He ran his fingers through her hair once, reassuringly.

"Go on," Eric prompted, in a low grunt. The girl pushed forward a bit more, enjoying the way he filled her mouth and twitched against her tongue. Then she pulled back, locking her lips around his shaft and sucking firmly as she did so. The effect was instantaneous. Eric's head arched back and he groaned loudly. His dick twitched inside her mouth and a little pulse of that sharp fluid hit her tongue.
Oh, she liked that. Honey did it again, then again, reveling in the moans coming from above her and the throbbing inside her mouth. The hand in her hair guided her the way he wanted her to move and with every bob of her head, she took more and more of him into her mouth. His hips rocked forward just a bit and it made her groan. That made him suck air in between his teeth and grip her hair harder. The tip of his dick hit the back of her throat and her eyes widened as she gagged involuntarily. She felt the man shiver and he tried to make her movements more shallow. Instead, the girl gripped his thighs for leverage and pushed forward harder.

"God, Honey. You feel so fucking good," Eric moaned heavily, loudly. "Sucking my cock like you love it." She did love it. He was so uncaringly loud, anyone nearby could hear. Not only did that not bother her, it pushed her arousal even higher.

Her eyes watered, but Honey fought her gag reflex until the constant touch of his cock against her pallet desensitized it. Desensitized, what a strange word to use at a time when all that existed of her was nerves and the feel of Eric against them. He was groaning her name and it was like a rough caress. His thighs were hard under her hands. Everything about him was hard; he may as well be cut from the rock behind her. Honey was aching for him by now and was about to drop her hand from his thigh and reach down to relieve that ache, when she heard voices echoing down the hall.

The reality of someone coming upon them struck the girl far differently than the idea of it had done. Ice raced through Honey's veins and she froze for an instant, then panicked. She tried to pull back, but the hand cupping her skull was like iron holding her in place. Her wide eyes looked up to his heavily lidded ones and found that Eric was smirking down at her. As the voices drew nearer and she pushed against his thighs, his smirk twisted into a full sneer of lusty dominance. Lifting his hand from the wall, he brought one finger to his lips.

"Shhh," he hissed softly, cruelly teasing her. Then he pushed his hips forward with very deliberate slowness and moaned as his dick sank back into the wet recesses of her mouth. Honey's clit twitched and she shifted uncomfortably, her thighs rubbing together even as ice gathered in her stomach. The man didn't care at all if someone saw them and that sent heat racing through her, but she was the one on her knees in a hallway like an escort and a sharp pang of humiliation followed in its wake. Her eyes squeezed shut tight against the heat building behind them.

"C'mon, Honey. Don't get shy on me now," he purred down at her, pulling her head back and pushing her forward again as his hips arched slightly to meet her. She could hear footsteps now and her eyes opened, looking frantically toward the corridor that led to the Mats. Eric growled, tugging her hair. "Look at me."

She couldn't refuse his command and lifted her gaze to his immediately. A tear escaped the corner of her eye, leaving an icy trail along her flushed skin. He shifted, easily sliding toward the wall and turning them just enough that his back was to the hallway and his bulk blocked her much smaller self from view.

Tucked safely behind him, shielded from prying eyes, the clawing dread in her chest faded. His hand loosened, combing through her curls tenderly. The girl pulled back and he didn't stop her. He wouldn't stop her.

"No one gets to see you like this, but me," he told her in a harsh growl of protective possession. "No one deserves to look at you. You're too far above them."

Her heart lurched in her chest. Eric didn't say things to be nice; Eric didn't say things to make people feel better. Eric was looking down at her, with her lips still wrapped around his cock, as if Honey was something special. Something so special he meant to jealously keep it to himself.
Any trace of cold was melted by the warmth his words and expression dredged up from deep within her, then boiled away to steam under the influx of searing heat that scorched through her system. She pushed forward, taking him as deep as she could manage, her eyes locked on his unwaveringly. Eric moaned and Honey believed it was as much from the way she was looking at him as the feel of her mouth. His fingers tightened in her hair again and he rocked into her as she moved, his mouth falling open as his chest heaved.

"Oh ho! Look at this!" a male voice called from behind the young leader. The laughter of multiple others came directly after.

"Damn, man," another male, younger by the sound of it, cackled. "Get it!"

Eric turned his head back over his shoulder, but didn't break eye contact with the girl on her knees before him. He snarled in a way that was reminiscent of the day he'd gone after Jacob on the knife range. "Fuck off!"

"Oh shit!" the first male gasped, his voice choked tight with shock and fear. The youngest of the Dauntless leaders was easily recognizable and quite terrifying to most. The group took off down the hall, their footfalls fading quickly to nothing.

The girl dug her nails into his thighs and moaned in approval. He purred down at her, a lion being stroked.

"You look so pretty with your lips around my dick," Eric said, breathlessly. "Did I tell you? So pretty."

He stroked her cheek lightly and Honey raised her hand to cover his. Just for a moment, to appreciate his words. Then she pushed his hand away and scraped her nails against his hip on her way to wrap her fingers around the not inconsiderable amount of him that wouldn't fit into her mouth. She pumped her fist with firm, sure strokes. Eric began to pant harshly, brokenly. Recognizing the sound, Honey pushed further, sucked harder, rubbing her tongue against the underside of his shaft.

"Fuck, I'm gonna come," he warned in a growl so low and harsh it was like stone grinding on stone. Honey made a sound of wanton encouragement, urging him on, wanting him to lose himself to her. A massive shudder rippled through the man and his hips arched forward sharply. The hand in her hair flexed against the back of her head, his nails digging into her scalp as if he were going to push her all the way down, but he held himself in check. Just barely, she thought.

Her eyes popped wide as he thickened even further, then throbbed hard against her tongue. Eric barked out an obscenity and her name and a jet of liquid heat splashed against the back of her throat and she loved everything about it. Honey sucked hard, milking his cock with her hand, trying to make his orgasm as good as she possibly could. It appeared to be working as he hunched forward and shook above her, grunting and gasping with every pulse of cum he poured into her mouth.

Eric slumped forward, his forearm bracing against the wall to keep him upright. He pulled her back off his cock, groaning almost plaintively as she sucked hard the whole way, her tight fist following her lips to squeeze out every last drop. Honey released him with a wet pop and sat back on her heels. Her hands rested demurely on her thighs and her head was tilted to the side in curious consideration as she rolled his cum over her tongue.

The panting, thoroughly debauched man in front of her opened his eyes and found hers. Her shoulders shook with a suppressed giggle as his head tilted in much the same way as her own - her expression and manner apparently perplexed him. Honey felt a little curl of wickedness inside and swallowed her mouthful in a very intentionally blatant way. Then winked at Eric with an impish
"Five finger fuck me," he huffed, eyes falling shut once more. The girl giggled with playfully fiendish delight.

What she didn't enjoy as much as his reaction was the lingering taste of semen on her tongue. While it was definitely better straight from the tap, as it were, she still wasn't overly fond of it. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out the mint, quickly unwrapping it and popping the candy into her mouth.

"We need to pick up a case of these," Honey told him with that impish grin still in place, rising to her feet and brushing off her knees. He snatched her close without warning, crushing his mouth to hers with a heavy groan. The artificial sugariness of the mint fought against his own natural sweetness and lost. She clung to his biceps and opened up to him with a responding moan of her own.

Eric pushed her back against the wall and stooped to cup her ass, lifting the girl off her feet. His hips split her thighs wide and she cried out sharply at the jolt of pain that caused, but that didn't discourage either of them. If anything, it made the pair grip each other harder. Her legs wrapped around his waist instinctively, boots hooking together behind his back. His hands pushed under her shirt, pawing roughly at her ribs and back as his mouth devoured hers. He was grinding against her, which made Honey press her shoulders hard into the stone and arch her hips forward. She whimpered into the harsh, demanding kiss as her thigh burned and throbbed.

Was he going to try to fuck her, right there in the hall? More importantly, would she let him? Caught up in the moment like this, Honey thought she just might. His hands finally rose to her breasts and squeezed firmly. She shrieked at the sharp stab of agony the action caused. He released her immediately and the girl all but sobbed at the loss. Eric leaned back, pulling her shirt up with one hand and carefully hooking a finger of the other into her bra to tug it gently out of his way.

The fierce man made a soft breathy sound of comforting, as if he hadn't known all along that the injury was there, as if he hadn't put it there, stroking his finger lightly against her abused flesh. Each touch both caused a twinge of pain and soothed said pain at the same time. She whimpered again, quietly, pleadingly, squirming between his now still body and the wall at her back.

Honey begged for the thing she wanted most. "Eric!"

"No," he told her softly, pulling her shirt back down. "Not here. I've got to take care of you."

Eric's gentle tone stroked across her like the sweetest caress and she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pressing her face into his neck. She was still on fire, still wanted his touch so very badly, but when the youngest leader in Dauntless said something like that, how could she fight him?

Eric cut a path straight through the bustling crowd that filled the Pit with Honey close at his side, one large hand resting just below her shoulder blades to guide her and keep her near to him. Even though the man she walked with was the only thing the girl wanted to focus on, she still had to watch where she was going and caught people taking notice of them together. Most of them would think it was simply two government officials and not even remember it in a few moments. Some would take note of his hand on her back and the flush in her cheeks and curiously wonder what the new crow had done to displease the scariest leader in Dauntless. If any of those few heard about what the group that had been heading down the eastern corridor towards the Mats had seen the aforementioned leader up to just minutes before, their little secret would be out in a very big way.

It wasn't a secret, Honey reminded herself. Eric had no issue with anyone, or apparently everyone,
knowing that he had attached himself to the young ancillary. It wasn't the difference in their ages that would fuel the rumor mill, nor would it be a scandal for a leader to be involved with a lower ranking member of government - everyone in the faction was a subordinate where the leaders were concerned. It would grab people's interest because it was Eric. Eric and the kid. When they showed up for breakfast together the next morning, there would be no doubt. The girl knew it shouldn't bother her, but this was her first relationship. It wasn't fair that it would be under the scrutiny of the whole of Dauntless.

Once they were away from the Pit, it was easier for Honey to push aside her social anxiety and concentrate on the man at her side instead. A much better point of focus. Eric's hand was warm through her shirt and he'd purposely slowed his long stride so that she didn't have to struggle to keep up. Every so often, he'd glance down at her, just a little flick of his slate eyes so fast you might think you'd imagined it, as if checking she was still there and okay.

"Do you want to tell me what that was about?" Eric asked when they were alone, walking down a flight of stairs to get to the level where the lower quarters were. His question confused the girl and she looked up at him questioningly. The man trailed a fingertip lightly down her face, from the corner of her eye downward under her ear. Gooseflesh rose to follow the touch, but not the good kind. He'd traced the path of the tear that had fallen while she was on her knees.

Honey looked away, embarrassed, flushing hotly. She shook her head again, reluctantly admitting, "No. You're not wrong."

"Tell me what it was," he ordered, quiet but not gently. She took a deep breath and sighed, not sure where to begin. She told him as much. He told her simply, "Begin at the beginning."

"Okay," Honey licked her lips, keeping her eyes trained on the ground passing beneath her feet. "Back at Erudite, there's these people called escorts."

"I'm aware," he informed her, cutting her explanation short. Curiosity, as always, got the better of her.

"Does Dauntless have them, too?" She'd never heard of such a thing, but then, she'd never heard of the Mats or the Hole, either. Eric chuckled humorlessly.

"No. If you want sex at Dauntless, you just need to go to the Pit and put out a sign. There's no shortage of willing partners." That was enough to pull the young sub's eyes from the floor. She might have guessed; Eric was smirking down at her. "No, I'm not going to give you more details. Stop trying to change the subject."

Damn. He chuckled at the way she frowned, pressing his thumb into the muscle and making her sigh at the soothing sensation the pressure evoked.

"I know you weren't an escort before you came to Dauntless, so keep going," he said, his tone a bit less commanding and more entreating this time.
"When I went to my brother's wedding reception, I ran into Kent from Behaviorism," Honey went on. Eric stiffened beside her, his muscles pulling tight, but he said nothing. Because her mind wanted to be thinking of anything but what Eric wanted of her at that moment, it wandered, pondering how the Erudite man was always Kent from Behaviorism; as if "from Behaviorism" was his last name. "I blew him off at first, but he caught me alone in the hall when I was coming back from the bathroom. He told me how much he wanted me and.. I dunno, I guess I was so amazed that when he kissed me-

"He touched you?" His tone was low and dangerous. The strong fingers at her fragile spine tightened. They didn't hurt her, but it was a reminder that they very easily could.

"Yes," Honey confirmed in a small voice. "He kinda felt me up an-

"Kind of?" Every time he interrupted her, Eric's words were sharper and his voice more threatening. She didn't dare look at his face. His pace had quickened and he propelled her down the corridor.

"But when he put his hand under my skirt-

"Did you stop him?" the furious man demanded harshly. It wasn't an accusation, he wasn't implying Honey let any of this happen; this point was just clearly the most important to him.

"Yes," the girl said, her voice firm and even. Her shoulders had gone back, her posture was straight and tall - as tall as it could be, anyway. His fingers relaxed, though the rest of his body did not, and he was no longer pushing her forward.

"Start over. Tell me everything that happened," Eric instructed in a calmer, less murderously timbre. So she did.

Honey recounted the kiss that was a surprise, but mutual at first; the way Kent had touched her breast and thigh; how disgusted she had been by the cheapness of the encounter; the behaviorist's angry reaction to her rejection and how she'd quickly put a stop to it. The young leader remained silent throughout, his eyes fixed on the hall until they reached his door. He hadn't let them inside, but waited for her to finish. The girl fidgeted, picking at her fingernails and rocking on her heels, unable to both hold still and tell him the things she was. Her own gaze flitted around like a moth, lighting on her fingers, his boots, the wall, the lights, but never rose to his face. She wasn't ashamed, but the memory didn't bring up good feelings.

Eric brushed the backs of his fingers against her jaw and Honey's eyes finally snapped to his. His touch was gentle, but his expression was fierce. Not angry, but intensely possessive and approving; startlingly so. When he finally spoke, his voice was a deep rumble of pride.

"There's my strong Dauntless woman."

Her heart soared. He pulled her forward and Honey thought he was going to kiss her - she certainly wanted him to - but Eric just held her close, wrapping his arms tightly around her small body. His own body had remained tense, every muscle pulled tight and hard, and she knew he was still seething inside. Kent had touched what was his.

His. Honey was her own, dammit; not anyone else's! She was independent and strong and should have railed against such flagrant possessiveness. Yet, the feisty girl couldn't summon up an ounce of outrage or even denial. Something about being claimed by the dangerous Dauntless man felt so good. Eric didn't own her; she wasn't his property, but she was his. The thought settled deep inside Honey, stretching out, sinking in, and making itself at home as if it had always belonged there. So right, she didn't have the will to fight it. Maybe tomorrow, but not tonight.
Chapter End Notes

Just a reminder, Eric pushes Honey's boundaries, but doesn't cross them. Any questions or concerns, feel free to ask.

And thanks for all the great comments and kudos!
Chapter Summary

Eric returns the favor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The moment Eric's door was locked behind them, he started stripping off Honey's clothes. Her jacket was dropped directly before the threshold, her shirt and bra landed on his desk. He pushed her down onto the couch and knelt at her feet to remove her boots and socks. She leaned forward to try to do the same to him, going after his vest, but the man caught her hands and pressed them pointedly against the cushion on which she sat. The girl groaned plaintively, rolling her eyes and slumping back. It was only when he had her completely bare that Eric shrugged off the vest.

He slid his hands up her legs, brushing his thumb firmly against his bite mark inside her thigh and Honey's pout was burned away by pain and arousal. She opened up for him without hesitation, parting her thighs wide the way he had done himself the other morning. Eric grinned at how quickly she'd lost her inhibitions about him seeing her body and how freely she showed she wanted him to touch her. He leaned in to kiss his mark, but she stopped him.

"Take this off," the girl commanded, tugging at the material of his shirt. The leader's grin widened at her demanding tone.

"No," he refused her, anyway. "I'm taking care of you, remember?"

Honey sat forward and cupped his jaw with one hand, the other pushing under the collar of his tee. She stroked her fingers against his clavicle and shoulder. "Please. I want to feel you, not your clothes."

He pulled her hand free and nuzzled the ligature mark on her wrist, placing a lingering, openmouthed kiss there. "Just the shirt," Eric told her. That compromise was fine with the girl - for now - and she nodded. He even let her help him take the garment off; so generous.

Honey let out a long, happy sigh once her hands and eyes were free to roam over his flesh as they pleased. She sank back against the couch, her palms trailing over his shoulders and up his neck as she did so. He caught her hand again, placing another kiss to her bruised wrist, then scraped his teeth over the injury. The girl groaned and weaved her fingers into his hair, urging him forward unabashedly. The man chuckled and placed the hand he held against her mound. He cupped her backside and tilted her hips upwards more, into an angle more to his liking.

"Open your pussy up for me, Honey," Eric purred, then ran his tongue over the bite mark firmly. Honey hissed in a breath at the sizzling ache his action caused and licked her lips. She was so very wet and slick as her fingers parted her folds for him, as requested. He immediately set to work on her already aching clit, suckling and stroking firmly with his tongue.

"Oh, fuck, Eric!" she whimpered, her head arching back. Every breath left her in a high little whine of need as his tongue toyed with the small bundle of nerves. But Eric wasn't toying with her, every
move was purposeful as he pushed Honey closer and closer to the edge. It didn't take long, not with how she'd been thinking about this for days and after being on her knees in that hallway making him lose himself into her mouth. Too soon, but bless him for not making her wait any longer, her insides clenched hard and she fell loudly into orgasm.

The girl's hips writhed under the onslaught of her leader's skilled tongue as wave after wave of bliss crashed through her system. Eric moaned against her clit and the vibration just pushed her higher. In the end, Honey was a shivering, panting mess of glowy aftershocks and satisfaction.

"Oh, god," she moaned the words long and low and so very relieved. "I've been dying for that. Thank you."

Eric laughed, lifting his head to look at her. "You're so polite when I'm eating your pussy," he informed her, highly entertained by the fact. Honey could only manage a lazy smile.

"You're really good at it," she told him. She stroked her fingers through his hair, loving how badly she mussed the perfect coif he always had.

"Unlike you, I really enjoy the taste," he informed her haughtily. Then, as if to prove it, the man ran his tongue from the very bottom of her entrance up over her clitoris with a little teasing flick at the end. The girl moaned, eyes fluttering shut, squeezing inside reflexively.

"Wait," she said breathlessly, giving him a suspicious look. "Are you saying I wasn't good?"

"Fuck no!" His quick, vehement denial cut down any doubts about her performance before they could even sprout. "I just might make you suck my dick every day. And twice on Sunday."

Honey giggled, giving his hair a little tug, just because she could. "Only if you pick up that case of mints."

"I'll get a pallet." She laughed gleefully. Oh, she so liked this Eric. The intense, scary Dauntless leader was sexy as hell, but the teasing, patient lover made her feel so good. "And I'll be more than happy to return the favor."

Again, he demonstrated with a long swipe of his tongue. The girl shivered and shifted as if in discomfort, but she was feeling anything but. After a pause, Eric licked her again and Honey's breath stuttered in her throat.

"Want some more, do you?" he purred. She bit her lip and nodded. She wanted everything he would give her. Instead of going full bear as he had before, the man teased her for long moments with little licks and light flicks of just the tip of his tongue. The girl squirmed languidly beneath his mouth, his hands keeping her right where he wanted. Honey just lay there and moaned; long, breathy sounds of bliss as he slowly, slowly stroked her nerves into frenzy.

When her breathing grew shallow and fast and her fingers tightened in his hair, Eric abandoned her throbbing clit and pushed his tongue inside her. The young sub gasped sharply, inner muscles reflexively clamping down on the intrusion. With a groan of his own, the man withdrew, then pushed in again, deeper. Then again, effectively fucking her with his tongue. Every time he pushed forward, his nose pressed against her clitoris, keeping her nerves on fire, but not quite stimulating them enough to push her over the edge. Honey shuddered. Her muscles were tightening, her whole body going tense in anticipation as he forced her to ride the edge of climax with thrust after thrust of his tongue.

She ground her teeth together and grunted, refusing to beg him for completion because the torture he
was subjecting her to was just so fucking good. Her knees bent up, feet coming to rest on his broad back. Her toes curled against his skin and she groaned and panted and arched her head back in delicious torment until she finally couldn't take it anymore.

"Fuck, Eric, please!" she squealed at last. His lips were around her clit in an instant and he sucked hard, pinning the tiny organ against his teeth with his tongue and giving it a wiggle. Honey shrieked, spine bowing as the most intense orgasm of her young life slammed into her. She snapped forward, bowing towards him now, her nails clawing at his back in search of an anchor against the storm of sensation ripping through her body. Every thrrob wrenched from her lips a moan that was close to a sob and she called his name again and again before the shattering spasms finally ceased.

Honey didn't collapse, not until Eric lifted her thighs from his shoulders and rose up to pull her twitching body against his chest. Then she melted into him, tucking her head under his chin and letting the strong, steady thumping of his heart ground her once more. He gave her some time to catch her breath, then stroked his fingers into her hair and lifted her head away from his chest.

His kiss was slow and deliberate, his mouth coated with her slickness. The girl found herself fairly ambivalent of the taste itself, but the fact that it was all over Eric's lips and tongue because of what he'd been doing to her sent a heady rush of lust through her still tingling body. Every brush of his smooth, feverish skin against her own sent a chill across her overstimulated nerve endings. She whimpered into his mouth, curling her arms and legs around him to pull him impossibly close.

Slowly, Eric leaned forward, pushing Honey back against the cushions, pressing her down into them with his weight. His hands smoothed over her skin in firm caress. Her neck, her shoulders, her hips, her ribs, he touched her everywhere, learning her shape all over again. He unhooked her legs from around him so he could reach the insides of her thighs. She knew he wouldn't ignore the bite mark, but still jumped at the jolt of pain it caused, moaning into his kiss. Honey hoped the thing never healed.

Then, before she knew it, Eric's fingers were inside her, scouring the too sensitive nerves. She cried out in surprise and too much sensation, but tightened around the digits regardless. He worked them in and out of her slowly at first, murmuring encouragingly against her mouth. When her nails dug into his shoulders and her head fell back, he growled in lustful approval.

"That's right, Honey," he purred, deep and low, like the rumble preceding an earthquake. "Good girl. You've got one more for me."

She whimpered his name, not nearly as sure as he was. Eric clicked his tongue against his teeth in soft admonition.

"Shh. I've got you," the insatiable man assured her. He curled his fingers, hitting that spot she could never quite reach. Honey moaned, high and thin, arching up against his hand. "There you go. Just like that. You're doing so good."

His words didn't wash through her, but into her, filling her up with warmth and desire and an aching need to give him what he wanted. Anything he wanted. She could feel that tingle starting to grow low in her belly and knew she'd be able to. The girl groaned in relief knowing she wouldn't disappoint her demanding, wonderful lover. She rocked her hips in time with his rhythm and he sped up further, pressing harder against that amazing spot inside her.

"Gonna come for me, Honey? Getting close for me?" Eric asked, all quietly intense urging. "Come on. You can do it. You're so pretty when you come. Even prettier than when you suck my dick."

The girl shuddered hard, breaking apart under his gently insistent domination. She shivered and
quaked, inner walls tightening around his fingers with pleasure bordering on discomfort. The only sounds coming from her were breathy gasps.

"There she is. There's my girl." Eric's voice was a deep growl of praise and satisfaction that Honey just wanted to curl up in like a blanket and never leave. "So fucking pretty, Honey."

She was a boneless waste on the cushions of his couch, blissful and so very done in she could barely open her eyes. Honey made them open, however, because she needed to see the look of approval on Eric's face. It didn't disappoint; his cheeks were flushed, his lips parted, his eyes were just a ring of silver around black wells of pride. And lust.

"Don't move. Just stay like that," he ordered, pulling away. He stood over her and opened his fly, pulling out his cock with a shuddery growl. Eric wasted no time gripping his hard shaft tightly, stroking himself in fast rhythm right off. He grunted, staring down at her thoroughly spent form like he wanted to devour her. Again. It wasn't long before his body tensed and he barked her name loudly. His cum splashed down onto Honey's skin, a scalding rain of debauchery from thighs to chin and she welcomed it with a soft, grateful moan.

He panted and grunted over her, chest heaving in that way she had come to adore. When he'd spilled his last drop onto her, the slick fluid sliding its way down the valley where her thigh met her body, Eric dropped to his knees once more. He leaned in and kissed her forehead, her eyelids, her cheeks, and finally, so softly, her lips.

"You did so well," he whispered. Honey sighed blissfully, not understanding why that meant the world to her, but it did.

Eric waited until their heartbeats had returned to a normal pace and they could take full breaths again, then helped the exhausted girl to her feet. He took her into the bathroom and put her in the shower, waiting just outside the curtain while Honey cleaned his semen from her skin and washed the sweat from her hair. After she finished, he dried her off, his large hands making her feel even smaller as they gently moved the towel over her skin. In the bedroom, he slipped her shorts back up her legs and another buttery soft tshirt over her head, and eased her into his bed.

The young leader left her there, wrapped up in his warm blankets and the scent of him, and took a shower of his own. Honey barely stirred when his freshly clean, shower loose body slipped into the bed behind her, letting out a soft sound of pleasure when he curled his massive frame around hers. Sated, exhausted, and literally surrounded by Eric, it might have been the best night's sleep of her life.

Chapter End Notes

I dunno; rough, pushy Eric is hot, but I think quietly intense urging Eric is the best. ;)

Short chapter, though. You know what that means.
Chapter Summary

Honey gets hit with the fallout from her relationship with Eric

Chapter Notes

Reminder: Eric is not a toolbag.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Honey awoke to a world of warmth and sensation as Eric's lips moved slowly against the back of her neck. She was wrapped in his arms, fitted perfectly into the curve of his thick, muscular body. The shirt she wore had either ridden up in the night or been pushed up by him and the soft curls on his chest and stomach tickled her bare back. She stroked her hands over his forearms, tracing his tattoos with still shut eyes as if by memory. He rumbled against her spine and she cooed sleepily in reply. His arms squeezed her tight for a moment, then loosened. One hand slid up her ribs to cup her uninjured breast, rolling the nipple firmly between his fingers. The other pushed between her thighs, rubbing her through her shorts.

Honey groaned, rocking against his touch. She reached back to grip his hip and found Eric completely nude. That sent a lovely shiver through her body. He grazed his teeth against the back of her shoulder and rocked his hips forward. His dick rubbed slickly against the back of her thigh and the girl wondered how long he'd been awake and hard before his kisses brought her to consciousness. His head gently butted hers aside and she arched her neck, knowing it was what he wanted. He rewarded her by pressing his lips firmly to her skin and sucking hard. The girl moaned his name and covered the hand between her legs with her own, making him stroke her harder as she rocked against his fingers.

Eric growled and pinched her nipple cruelly. She squealed and just arched further into his touch. After a moment of agonizing bliss, he released her and stroked his fingers over the throbbing peak. Honey tried to turn her torso towards him. She wanted his mouth, craved his sweet taste. With a warning rumble, the man's hand gripped her ribs, his arm squeezing her so tight that she couldn't breath in. With a quietly despondent whine, she quit her attempts to roll towards him and his arm relaxed again. His hand stroked firmly over her skin, up over her ribs and breast to her shoulder and neck.

At first Honey didn't really react to Eric's fingers closing around her throat, just lazily enjoyed his caress, but when those strong fingers tightened, her eyes popped open wide. She stiffened and arched her head back, trying to get away, but there was nowhere she could go. Her hands abandoned their previous positions and dug into his forearm, trying to pull his hand off her. Once again, the dangerous man was stone, immovable.

"Eric!" the girl gasped out his name, high in alarm and tight from the way he was squeezing her throat.
"Shh, relax," he breathed against her jaw, then shifted his lips to her ear. His teeth scraped over the silver ring there, then caught it and tugged, before he said, "I know. It's okay."

Yet his grip tightened still further. Honey squirmed, writhed desperately, drowning under the icy flood of fear and panic. She clawed at his arm and tried to protest, but couldn't speak, couldn't breathe. His fingers were working between her thighs, but she couldn't feel it, numb to everything but his constricting hand. Her vision started to darken, her head spinning wildly. She clawed at his arm and tried to protest, but couldn't breathe. His fingers were working between her thighs, but she couldn't feel it, numb to everything but his constricting hand. Her vision started to darken, her head spinning wildly. She elbowed him hard in the ribs, but the man barely grunted. She kicked back at him, but he just wrapped his leg around hers and pinned them in place. The panicked girl reached a claw up towards his face, but he saw it coming and wrenched his hand from betwixt her thighs and caught her wrist.

"You can breathe," Eric told her. His voice was firm and commanding, but still only a murmur against her ear. "I'm not hurting you. Breathe, Honey."

She could and did, sucking in a great gulp of sweet, blessed air. Honey was shaking, dizzy, heart pounding. Eric remained as solid as a rock behind her, his fingers locked around her neck. They were tight, constricting the blood and airflow, but he was correct. Her breath was raspy, but he wasn't cutting it off; his grip wasn't painful, just strong.

"You don't have to be afraid of me," he said in that authoritative tone that shouldn't have been as reassuring as it was. "I know you're not afraid of me."

And she wasn't. Not when she'd seen him so wild and viciously brutal in the Hole and not now completely at his mercy. Just a slight flex of his muscles and Eric could snap her like a twig, but he wouldn't. Little by little, Honey's own muscles relaxed, the tension seeping out of her body slowly until she was resting comfortably against her lover again. The hand that had remained on his forearm now simply held it, waiting passively.

Eric slowly released her wrist and uncurled his leg from hers, moving with marked hesitance, lest she turn out to be placating him and waiting for her chance to strike out again. His hand slipped between her legs and there was no mistaking Honey's sigh of pleasure or the way her hips rocked forward. When his fingers tightened around her throat, she didn't tense, just laid her other hand along with the first, gripping his forearm lightly as an anchor while she groaned. Even when the man did cut off her airway, she didn't try to force air in; only held on and waited for him to allow her to breathe again.

With a groan of his own, Eric relaxed his hold on the girl's neck, kissing her ear and jaw again and again.

"Thank you," he breathed. Honey didn't really understand what he was thanking her for, but it made her feel wonderful just the same. He reached lower between her thighs and tugged the legs of her shorts up.

"What are-" the girl started to ask, absolutely bewildered, but Eric bit her earlobe and tugged and her question was lost to a lusty moan. Caught up in the delicious little electric tingles his mouth on her sensitive ear was causing, she didn't realize what all his tugging and shifting was about until his cock slipped between her legs. "Oh!"

The man at Honey's back let out a wicked chuckle and sucked on the soft bit of flesh as he started rocking into her. His erection wept precum onto her skin, slickening her thighs and sliding more smoothly between them with each thrust of his pelvis. She shuddered and groaned, her nails digging into his arm all over again.

"Like that?" Eric purred, all smugness and pleasure. "Just imagine what it'll be like when I'm inside you."
He rolled his hips on the next push and his dick brushed against her pussy. The feeling was muted by the barrier of fabric between them and Honey so wished it wasn't there. With Eric's strong hand around her throat, a feeling that was suddenly reassuring instead of threatening, she would have let him fuck her if he tried. But he didn't; instead the man rutted against the girl, muttering dirty promises into her ear about how good it would feel once he was inside her pussy. The outright lasciviousness of his actions sent heat coursing through her, making the little Dauntless feel so very lewd in the very best way.

His hand was in her shorts now, rubbing her clit in fast circles that pushed her rapidly towards climax. Just before she reached her peak, Honey whimpered his name and shoved her hands between her thighs to cup his cock and force it against her core, rocking her hips frantically back against him as she came apart at the seams. Eric shuddered and moaned loudly, muscles bunching and tensing, squeezing her tightly as he spilled himself all over her thighs, shorts, and hands.

He was so slippery and nice. She loved everything about his cock. In a gaspy pant, Honey told him so and the man groaned in reply, so pleased. If he hadn't pulled her cum-drenched hands away, she would have been content to stroke his slick, velvety dick all day. The girl purred in absolute contentment when he finally allowed her to turn enough to kiss him. So generous. His fingers brushed and stroked and petted her throat and she sighed against his mouth happily. Eric was definitely the best alarm clock ever.

"We need to talk. Now."

Honey sighed. She'd known this was coming. After the way people had started murmuring when she and Eric walked into the mess together that morning, it was obvious word of the young leader's illicit interlude in the eastern corridor had gotten around. People might have chalked it up to coincidence, if not for the very prominent hickey the white-haired girl was sporting high on the side of her neck. She was fairly certain Eric had done that on purpose.

The meal had been pleasant. Eric sat beside Honey, closer than a coworker, his bulky arm brushing against hers. They chatted about work and other safe topics. It became obvious to the girl that he was very easy to be around, when he let himself be. Of course, he was still Eric, smug and superior, but Honey didn't mind so much when he wasn't smothering her with it. No one had said a word to her with the big, scary leader at her side and when the meal was finished, they'd headed off to the office and parted ways. Marta's eyes were huge and questioning, but the woman still didn't bring up the subject.

Now, the young sub was back in the mess for lunch and her beautiful, but very angry friend was standing over her, scowling. With the pink mohawk spiked up today, Honey thought Daisy looked very like a pissed off tropical bird. She considered mentioning it and offering the young woman a cracker, but decided that wouldn't go over well.

"Can I eat my lunch first?" the girl asked.

"I bet you've got quite an appetite after last night," the squad leader sneered, dropping onto the bench beside her.

"I've always got quite an appetite," Honey told her somberly. Daisy's scowl intensified.

"Don't try to change the subject."

"Since you haven't really said anything, there wasn't a subject to change," the girl pointed out. Daisy grabbed Honey's tray and stood, stalking out of the hall. Damn. She could stay and get a new tray...
and new food, but why bother? The conversation was going to happen now or later tonight. If she stalled, the pissed off former Amity might come right to her office and Honey definitely didn't want that. So, she got up and followed her tall friend.

"So, are we meeting the others or did you draw the short straw? And where are we going, anyway?"

They ended up in the initiate barracks, which was empty and waiting for the next class that would be there in a matter of weeks.

"Calhoun's pretty pissed off," Daisy told her, kicking a rolled up mattress so it unfurled onto its cot. "Beth's just confused. We're all confused. What the fuck, Honey?"

The girl sat on the cot and accepted her tray, setting it beside her and picking up the sandwich she'd been about to eat. She couldn't bring herself to take a bite, however.

"I dunno," she shrugged, picking at the bread. "It just kinda happened."

"How does something like that just happen? With Eric? Remember what he did to you?" Daisy demanded, angry and confused.

"He-" Honey had started to say Eric was different now, but he really wasn't. She just saw him differently. He was still the same hardass who'd tormented her and her friends all through initiation, but he was also more than that. She frowned, trying to figure out how to explain it to her friend. Daisy took her expression and silence a very different way.

"Did he make you do it? Because he's a leader?"

"What? No!" the girl insisted, abhorred by the notion.

The squad leader's eyes grew large and furious, every muscle tensing. "Did he say he'd make you a crow if you did?"

Honey shot to her feet, instantly boiling. "You think that's how I made ancillary? On my fucking back?!"

Daisy popped up as well, looking down at her angrily, but also worried. "Of course, not! But he might have made you think that!"

"He didn't!" the outraged girl insisted. "He supported me and was proud when I made sub! He didn't even touch me before then! You think I'd have let him do that to me? We still haven't even had sex, yet!"

"Oh, you haven't fucked him?" To say her friend was a little skeptical would be like calling the marsh a bit damp.

"No, I haven't fucked him," Honey insisted acidly.

"Then what happened last night? You didn't get these-" indicating the ligature and the hickey "-at the Mats."

"We… do other stuff," the girl said; quite a bit of her fire was suddenly smothered under a blanket of awkwardness. "Just not… sex. Yet."

Daisy's flame seemed to extinguish as well as she took in the hunched shoulders and bright blush that lit the smaller Dauntless's face. "Really?"
Honey huffed in exasperation. "Yes, really. I know it's Eric, but he's really not trying to force me to do anything I don't want to do."

The squad leader unrolled a mattress of her own and sat down. "And you want to - with Eric?"

Honey sat as well, pouting at the half sandwich that now sat on the floor by her boot. *I was gonna eat that.* "There's more to him than the asshole from initiation," she told her friend.

"Is he secretly nice or something?"

Honey smirked, then chuckled, then smiled and shook her head. "No. He's not nice at all."

"Is it just physical, then?" Daisy asked the next logical question, relaxing a bit more into her usual self. "I mean, I can't deny he's easy on the eyes, even if he is a prick."

"I thought it might be, at first," Honey admitted, picking up a broccoli-stuffed potato skin and taking a bite. "But it's really not. That's actually why I didn't tell you guys right away. I wasn't sure what was going on between us and wanted to figure it out before I made some big announcement."

"So what is going on, then? Are you guys, like… a couple now?"

The girl's lips curled upwards. "Yeah, I think so." That was a lovely little realization. The happy expression on her friend's face seemed to sap the last of Daisy's ire and suspicion.

"Explain the wrist," she ordered, pointing at said appendage. "Because it's got Calhoun climbing the walls. Punching the walls, actually."

Honey cringed. At the fact that the big, laiddback Dauntless was so uncharacteristically angry; not the memory of her first night with Eric. She explained what happened in the most benign way she could think of. "I was a little nervous when we finally… you know, did anything. So he cuffed us together to help me get over it. He's got a mark on his wrist, too, if you'd look."

"That's weird," Daisy told her, face pinching in perplexed discomfort. "You know that's weird, right?"

"Yeah, I know," Honey shrugged, starting on the remaining half of her sandwich. "But it worked. I guess I'm weird, too."

"No argument on that." The line was delivered with a cheeky, teasing grin, but they both knew it was true. "Did he apologize for initiation? For Visiting Day?"

The girl's brow furrowed; now she was the one confused. "No. Why would he?"

"Because he treated you like shit and was a huge asshole."

*Oh, that.* "He didn't treat *me* like shit, specifically. He treated all of us like shit. He's just a hardass. He'll do the same thing to the next class." She motioned around the room in which they sat.

"You're not giving me alot to hang my hat on, here," Daisy admonished. "You gotta give me something. *Why* are you with him?"

A soft little smile lifted Honey's lips and she had no idea how warm her eyes looked as she spoke. "He's intelligent and clever. Honest and straightforward. He's so intense. And strong. And pretty much amazing at anything he sets his mind to."

The squad leader sighed, shaking her head with a wry twist of her mouth. "Okay. I can get behind
that. As long as you're not pretending he's not a total shithead."

Honey laughed hard, leaning forward, hand on her stomach. She waved her sandwich dismissively. "No. No, I know he's a shithead. But I guess he's my shithead now."

The thing that had settled inside her so completely when Eric had called her his now lifted its head, growling in approval and a startling amount of possessiveness. Apparently, she'd claimed the young leader right back. *Mine.* The bit inside said it without doubt.

"So, what's he like, then? You know, the 'other stuff'." Daisy folded her legs up on the cot and leaned forward, burning with curiosity. "He's not gonna get all pissed if you tell me right? He seems like he'd be pretty controlling."

"Nah," Honey assured her, picking up her tray and eating a spoonful of beans. She eyed the fallen sandwich half and wondered when was the last time the floor was cleaned. "He won't mind. I mean, yes, he's definitely dominating, but he's not controlling. Hey! Why didn't you tell me cunnilingus was so amazing?"

For an instant, Daisy just blinked at her over the suddenly outraged question, then broke into wild peals of laughter and fell over onto the cot.

"God, you gotta tell me everything!" the pink haired Dauntless insisted between loud bouts of humor.

Honey told her alot, but not nearly everything. She'd only just gotten her friend to accept that Eric wasn't some kind of rapist. The biting Daisy might accept as just more weirdness between the couple, but the way their first sexual encounter had taken place would set the squad leader right off again. Not to mention how Eric had pressed her in the hallway while she was on her knees and the way his hand had been around her throat that morning. It wouldn't matter that Eric had never pushed too far or that he'd always ensured she felt wonderful and secure in the end.

With a feeling that was very like loneliness, Honey realized she might never be able to tell her.

By dinner it was all over Dauntless. Eric and the kid. Honey knew people were giving her curious glances when they thought she couldn't see; a few tactless souls even stared at her openly. Before her conversation with Daisy, the girl had never even considered that her involvement with the youngest leader would cast a shadow over her appointment to ancillary. How many people thought she'd slept her way into the office? The crows that already hated her had to be salivating over the little morsel of possible scandal. The ones that liked her… She knew some of them would switch sides over the hint of impropriety.

Honey was miserable for the next several days, stewing in resentment of the whispers hissing behind her back. Her friends did their best to be supportive and tell her not to listen to idiots. They were right, but that didn't quell the tight feeling in her chest or remove the oppressive weight from her shoulders. She'd earned that spot, goddammit! Even if Eric were the kind of awful person who would disregard the welfare of his faction and use his position to unfairly promote his girlfriend, Max and the other leaders would never have gone along with it. Honey never thought she'd miss anything about Erudite, but fuck, she wished the denizens of Dauntless had some of the noses' logical sense.

The embittered girl won every fight she had that week, taking out her ire on whatever poor soul Dante put into the ring with her. Even Jasper wasn't spared; though the beating he took only seemed to make him like the kid even more. She barely ate, which worried those who were familiar with her appetite. Her work didn't suffer, however. If anything, Honey pushed herself even harder. She ran
poor Marta ragged and was seriously considering taking on an additional staff member to lighten her secretary's load.

The only peace Honey knew was in Eric's arms. The pleasure he gave and the exquisite pain he inflicted burned away any thoughts that didn't revolve around his mouth, his hands, his cock, his body against hers. She slept deeply and awoke sweetly, curled into him in his bed or hers. But once they stepped out into the halls of Dauntless, the pressure burst back into her head and into her chest.

Chapter End Notes

So, the throat thing. If you don't get it, the best way I can explain is to compare it to some wolf behavior I saw on a docu-series some years back. The pack member whose job it is to keep the others in line will close its jaws around the throat of another wolf that is afraid - basically saying, "See how strong I am? I could hurt you, but I'm not. It's okay; you're safe."

I did warn you guys things would be relationship and smut heavy for a while. I promise, there's plenty of plot still. As always, feel free to drop me a line with questions or concerns. :)
"Our last order of new business; Choosing Day is coming up fast and we'll have a new crop of initiates," Max announced, sitting in his seat at the center of the leaders' dais. "There are two new guidelines we're looking to set in place. So this will be an open forum if you have any questions. Eric?"

The youngest leader leaned forward, glancing down at the paper sitting on the table before him before speaking. "First, we will be implementing mandatory cuts for initiates not meeting a minimum performance requirement."

The meeting room instantly erupted. Crows shouted in vehement protest of the concept, though a great number shouted back in approval. Max loudly brought the room back to order and demanded proper protocol.

"If you want to speak, wait your goddamn turn!" he bellowed.

"Why?" a male ancillary, Ivan, stood and demanded hotly. "Why the hell are we limiting the number of initiates?"

"We have enough shop clerks and kitchen workers," Eric informed him flatly, bored and condescending. "We will only be accepting new members into open essential positions. We need Patrol officers and security personnel, not daycare aides."

Try as she might, and she did try, Honey could not come up with a viably strong argument against such cuts. Dauntless needed all its members to remain Dauntless, but how could she express that in a logical, rational enough way to sway the five leaders? The girl had never had a gift for words and for the first time in her life, wished she'd been born Candor. It had been bad enough when Shay cut herself from the faction, now there would be initiates that wouldn't have even the choice to push through.

"There will be a cut at the end of stage one of initiation and another at the end of stage two," Eric explained.

"Before the Fear Landscape?" Ivan asked.

"Yes," the young leader confirmed. "The rankings will be determined as per usual after the Landscape and the new members will choose their positions accordingly."

"If we're going to cut people based on their sim performance, it should wait until after the Landscape."

"Why should we wait?" Max inquired.

"Good performance in the training sims don't mean a good Landscape score," Ivan told him. "Someone who's below the line in training might beat out someone above it in the Landscape. We'd
be selling the faction short."

"That's an excellent point," Amelia spoke up. "Statistics show that faster times in training are often misleading."

And if anyone knew statistics, it was Amelia the Number Queen. The other leaders nodded to each other as Ivan retook his seat.

"Anyone else have something to add?" Max asked of the room. Several more people stood to voice their objections and attempt to sway the leaders on the issue and a few who were for the cuts spoke up as well. When the discussion was exhausted, Eric moved on.

"The second guideline will deal with the ranked matches that take place during stage one. We will be eliminating the option to concede."

Half the room leapt to their feet, Honey among them, and shouted in outrage. Again, Max had to bring the chaos back to order. One by one the subs took their seats, waiting their turn to speak impatiently, and the roar of shouting dropped to a seething murmur.

Eric continued his recitation of the guideline, "As I was saying, fights will go until one of the combatants is physically unable to continue. Anyone who refuses to fight will be cut."

Honey instantly popped to her feet, ignoring the protocol to wait until Max opened the room to discussion. "Are you crazy?"

"I think our newest ancillary doesn't agree with the proposed guideline, Eric," Max chuckled.

"You might be right, Max," the younger leader deadpanned back. Several of the crows shared a chuckle at the girl's expense, but she couldn't care less. This was insane!

"I would think you'd be all for it," Max told her, with a mildly confused shrug.

"It puts pointless pressure on the initiates," Honey insisted. "And it's dangerous."

The entire board of leaders scoffed as one. Eric pointed at her and said, "You seemed to manage without ever conceding a match, if you recall."

As if the girl needed reminding. The crows apparently did, because his words set off a fresh round of murmurs and several heads swiveled her way with surprised expressions.

"I managed to nearly get myself killed in the first fight, if you recall," she tossed his words back at him hotly. "And ended up with a broken arm because I refused to tap. By your new standards, I'd have been cut before the end of stage one!"

Max chewed that over as Eric continued to look bored. "She's got a point," the head of Dauntless conceded.

"No, she doesn't," Eric countered. "The arm didn't impede her performance. She got better after it happened, because it forced her to switch to a more suitable fighting style. With her firearms proficiency at the top of the class, she would have stayed above the line. And she still didn't concede any matches. She wouldn't have been cut."

The older leader nodded as the crows around Honey continued to squawk softly to each other. She steeled her spine and forced the next words out. "You would have been."
The room snapped to dead silence. He'd been second in his class, but everyone knew the youngest leader in Dauntless had conceded a match to Four. Eric's expression didn't change, but the girl knew him well enough, knew his body well enough that she could see the tension gather in his shoulders, the muscle twitching in the side of his jaw. His eyes hardened into chips of stone, but she never looked away. That would have been a fatal mistake.

"If this guideline had been in place at the time," the secretly seething man told her, his voice even and calm and deadly. "I would have done what was necessary to pass initiation. Or I wouldn't have. Cowards don't belong here."

Honey swallowed and fought down the urge to fidget with every ounce of willpower she possessed. "If you take away the option to concede, then not doing so is meaningless. They won't be fighting because they're brave, they'll be fighting because they have no other choice."

"They don't have another choice," Eric insisted, voice as hard as his eyes. "None of us do."

"If you implement this rule, you won't have the bravest initiates proving themselves," the girl told him and the rest of the panel. "You'll have half a class of initiates disabled or unconscious and you won't know which of them are faking it because they're too afraid to fight. You're not discouraging cowardice, you're enabling it."

Honey held Eric's gaze a moment more, just to make sure her words sank in, then retook her seat and broke his stare. There was nothing more she could say on the matter. There was nothing more that needed saying, really. The rule would cause far more harm than good; the leaders had to already know that. How could they not? Still, other ancillaries rose to put their thoughts in, get their position on the record. Finally, Max spoke again.

"Does anyone have any further new business?" Honey stood immediately. "She speaks again."

She ignored the jab and announced, "I move to slow the train on Choosing Day."

The chatter around the room was more perplexed than anything else. The leaders looked to each other in bewilderment.

"Why the hell would we do that?" Kai demanded.

"It seems to me with these new guidelines, we should want every initiate to make it to Dauntless so we can be sure to get members with the highest potential. Being faster doesn't make you a better marksman, being at the end of the line doesn't make you a worse fighter."

"Maybe you're just softhearted," Belen said icily. Now she'd spoken to Honey six times in total.

"If they can't even make it onto the train, they won't pass muster in stage one. That's a given," Kai insisted with a disgusted wave of his hand before sitting back with his arms crossed in irritation.

"It would be a waste of resources to accommodate initiates that have so little a chance at becoming members," Amelia expounded on the psychotic leader's statement. Honey knew she wouldn't win this point, so she moved on.

"Then only slow it down on the approach to Dauntless," she implored firmly.

"Too delicate to see an initiate hit the pavement?" Belen asked. Seven.

"It's wasteful," the girl insisted.
"If they're afraid to jump, they don't belong at Dauntless. I told you that your first day," Eric declared. He was so much the man from the roof right now, Honey couldn't stand it.

"Slowing the train a little doesn't make it less scary to jump onto a roof fifteen stories up, it just offsets poor timing and shitty judging of distance," she pointed out in a sharp tone, growing louder from aggravation over their continued vicious obtuseness. "It's always a transfer that misses. They don't fall because they're cowards. They fall and die because they're brave enough to jump in the first place, but they've never leapt off a moving train before!"

"That is true. A Dauntless-born has never missed the Choosing Day jump," Amelia told the others.

Max let out a weary sigh and sat back in his chair. "Alright. Does anyone second Honey's motion to slow the train on approach to Dauntless?"

To Honey's surprise, a number of voices called out, "Aye!" Even more shocking, a few of them were subs that she knew for a fact hated her guts.

"Fine. The motion carries," Max announced. "We'll discuss the points raised here in tomorrow's closed session. I call this meeting adjourned."

Several of the crows were moving towards Honey, intent on speaking to her about what had just passed between her and the leaders, but the girl was already making for the door. She didn't want to speak to anyone, she was far too livid. Mandatory cuts! So many initiates Factionless and for what?! Some arbitrary cost cutting measure? A twisted idea of what bravery is? Simple cruelty? There were so many things going on in her faction that the girl did not understand and it was crushing her inside that she could do nothing to stop them.

"Honey!" the last voice Honey wanted to hear at the moment called from behind her as she stalked her way quickly through the corridor towards the Pit. She didn't even break stride. Not that it mattered; Eric's legs were long enough he probably didn't even have to jog to catch her. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know," she admitted angrily. "Somewhere you aren't."

He caught her arm and yanked her to a stop.

"Leave me alone!" the girl ordered, trying to pull away, not even wanting to look at the man, with his cold eyes and superior smirk, looking down at her from the ledge as if she were a failure waiting to happen.

"Stop that," he commanded, giving her a shake. "Look at me."

When Honey didn't comply, Eric shoved her against the wall and caught her jaw in a hard grip that bit through her sullen attitude, forcing her gaze to his. He was angry, brows low and furrowed, eyes hard and unyielding, mouth set in a straight line, jaw as tight as his hand on her face. But he wasn't the man on the roof and she wasn't a frightened initiate.

"Just like what happens between us has no place in the office, what happens in there has no place between us," Eric told her in that stony, authoritarian tone he used when giving orders. He was right. That was work. He was a leader and had been doing his job. Honey slumped against the wall. She pushed his hand away and he let her, then she scrubbed her own hands over her face.

"You're right. I'm sorry," the girl told him, letting out a rushing breath of exhaustion. "There's too much happening that I don't understand and I can't change and it's fucking killing me."
Eric gripped her biceps firmly, rubbing his palms up and down her arms. "Do you have plans tonight?"

Honey drew her hands down, cupping them over her nose and mouth and letting out another heavy breath through her nose. She nodded.

"Calhoun's band is playing down in the concert district. Everyone wants to go out for drinks after, to keep me away from the Mats." She wasn't supposed to know that was the reason, but it was pretty obvious. They all knew she didn't drink; her small body didn't hold liquor very well.

"Cancel," Eric ordered simply. The girl dropped her hands and frowned up at him.

"Why? I'm not gonna get plastered and wander too close to the Chasm."

His hard glare made her instantly regret the words. "I'm going to take you somewhere to help clear your head."

The aforementioned head tilted to the side in question. "Where?"

A small smile curved the still glaring man's lips upward just a bit. "You'll see."

Honey did see. She saw everything. The whole of the city, the marsh, all the way to the fence and the sunset beyond. A flock of birds, starlings probably, huge and undulating, rose above the horizon, backlit by the burning orange orb sinking lower in the sky with every beat of the girl's heart. The wind was astounding, shoving and tearing at her all at once and it seemed only Eric's strong arms kept her from falling to the roof beneath their feet.

He had brought her to the Hancock building, the tallest structure in the city, a black spike set against the sky that she'd always known but never thought further about - like any other building that wasn't her own. He'd taken her up and up in the elevator and up the final flight of stairs to the roof and let her marvel at the whole of their world spread out before her. It was beautiful.

"Come on," Eric told her after they'd been standing in silence for quite some time. "Before it gets dark."

Honey sighed. Right, back to the world. Still, it was so wonderful of him to have brought her there and given her that bit of peace. The young leader took her hand and tugged her along the roof, but he was going the wrong way. Instead of heading back to the door, he was pulling her towards the safety wall that surrounded the rooftop. There was a small pile of cloth and metal tucked against the bricks there, hidden in shadow. He stopped and made sure she was steady on her feet against the wind, then bent and grabbed up what turned out to be a heavy duty pulley and some kind of tarp.

"What is that?" the girl shouted the question so he could hear her over the wind. Eric was busy attaching the pulley to a thick black cable that trailed off the roof, which she had assumed was a power line for the wind turbines that lined the building exterior. He looked back at her over his shoulder and grinned widely.

"It's a sling," the man informed her. Oh, well that explains everything. Pulley secured, he clipped the sling to it. Hanging from the cable, it looked like a small hammock. Eric turned to the girl again and held out his hand for her to take. Just before her fingers touched his, Honey realized what the contraption was for.

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"You expect me to get in that thing?!" He only continued to smile and wait for her to take his hand. "You saw my Landscape, Eric!"
He reached up and flicked something on the pulley that appeared to lock it in place, then went to her instead of waiting for her to come to him. He cupped her face with both hands and leaned in so he could speak at a more normal volume.

"I did see your Landscape," Eric confirmed. "And I saw you step up on Choosing Day, First Jumper. When you were falling in that sim, you had the same look on your face as when you tipped back off the roof. Like you'd never let anything stop you. And I know you won't."

How could she argue with that, when he had so much faith in her? Honey let him lead her to the edge of the roof and lay down in the sling on her belly. She trusted him. If he was encouraging her to do this insane thing, it must be safe. He strapped her in so tight she could barely breathe, then leaned close to her ear.

"I'll be right behind you," Eric promised, then kissed her temple and shoved her off the roof.

The wind on top of the Hancock building was nothing compared to this, tearing at her like a beast, forcing her arms out to the sides as she plummeted away from the black spike. First came terror; the ground was so far beneath her, she was moving so fast she felt weightless. The scream that had built in her throat as she fell from the Dauntless roof so long ago tore itself free now and was lost to the air that rushed passed the falling girl. Her eyes stung and watered, tears streaking back from her face into colorless hair that whipped wildly like a tree in a storm.

She flew passed buildings and over the street so far below. She flew by turbines spinning endlessly to power the city. She flew. Honey flew, arms wide, heart weightless, everything forgotten. Soaring over the city, her laughter given to the wind, she was free and empty and light as air. The starlings rose into the sky again, beckoning the Dauntless girl to join them and for a few precious moments, she did.

After skimming along above Lake Shore Avenue for a time, like a crane gliding over the marsh, Honey finally slowed to a stop. Her heart was pounding faster than ever, adrenaline singing through her veins and the combination made her lightheaded and giddy. Not long after, she felt the line dip and looked back to see Eric careening towards her. He reached behind his head and pulled a cord that was apparently some kind of break and stopped some distance away. He caught her eyes, grinning widely, and pointed to a strap at his own shoulder, which he then pulled. The sling gave way and he dropped to the ground, landing with the grace of a big cat.

The leader moved to stand beneath her and motioned for her to drop as well. The girl tumbled to the ground with a distinct lack of grace and if not for the strong, steady form of the man below, she'd have ended up in a heap on the pavement. Honey immediately pulled Eric down for an exuberant kiss, laughing into his mouth with sheer, unadulterated joy. He drew back and ran his fingers through her hair as if to tame the wind out of it.

"How do you feel?"

"Amazing," she beamed up at him. The sunset bathed his skin in fire and his eyes practically glowed. He was beautiful and for a moment Honey couldn't breathe. He'd given this to her, so precious and wonderful and she loved him for it. "Can we go again?"

Eric laughed, shaking his head down at her. Those few minutes suspended above the city had been some of the best of her life and she wanted to experience it all over; the terror, the rush, the freedom. But it could wait. She had the memory. The Hancock tower wasn't going anywhere. There would be other days.
The young leader cupped her cheek, brushing his thumb against her skin. He looked at the setting sun for a moment, then back at Honey.

"It'll be dark by the time we get up there," he warned. The girl let out a little squeal of glee and wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling the man into another joyous kiss, loving him just a little bit more.
After Eric used a ladder to retrieve the slings, they set off for the Hancock once more. Honey practically skipped along - truth be told, at one point she did skip, which Eric found quite amusing. Once the adrenaline wore off, she settled into more of a contented buzz than a manic glee and strolled along beside the man who was such a collection of contradictions. Violent and gentle; cruel and caring; vicious and tender; ice and heat; apathy and warmth. How could any one person live with all that swirling inside them? Eric was rare and wonderful and terrible and precious. And he was hers.

As they rode the elevator up to the top floor again, Honey looked at him and that thing inside said, mine. She didn't even think he would argue if she told him so. The doors slid apart and they stepped into the hall, Eric leading the way back towards the stairwell. The girl caught his hand just as he opened the door.

"Wait. I changed my mind." The Dauntless leader looked down at her, confused and slightly irritated. She had made him come back all this way, after all.

"You're not scared," he said. It wasn't a question, but it was asking why she'd suddenly decided against another trip down the zipline.

"No," Honey agreed softly. "I'm not scared."

His brow furrowed and she knew he was about to demand an explanation, so she cupped his neck and pulled him down instead. Honey pressed up onto her toes, taking Eric's mouth in a needy, hungry sort of kiss. He had a moment of surprise, but it melted away as he dropped the slings he carried and pulled her tightly against his body with a soft growl. He slid one hand down to cup her ass and squeezed, pulling her up further, nearly lifting her off her feet.

The girl moaned and raised one knee, curling her leg around his to pull him tighter against her. Eric caught her thigh and did lift her then, pushing her against the wall and pinning her there. He released her lips and went after her throat and Honey wondered if he could taste the wind on her skin. Her heart was already slamming against her ribs and not just from his scalding mouth. She pushed her hands between them, unzipping his jacket and shoving it off his shoulders, but that's where it stayed, halfway down his biceps because Eric refused to stop touching her for even a second. She wasn't complaining.
The girl pulled his shirt free of his pants, as always, craving the smooth heat of his skin beneath her palms. He groaned into her mouth as she stroked his ribs and back, grinding his growing erection against her hip. Honey shivered deliciously and went after his fly next. She'd only gotten the button open when the man lifted her away from the wall and carried her into the stair well. Dropping her back to her feet, Eric spun the girl around, pulling her back against his body as he opened her fly instead. He reached inside, stroking his skilled fingers against her already soaking pussy, rubbing her clit in firm, fast circles for just a moment before withdrawing again.

Honey whined in protest, her hands gripping his thighs, nails digging into the fabric of his pants. Suddenly, Eric grabbed her hip and shoved her hard between the shoulder blades. The startled girl pitched forward and flung her hands out to break her fall. Her palms hit the concrete steps with enough force that they stung. Before she had time to ask why he'd done it, the man at her back was tugging her pants and shorts down to bare her ass. He gave her a little swat and she glared at him over her shoulder, but when the young sub tried to stand straight, his hand between her shoulders wouldn't allow it. Then she didn't care anymore because his fingers were inside her.

Honey moaned, bending over further, her head resting on top of her hands on the step. Behind her, Eric chuckled hotly.

"Fuck, that's a pretty sight," he said, low and lusty, stroking his hand against her spine. "You know, I thought about doing this out on the roof; bending you right over that safety wall. Probably not a good idea, though."

The theory was damn hot, however, and the girl groaned in appreciation of the image, rocking back against his hand. He bent down and kissed the small of her back, hot and wet, then again lower. He made his way over her hip, dropping to one knee behind her. Removing his fingers, Eric gripped her backside to tilt her up further. Without the digits working her nerves so fantastically, Honey could finally get a thought in that wasn't "good", "yes", or "more" and pulled away from him before his mouth could steal her mind again.

"Don't," she panted, turning out of his grasp. He let her go, face twisting into incredulity. "I don't want that."

His brows shot up towards his hair, eyes widening in disbelief. "You don't want it? You always want it. It's your favorite thing."

It was her favorite thing. The man had the mouth of a god and in seconds he'd turn her into a whimpering mass of nerves and begging. But she had something else in mind. Honey dropped to her knees before her confused leader and made certain to look him straight in his gorgeous gray eyes as she cupped his hardon.

"I want this." Eric stopped breathing. He stared back at her, still as stone. Hard as stone, too.

"What do you want?" he asked in a hoarse, tight sort of voice; so low she could feel it in her chest.

She licked her lips, her mouth suddenly dry. "I want your cock."

"Where?" the man demanded. She could see the tendons in his neck starting to stand out, the fabric of his shirt tightening over his shoulders.

"In my pussy," Honey whispered. She wasn't certain why she'd spoken so softly; she wasn't nervous. Not anymore. "Please, Eric. I'll beg if you want me to."

He did that sometimes; made her beg. She never minded it, because he always gave her what she
asked for in the end. Eric surged to his feet, grabbing the girl and pulling her up with him. He gripped her arm tightly and dragged her back through the door, bending to snatch up one of the slings as he stalked passed them. He moved swiftly down the hall, pausing to open doors as he went, looking inside each for something Honey wasn't privy to until he found what he'd apparently been seeking.

The room had probably once been someone's office, because the entire back wall was windows - like Jeanine's. There was broken furniture and papers and various debris strewn about the space, a number of desks had been shoved, piled into the far corner, some overturned. The light from the hallway only illuminated a starkly defined rectangle in the center of the room while the rest was cast in an eerie blue glow from the full moon that had begun to rise outside.

Eric released her and went to the pile of desks, grabbing the one nearest the edge of the mess and yanking it out into the open space. Honey flinched as the pile shifted and several of the metal structures fell loudly to the floor. He brushed his arm across the surface of the piece of furniture in a quick, almost careless move, then spread the sling over it like a sheet. He turned to the girl and she went to him without needing to be beckoned. She wanted this.

The instant she was in arm's reach, Eric grabbed Honey and lifted her onto the desk. It was cold and the sling rough against her bared behind, but she barely noticed. She tried to pull him into a kiss, but the man would have none of it, attacking her clothes as if they offended him. Her jacket was yanked down her arms and tossed away. She'd been wearing a sweater beneath that, which she would never wear again, because he literally tore it from her body. The tshirt and bra beneath were too much for his impatience at this point and Eric just shoved them up out of his way before pushing her back to lay on the desktop.

He tugged her pants and shorts roughly down her legs, growling in outrage at the fact Honey was wearing boots. Caught up in the whirlwind of his rush to undress her, it took the girl a moment to realize he was struggling badly with her laces because his hands were shaking. She sat up and caught Eric's face between her palms, pulling his gaze to hers. In the blue light of the moon, the irises of his eyes shone like silver, a sharp ring around blown out pupils full of hungry need. She stroked her thumbs against his cheeks and breathed with him for a moment, just to get the man centered again. When he finally blinked, she spoke.

"Take off your clothes. You know I want skin." She always wanted his skin, almost more than his mouth. Almost. As Eric shrugged off his jacket the rest of the way and stripped his shirt over his head, Honey made quick work of the laces that had caused him so much trouble and pulled her boot off. Before she could get to the other one, however, he was on her again, pushing her back down on the desk. He pulled her leg free of her pants and called that good enough. His fingers slipped into her again, first two, then a third and she arched up with a sharp moan.

"You ready for me, Honey?" he asked in a harsh, demanding tone. He pushed against the tight confines of her channel, testing her limits roughly.

"Please, Eric!" she pleaded, trying to sit up and reach for him. He caught her around the throat and shoved her back down.

"Answer the question." The man's voice warned her not to disobey. "Is your pussy ready for me to fuck it?"

She nodded quickly, whining, gripping his forearm but not trying to pull his hand away. Whether she was ready or not, she wanted him inside her. Now: "Yes, I'm ready. I'm so ready, Eric. Please!"

He released her neck and finally opened his fly, shoving his pants down enough to free his erection
and then forgetting about them. He pushed her thighs far apart and tugged her to the edge of the desk, right up against him so the length of him pressed between her labia. Honey gasped sharply, eyes wide, fingers gripping the edge of the desk tightly. He was so hard and hot and throbbing against her clit.

"Feel how hard I am?" Eric demanded, rocking against her once and forcing a moan from her lips. "You sure your baby, virgin pussy is ready for me?"

"Yes!" she insisted, rolling her hips against him and shuddering as the underside of his cock slid so slickly against her throbbing clitoris. He let out a growly purr of approval and reached down between them to take hold of his shaft. He pulled back just a little, just enough to rub the head of his dick against her clit in a wicked tease, then slid it lower to line up with her entrance. "Wait! Don't you have a condom?"

When Honey protested, Eric froze and for a moment, she forgot all about proper sexual safety and focused on how he'd just stopped the instant she spoke. God, she loved him. Then her question sunk in and he chuckled and shook his head.

"No. No condom," he told her airily, brushing the tip of his dick up and down against her pussy. It moved wetly between her labia and she could hear it and that made her stomach twist tightly. But he wasn't prepared and she'd just left that all up to him and goddammit he was always in control, why didn't he have one?! She groaned despondently and threw her arm over her eyes. He started to press into her anyway.

"Eric, don't!" she snapped, sitting up to push at his chest. "We can wait until we get back to Dauntless and get one."

"We don't need one," he told her in a voice that was like a caress. Eric leaned down to brush his lips against her jaw, making his way back to hear ear and nuzzling against it.

"Of course we do," Honey insisted, but leaned her head aside for him anyway.

"I haven't had sex in five months and I've been tested three times," the man informed her as if he were whispering a sweet nothing into her ear. "And you've been on birth control for almost two weeks."

The girl pulled back from his lips, frowning at him mightily. "How do you know that?"

"Because I checked your medical file," Eric stated the obvious. Then, in a deeper, more meaningful timbre. "I want to feel you around my cock, tight and wet and nothing between us. What do you want, Honey? Tell me what you want."

If she told him she wanted to use a condom anyway, he would. Honey knew that. He'd get them both off - spectacularly - and then go back down in the elevator and take the train back to Dauntless, stop at the Health Center and grab a box of condoms and take her back to his room. Or she could have him right here, right now, and feel every precious inch of him slide up inside her.

Honey reached between them and wrapped her hand around his, drawing him towards her, inside her. With a moan that sounded almost grateful, Eric sank his cock into her.

The girl had experimented a few times with a vibrator - an incredibly awkward gift from a very well meaning, but completely oblivious friend. The thing had been too artificially smooth, too plastic, and far too buzzy. The absolute rigidity of it had stung unpleasantly and the buzz numbed her to the point of frustration. Maybe she'd been using it wrong, though she couldn't imagine in what way. For a
very brief moment, Honey worried that awkward sensation of being invaded would return with Eric. Foolish girl.

His cock slid into her like it belonged there. Eric belonged inside her. He was thick and hard and filled her up in places she hadn't known were empty and would never not know again. His dick was huge in her hand, but inside her pussy impossibly so, stretching her until she thought her seams would split. They didn't. Eric's cock pushed her body to the limit and stayed there. He was made for her.

She told him so in a breathless whisper, needing him to know. The man shuddered and groaned her name like she was killing him. She'd waited to be killing him for too long and reveled in it, squeezing him tightly inside just to skewer him that little bit more.

"Fuck, Honey," Eric choked the words out, gripping her hips tight enough to bruise and drew his own back only to roll them forward and sink right back into her. Honey moaned, her head falling forward to watch him as he did it again. His shaft glistened with her slickness in the moonlight every time he pulled back, her labia stretched obscenely around it each time he pushed forward.

"Oh, my god, Eric," she whined. He made a fist in her hair, pulling her head back so he could crush his mouth to hers so roughly their teeth clacked together. The taste of copper filled her mouth, hot and metallic and Honey didn't know whose lip had been cut in the harsh kiss, but it didn't matter. He pushed her down onto the desk with his chest and rose up above her, looking down at the girl like a king surveying his kingdom; all that he saw was wondrous and his.

"Rub your clit," Eric commanded. "I want to feel you come."

Honey immediately complied, reaching down to work herself in the quick, hard circles she knew wouldn't keep him waiting. Her lover moaned in approval, the sound punctuated by the steady, rhythmic clap of his skin against hers.

"Such a good girl," he cooed with a superior sneer. "So obedient. Always does as she's told."

The good girl narrowed her eyes up at him and retaliated the best way she knew how, clamping down around his thrusting shaft as hard as she could and arching up against him. Eric shouted, his head falling back for a moment as he panted heavily, snapping his hips forward hard and deep. Honey cried out at the sudden rough thrust. Fuck, yes; she wanted more of that. She arched against him again, raising her knees and pressing her heels into his ass for encouragement.

Eric caught the girl under her knees and pushed them up aside her ribs, opening the wanton Dauntless so wide it was indecent. She loved it.

"Not yet," he admonished firmly. "Give me what I want and I'll give you what you want."

She'd give him anything he wanted and said so as she resumed stroking the bundle of nerves hard and fast. He rubbed his thumbs against her skin, far more sensitive just behind her knees than she would have guessed.

"I know you will," he purred approvingly. He shifted some way and his cock started hitting that spot that felt so good and Honey's back arched up off the desk. "Give it to me, now, Honey. Come while I fuck you."

She nodded over and over, panting out high little moans as she grew close. Closer. So close. There! "Eric!"

Coming on Eric's hard dick took Honey to a whole other level. Her inner muscles clenched and
fluttered around his shaft, trying to pull him further inside her and keep him there forever. It was amazing and she shrieked out her pleasure, rocking against him in wanton abandon. As for the man himself, his iron will was tested and proved unbreakable. He grunted her name hoarsely and squeezed her thighs, leaving more bruises against her pale flesh, steadily fucking into her all the while.

When the orgasm faded, Honey's shrieks and cries turned to moans and whimpers, because he never stopped moving and his cock was fairly scraping across her sensitive nerves.

"Now I'll fuck you good and hard," he assured her, arrogant and dominant and hungry. "So deep you scream. That's what you want, isn't it?"

Honey whimpered out an affirmation, reaching for him pleadingly. Eric wrapped her legs around his waist again, then lowered himself over her. Now, when he rolled his pelvis into hers, his stomach brushed against her own and his hip bumped against the bite on her thigh adding a sharp sting of pain to increase her pleasure. Eric's body was against the girl's from shoulders to where he slid in and out of her so perfectly and every time he moved, his skin stroked hers.

One hand pushed between her and the desk, curling around her shoulder from behind, while the other petted its way down her side to grip her hip tightly. With a grunt, he snapped his hips forward hard and Honey cried out again, with pleasure and relief that he was making good on his promise.

"That's what you want, isn't it?" he rumbled, eyes locked on her face, intense and unblinking. Eric slammed into her again, harder still. "Isn't it?"

"Yes!" she squealed piteously, her nails digging into his bicep and ribs. It was what she wanted so badly. He gave it to her, driving into her hard and deep again and again and again; so forcefully the metal legs of the desk scraped against the floor. Honey was a writhing, pleading mess, her head back against the desktop, sobbing his name. Even the mighty Dauntless leader lost himself to the heat and pleasure between them, dropping his face to her shoulder and groaning into her skin.

He lifted her hip with every beautifully brutal thrust, filling her anew each time. His pubic bone ground against her clit, sending shivers through her small body that left her shaking like a leaf beneath him. Honey felt the heat coiling inside her, until it was so tight she couldn't stand it. With a scream they must have heard back at Dauntless, she exploded into sparks that seared every part of her with painfully exquisite sensation.

As she came back down, Eric snarled her name in pleasure, in warning, in supplication. Honey wrapped her arms around him and leaned up, begging him to lose himself inside her, to fill her to the brim. As the girl felt him start to let go, she sank her teeth into his hard, meaty shoulder. Eric bellowed, slamming himself as deep as he could, so deep inside her that for an instant Honey felt the tip of his dick kiss her womb; the resultant spasm forced through her pussy made her bite down even harder. The glorious man shuddered and rocked and grunted and panted above her, twitching and pulsing hard within her over and over, filling her up in every way possible.

When he'd spilled his last drop inside her, Honey released his shoulder and her head hit the desk with a hollow clang that made her want to laugh, if she only had the breath. Eric's arms pushed under her, constricting painfully around her body. He pulled her with him as he slipped back, sinking down onto his knees on the floor. His face burrowed into the crook of her neck and the girl mimicked him, breathing his scent deep as her senses slowly returned.

Eric recovered first, because of course he did, kissing and nuzzling her skin reverently, but not loosening his too tight hold. Honey lifted her head, kissing his ear and temple, stroking her fingers against the growing bruise on his shoulder. Even in the moonlight, she could see the perfect
impressions of her teeth and her Cheshire smile returned in full bloom.

"That's a nice one," she purred. "Gonna feel that for a while."

Eric chuckled low in his chest and nudged her head with his, lifting up and seeking out her mouth. Honey sighed against his lips, so soft and warm, still hinting at that coppery tang. She stroked her tongue against the bottom one, seeking more of the forbidden flavor. He purred and she felt it roll from his chest through her own. She pulled back to look at him. Yes, just as blissful and sated and content as she'd hoped, every worry line smoothed away, eyes clear and soft - after he was spent was the only time the girl got to see them that way and she cherished it.

Bathed in the moonlight, basking in the pleasure she'd given him, Eric was breathtaking. Honey combed her fingers through his hair, scraping her nails lightly against his scalp where it was buzzed short and tickled her palms. Her chest was so full she needed to open it, to relieve the pressure before she burst, to wrap him in the warmth that spilled over.

"You are so beautiful," Honey whispered. Eric's eyes slipped shut. She kissed between his eyes, his forehead, along his hairline to his temple, drawing a soft sigh from the man that curled around her heart. "I love you, Eric."

He buried his face against her throat again and she repeated the words. He didn't say them back, but she hadn't expected him to. She didn't need him to. She just needed him to know.

Chapter End Notes

What do you think, guys? Did I do right by Honey?

Also, thanks so much for the great comments. My little heart goes all pitter pat when I see that counter go up. You all are awesome!
Two weeks passed in a blur. Time for Honey was divided into two categories: how much she had to wait until she and Eric were alone and how much she had left before they weren't anymore. The man had been right, once he fucked her, the girl was certainly a handful. He'd opened Pandora's box. He didn't seem to mind. They were the best two weeks of her life.

After the confrontation between Honey and the leaders, the idea that she'd slept her way into office faded away. By trying to use her experience in initiation to counter her argument, Eric had inadvertently been educating the crows in just how Dauntless the youngest ancillary was. Even the ones who still hated Honey couldn't deny her work ethic and from the way she'd sliced into Eric about his concession to Four - something no one else seemed to dare bring up - publicly, no less, it was clear she wasn't his puppet. The public view of their relationship changed; instead of the harshly dominating leader taking advantage of an impressionable young girl, he had been ensnared by the brash new crow with the balls to stand toe to toe with him.

Honey's friends accepted her relationship with some reluctance, but they loved and supported her and it was clear that Eric made her happy. He made her so happy. In much the same way Eric and Honey kept their love life separate from their work, socializing with her friends was also devoid of the young leader. As much as the girl would have loved to snuggle up to her lover on a couch down in the concert district and listen to Lockbox play or sit beside him at a meal and joke around over nonsense or feel his firm presence at her back in a bar while the others drank and got sillier and sillier, it didn't seem meant to be. Eric was still Eric and her friends still hated him. Eric had his own social circle, which Honey had met, but none of his friends were the sort of people she'd choose to hang around with either.

So, they worked and took meals together - sometimes breakfast, sometimes dinner - and went their separate ways for a time, but always came back together in the end. This concept completely boggled Marta: separate, but together. The two of them were eating lunch, sitting by the Chasm and enjoying the sound of the water rushing against the rocks. Outside the office, Honey allowed her secretary to ask whatever she wanted, knowing now that the woman wouldn't spread gossip and wouldn't bring anything up at work.

"It's just a part of having a boyfriend!" Marta insisted, waving her bottle of water at Honey. The girl cringed inwardly. Thinking of Eric as her "boyfriend" always seemed wrong. There was nothing boyish or particularly friendly about the man. "You hang around with each other's friends and pretend you like them. It's what you do!"

"Why?" The young sub just couldn't fathom it. If you cared about your lover, why force them to make nice? "He has his friends, I have mine, we have each other at the end of the day. I don't see the issue."

The woman rolled her eyes in disgust. "No, you wouldn't. You noses are all like that; all compartmentalized."

"Eric doesn't mind either," Honey pointed out, popping a cherry tomato into her mouth.

"Yeah, I just said you're all like that," Marta scoffed. The girl's head tilted in confusion and her secretary's brow furrowed, lips turning downward. "You know Eric was Erudite."
"How did you not know? What the hell do you guys talk about?" she demanded, completely taken aback. Then her expression turned sly, "Or are you too busy to talk?"

The girl was so caught off guard by the revelation, she didn't even notice the bait. "We talk. Just not about Erudite." In fact, Erudite seemed to be the one thing Eric refused to talk about. She'd just always chalked that up to a combination of it being her old faction and whatever it was going on between him and Jeanine.

Honey had always, always assumed the man had been Dauntless, born and bred, but now so many things, little hints were clicking in her mind. Eric's intense focus and demand for excellence, the way he gave instruction during her apprenticeship, the shelves of books in his quarters. He'd used the phrase "five finger fuck me" - that was an Erudite epithet and Honey should have realized he was the only other person she'd heard say those words since she'd transferred. And he was circumcised, which was the norm in Erudite and Abnegation, but not common amongst the other factions. She'd been so blind and so remiss. She loved the man, but barely knew him.

Honey caught Marta's wrist, all but glaring at the woman. "Tell me everything you know about Eric."

Unfortunately, everything Marta knew was very little in the grand scheme of things. Eric had transferred into the same class as Four. After coming in second in the rankings, he'd pushed himself hard through the leadership program and became the youngest ancillary in Dauntless history - until Honey came along. An honor the man still held was the fastest ascension to leadership; having been made a full leader of the faction just a year later at the age of eighteen. In the years since, he'd grown into probably the most feared person in the whole of Dauntless. As such he had few friends, but no shortage of friendly company; his power drawing people to him like moths to a flame. There were always women - and sometimes men - fluttering around him, trying to get close to that power.

As far as Marta knew, he'd had a few actual relationships, but nothing that lasted. Honey had tentatively inquired if any of those former lovers had marks like the one on her wrist.

"Oh, I don't know," the secretary shrugged. "Maybe? I mean, probably. Eric always struck me as the type to like it rough. Is he that way with you?"

Something in the woman's casual tone, the careless cast of her eyes, the lack of pinching in her mouth encouraged Honey to be honest here where she had held back with her friends. She licked her lips and nodded, tense, waiting.

Marta just grinned. "I knew it!" The woman laughed and her expression shifted into something eager and open. "Is it just rough or does he have a full on dungeon?"

No judgment. No condemnation. Not even an ounce of discomfort. Honey felt a great swell of relief and leaned heavily on the railing between her and the Chasm. For the first time in her life, she felt even a little safe speaking about her less than conventional proclivities.

"It's a little more than rough, but there's no dungeon. He doesn't have, like… devices or anything," the girl admitted. Her secretary nodded.

"So handcuffs and hickeys? That's nothing. I once dated a guy who liked to pee on me." Said freely and without a hint of embarrassment. So, Marta was a Candor transfer, too, then. Or the most Dauntless person in Dauntless.
"Oh God!" Honey was absolutely revolted and Marta laughed and laughed at the horrified look on the young ancillary's face. "Why?"

The woman shrugged. "I really don't know. But he wasn't a total creep; he only did it in the shower."

"Still, that's gross. Ugh," the girl gave a shudder of revulsion, face all screwed up with disgust.

"So, no pee then."

"God, no! Just-" Honey cut herself off, blushing brightly. Marta grinned knowingly.

"Ooooh, he's one of those, huh?"

"You know what, I think we've done enough sharing for today," the girl declared, pulling her legs back from where they hung over the edge of the Chasm and getting to her feet. The deviant woman cackled, gathering up her trash and rising as well.

As they headed back towards the hall that would lead to the leadership offices, Marta offered one last comment. "Just so you know, since we mentioned bruises and all, I can't remember a single time Eric showed up with a mark like the one he's got right here."

She tapped her shoulder, not far from where it met her neck; the same place where the deep plum of Honey's bite mark peeked out from beneath Eric's shirt collars. The young crow wore her Cheshire grin all the way back to her office.

"We all know Monday is Choosing Day, so I'm going to let you all know the that we will be implementing both of the proposed guidelines as planned." The final decision of the leaders' council, mandatory cuts and no conceding. Honey felt sick as Max said the words. How could they do this? How? The youngest ancillary was among those that insisted their formal objection was on the record, for whatever good that did. Give them the right to say, "I told you so!" when it became clear the new rules were a mistake, maybe. There was nothing any of them could do. The authority of the leaders was sacrosanct.

Honey stood anyway. There was one thing she could do. Max gave her a look of weary annoyance and she wondered if the head of Dauntless regretted his decision to make her sub so soon out of the gate. He should have paid closer attention to her name; badgers aren't known for their passivity.

"Something to add, Honey?"

"I want to observe the initiation process this year and evaluate the effect and effectiveness of these new rules," she stated clearly and concisely.

"Eric will already be doing that," Max pointed out.

"Eric is also in support of the guidelines," Honey countered.

"Sounds like you're saying I can't be impartial in my analysis," the man in question spoke up. His tone was smooth and vaguely warning and probably would have cowed most of the subs in the room. Too bad for him he'd spent so much effort making sure the little Dauntless wasn't afraid of him.

"I'm saying you want to be right." The crows murmured. Eric's eyes narrowed. "I don't think anyone can be wholly impartial on such a polarizing issue as this one. I will provide a contrasting viewpoint, which will allow for a more accurate sense of perspective."
Any Erudite would agree. Eric grudgingly nodded. "I don't have any objection."

"Alright, Honey will observe initiation. Anything else?" Max asked it snidely, but that coldness that set her on edge was in his voice. It sent a chill down Honey's back. She shook her head and sat, hoping he didn't see the shiver she couldn't suppress. "Our final announcement is that we will be slowing the train on its approach to Dauntless."

No one objected. The news should have made Honey feel good, but it only seemed to add to that sickening pit in her stomach. Maybe those who jumped and missed were better off than being cut and made Factionless. After all, hadn't her choices been Dauntless or death?

Sometime that night, between round one and round two, while Honey lay against Eric, her head resting on his furry chest, she turned uncharacteristically thoughtful. Maybe it was the fresh bruising on his body that she hadn't put there that caused it.

"Do women ever fight down in the Hole?"

"Not the hole I normally discuss in bed," Eric snarked in the quiet rumble he often used after she'd thoroughly pleased him. Honey tugged the hair on his belly in playful admonishment.

"I only saw men when I was there. Is it a boys' club?" she pressed. The chest beneath her cheek rose and fell with a sigh.

"Stick to the Mats, Honey. You wouldn't last ten seconds down there." She frowned and lifted her head to look down at him. He was calm and unconcerned, but firm in his warning. "The kind of men who fight in the Hole won't want to beat you, they'll want to break you."

"You're the kind of man who fights in the Hole," Honey pointed out. His expression didn't change.

"I am. If I didn't feel the way about you that I do and you stepped into that pit with me, I'd want to break you, too," Eric admitted, his eyes unwavering. She shivered and his hand came up to stroke her throat. After what he'd just said, that should have made the chill inside the girl worse, but instead chased it away. "You're everything they can't have and they'll hate you for it. Any one of them would crush you; you don't have the ability to stop them."

"If that's true, those men see me every day around the compound. What's to stop them if they catch me alone in a dark hallway sometime?" Honey challenged.

"Me." His expression hardened then and his arm around her shoulders tightened, reacting to the threat as if it were in the room. "I'll kill anyone that touches you and everyone knows it."

That statement both frightened the girl and evoked a sense of solidity deep inside her and she didn't want to think about either of those feelings. Instead she focused on the way his fingers moved to stroke through her hair and trail down her cheek, like she was precious to him.

Eric went on. "But if you go down there, if you drop onto the sand, you're offering yourself up on a silver platter and they won't be able to resist. The stupid ones won't even want to resist."

She chewed her lip, brows furrowing as she took in his words and weighed them. Honey knew she had enemies amongst the crows; she knew there were people in the Pit whose eyes followed her every move. The little crow had never considered them a threat in a very real, physical sense before, since she'd never done anything to warrant such vitriol. So naïve. Honey held her own in the Mats, but she didn't win every fight. She was small and weak, still; her genetic makeup didn't allow for brute strength or even the kind of graceful agility of someone like Daisy. The girl had always known
she looked like easy prey, but had been unaware of the target painted on her until now.

"Teach me how to fight. How to really fight."

He was already shaking his head. "This isn't another challenge for you to overcome," Eric stated the words in hard rebuke.

"Yes, it is," Honey insisted, leaning up further and leveling an equally hard look on her lover. "It's not about the Hole. It's about me. If there are people that want to break me, I need to be able to stop them myself. If the stupid ones won't want to resist, they're stupid enough to think they can get away with it someplace the cameras can't see and think you won't find out who they are. Anything that happens to them after the fact won't do me any good. I need to be able to defend myself."

"Carry a gun," he told her. "You're one of the best shots in the faction."

"Because I can't be disarmed?" Honey said right back. Eric was frowning at her, angry she wouldn't yield to him on the matter. She also knew part of that anger was due to her pointing out that he couldn't always protect her and he didn't like that, not at all. Like she had with Four, Honey pressed on that weak spot with her hardest piece of leverage. "If you won't train me, I'll find someone else."

His glare intensified and his jaw worked as he ground his teeth together. Someone else. Maybe Four. He would be her first choice, being the only person she'd ever heard of beating Eric in a fight. That was years ago, but it stood to reason if the young leader's skill in combat had grown so much, the security officer's would have as well. Four fought in the Mats, not because he couldn't win in the Hole, but because the Mats had rules; the Hole did not. He needed that leash, feared who he'd become without it. Eric had no use for such a thing.

But Honey didn't think Four would train her to fight the way she needed to learn. He had already tried to warn her away from the Mats. He, too, had seen what the girl didn't - that there were people in Dauntless who wanted to hurt her badly. He was a good man, protective and caring, but afraid of losing control. Afraid of her losing control. No, he'd never agree to teach her the skills she sought. So it would have to be someone else. Undoubtedly someone who was a lesser fighter than Eric. She knew her lover wouldn't be able to ignore that.

As much as she hated being manipulated herself, Honey didn't seem to feel guilt over doing it to others to get what she wanted. It was the part of her that would always be true blue.

Eric wouldn't talk anymore on the subject that night; he'd just pulled Honey atop him and made her ride him hard and desperately until they'd both lost themselves to oblivion. He didn't mention anything about it the next morning, either and the girl decided to give him time. Not too much, but enough to come to grips with the fact that he wouldn't always be there to scare away the other monsters.

When Eric stopped her as they were leaving his quarters to head for breakfast, Honey didn't expect he'd suddenly changed his mind, so the move puzzled her. He drew her attention to the keypad on his door and punched in his code - six digits, instead of the regular four like her own lock required, because Eric was a leader and had increased security. He motioned for her to mimic his action. He was giving her the code to his room.

She punched in the sequence herself and turned the handle. The door opened easily and she smiled at her lover, warm and happy. Eric pulled the door shut again.

"I don't entertain here, so you don't have to worry about walking in on me with company," he
assured her and had the girl input the code again to be certain she had it. He gave her an insolent smirk. "And if I come home to find you snooping through my things, it just means I don't have to go looking for you for sex."

Not only was he giving her the code, Eric was giving her permission to come and go as she pleased. Honey was elated.

"Here, I'll give you mine, too," she said, reaching for the keypad again. He shook his head.

"I don't need it."

"It's not in my file," the girl pointed out. Each member of Dauntless programmed in their own door code, they weren't in the system anywhere, for security.

"I have a master code," her lover informed her. Honey tilted her head and he explained. "All the electronic locks in Dauntless have a master code programmed in, so they can be opened in an emergency."

"Really?" It made sense, but she didn't like the idea of people just having access to her room whenever they wanted it. "Who has the code?"

"Only the leaders and the heads of security," Eric assured her. "You need to memorize this, too."

He punched in another string of numbers, a longer one that he had to repeat for the girl before she got it right. She tried the door, but it didn't open.

"It's not the master code. It's my system password." Honey gaped at him. That password would literally give her access to all of Dauntless - every single file in the system from materials requisition to confidential fear simulation footage; it would access every scrap of sensitive information only the leaders were meant to see. "I was thinking it was a bit unfair that I've always been able to look at your files, but you can't see mine."

He could have given her his files. He could have found a way to do that without opening the whole system to the girl. Eric could be censured for this. If the rest of the leaders' council supported it, Max could strip him of his office. This went beyond trusting her with a secret. He was trusting Honey with his life. It was a terrible burden and one she accepted proudly and ferociously. Mine.

Honey punched his code into the keypad and flung his door open, yanking the man inside with her. Eric could send Ryland to get him some breakfast and eat in his office. Right now, he belonged to her.

It was Choosing Day and the faction was all abuzz. How many new recruits would Dauntless garner this year? How many of their own children would leave the fold to seek their fate elsewhere? Honey stood with beside the net at the bottom of the members' entrance with Max, Eric, Four, and Lauren, discussing last minute details about the arrival of the new blood. It was all stuff the older quartet had been through before, but Honey had only seen things from the other side, the initiate side. When the short conference ended, Eric headed towards the stairs to the roof, while the rest stayed behind.

The young leader paused when his lover didn't follow. "Aren't you coming up?"

When Honey shook her head, Max smirked. "Don't you want to see if they all make it?"

The girl had apparently lost a bit of her charm in the head of Dauntless's eyes of late. The man hated being challenged even more than Eric and that was saying something. Truth be told, she both wanted
to be there and didn't. The young sub did want to see if her insistence on slowing the train made any
difference, but was also afraid it wouldn't and she did not want to watch some poor, hopeful transfer
plummet to the pavement. Regardless of her feelings on the matter, Honey would have stood firmly
on that roof if she needed to, but she didn't need to and really, she shouldn't be up there anyway. She
said as much and the others looked at her in confusion.

"I don't make the right impression," the girl explained. Lauren balked.

"You're small, but you look very Dauntless," the trainer insisted. "All the Dauntless-born know who
you are and it'll get them whispering."

"Exactly, they all know who I am and that I was First Jumper in my class," Honey agreed, but not
because it was a positive thing. Eric and Four seemed to understand, but Max and Lauren needed
further clarification. "I'm not imposing at all. The point is to make them think the jump is this big
challenge they need to overcome to prove themselves. If they see me there and know I hopped right
off the ledge, it makes it much less intimidating. Let them focus on Eric; he's terrifying."

The young leader smirked arrogantly at that estimation and continued on his way. Max left the
trainers and Honey to wait by the net with the emergency staff who were there in case an initiate was
hurt in the fall or to stop the process if something went wrong with the net at any point. They could
hear the train come and go and waited in anxious anticipation.

Soon enough, a body dropped through the hole in the pavement. It was a girl, slight and mousy,
dressed in Abnegation gray. Four helped her down the same way he'd done with Honey exactly one
year before. This girl had a bit more trouble telling him her name, but the young ancillary couldn't
fault her. She could still remember how staggering the whole experience had been.

"First Jumper, Tris!" Four announced. "Welcome to Dauntless."

Well, Tris from Abnegation, I hope you're wearing sturdy boots; you've got a long road ahead.

Chapter End Notes

So, we've caught up to Divergent. Story wise, from here it's gonna be a mashup of the
movie, the book, and my own ideas. A plot patchwork, if you will. No smut for a while,
but you guys were getting sick of that anyway, right?
Chapter Summary

The first few days of initiation are always the hardest

The Dauntless-born were separated and sent off with Lauren and Four introduced himself to his trainees. A smart-mouthed Candor girl thought it was a good idea to tease the broody man about his name and Honey rolled her eyes. Children. No one in her class had been so foolish. He shut her right up.

"This is Honey, one of Dauntless's sub-leaders," Four introduced the young ancillary next, his expression practically daring anyone to say a word. Candor remained wisely silent. "She will be observing and evaluating training, but she is not an instructor, so don't expect her to help you. Follow me."

It was sort of surreal to watch the whole process from the inside out instead of the other way around. It all seemed to lose a bit of his grandeur when she saw everyone hitting the exact same beats as last year. Four took the transfers to their barracks and they were all properly horrified by the bathroom and showers. The room seemed so much smaller now. The initiates were given time to change and eat and Four led them to the Pit. Honey's lips curled upwards at the awed expressions on their faces when the class looked over the hub of Dauntless life - chaos and noise and life. Once it had been almost too much for the Erudite-born transfer, now she couldn't be more at home.

At this point, Eric joined the group, standing nearby, looking as intimidating as the first time the girl had seen him; cold and superior. Four gave a brief and intentionally vague outline of what would happen during training and explained the ranking system and that they would be scored against the Dauntless-born, despite being trained separately.

"After initiation, rankings will determine what job you move into," Four told them. "Leadership, guarding the fence, or keeping the Factionless from killing each other."

Honey frowned to herself. So few options. Then Eric spoke up.

"Rankings will also determine who gets cut," he announced, the words sharp as if honed by their subject. The class shifted, looking at each other in confusion, their anxiety increasing exponentially.

"Cut?" the mouthy Candor girl, Christina, demanded. She was coffee skinned and tiny, like Honey, but trim and tight where the pale girl was curved and soft.

Eric expounded with false pleasantness. "At the end of each stage of training, the lowest ranking initiates will be leaving us."

"To do what?" a large boy asked. He was tall and broad, though not so big as Calhoun or even Jacob had been, and had soft eyes. Honey couldn't remember what faction he'd been or his name.

Eric stated the obvious, what the initiates were afraid to believe. "There's no going back to your families, so you'd live Factionless."

"Why didn't we know that?" another boy demanded. A bomb went off in Honey's mind. They didn't
"They didn't know?!" the young leader informed him snidely.

"A new rule?" Christina asked with incense incredulity. "Somebody should have told us that!"

Somebody should have told them that. In the days leading up to Choosing, someone at the school should have told the students about the new Dauntless guidelines.

"Why? Would you have chosen differently; out of fear?" Eric challenged, looking at the petite Candor transfer and then the rest of the class with heavy derision. "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. You chose us. Now we get to choose you."

With that decree, the coldhearted leader left the class to Four, striding off presumably to crush skulls and drink the tears of the innocent. Honey immediately chased after him. Once they were out of earshot of the initiates, she grabbed his arm hard and yanked him to a stop.

"They didn't know?!" she hissed in outrage. Eric only looked at the furious girl impassively. "Why didn't someone tell them?"

"You heard what I said," he told her, speaking to Honey more coldly than he had in months. "It shouldn't matter to them."

"It should and it does!" she insisted, growing louder. "It matters, Eric! You're right; if they'd choose something other than Dauntless because they're too afraid, then they don't belong here! Why do you want them here? It's wasteful and unnecessary and cruel!"

"The world is cruel," he declared flatly.

"Don't give me that shit," Honey bit the words out. "This is sadistic. The only reason to bring so many initiates here just to make them Factionless is if you enjoy doing it. You're destroying people's lives! For what? Explain it to me!"

"I'm not the one doing it," Eric told her. "This was the decision of the leaders' council and it was unanimous. If you've got a problem, go take it up with Max."

"Fine," she snapped, spinning away from him to do just that. He caught her arm in an unbreakable grip and jerked her back.

"Don't mention this to Max," he warned in a low, incredibly threatening tone that raised the hair on the back of Honey's neck. "This is the way things are now, Honey, and there is nothing you can do to change it."

"I don't understand!" Her own tone was desperate, pleading, and furious.

"I know." That was it. No explanation. No regret. Not even sympathy because he knew exactly how much it ate at her to not know what was going on. Eric was a closed book, completely unreadable, shut off from Honey in a way that was both infuriating and agonizing. And then he just walked away, leaving the confused girl staring after him, shaking with rage.

For the first time since her breakdown in the showers nearly a year before, Honey cried. Tears of rage and hurt and confusion stung her eyes as she brutalized a dummy in the leaders' training room. This was where all the government officers of Dauntless did their upkeep: a medium sized gym filled
with every bit of kit available - treadmills, weight training equipment, dummies, heavy bags, speed bags, and more.

The heavy bag would have given stronger resistance to her frantic blows, but the girl wanted to hit something more human and it was too early and she was too out of control for the Mats. She hadn't even bothered to tape her hands before throwing herself at the dummy and now her knuckles were bleeding. Good. Maybe if she cut herself open wide enough, the bile that burned her insides would spill out and give her some relief.

Honey had come here hoping to work herself into exhaustion, push her body so hard that her mind finally shut down. Her stamina had increased so much in the passed year that it was taking far longer than she expected and the longer she attacked the dummy, the more unhinged and enraged she felt. It was all made so much worse by the fact that Eric had been standing silently in the doorway, watching her for the passed twenty minutes.

At first the livid ancillary thought he'd try to stop her. She knew he wouldn't give her the answers she sought, he wouldn't even speak about the subject again no matter how she pressed. Honey thought he'd throw her to the floor or bend her over the weight bench and fuck her until she collapsed and she really wished he would have done that, because it might have stopped the tumult in her head. But he didn't. He just watched her vent her undiminishing vitriol on the dummy. And there was nothing that could have moved her to ask him for it.

Eric disappeared back into the hall and Honey wasn't sure if she was relieved or hurt by that. The addition of still more confusion was more than the girl could take and she screamed herself hoarse, tearing into the dummy so viciously that the foam split. She spun away from the ruined target and found another, throwing her bloody fists into the heavy bag with renewed vigor. The impacts of her punches and kicks were far more jarring against the thick padding and soon her joints were aching in protest. So much the better.

Honey had just landed a particularly powerful kick to the bag, knocking it back on its chain. Eric caught the bag before it swung back and his sudden appearance before her made the girl stumble back with a start.

"God damn him!"

She shook it off and glared at the man, panting heavily, chin high and defiant. He let the bag down until it was hanging motionless, then walked passed her toward the door.

"Come with me."

Honey followed without protest, stalking along behind Eric. He'd changed his clothes, now wearing loose-fitting jogging type pants, sneakers, and a tight tank and that perplexed her, so she ignore it. The last thing she needed was another fucking unanswered question. She also didn't pay attention to where they were going, just hoping it wasn't far so that she wouldn't have to wait much longer to have him inside her.

Eric had traded one training room for another and why the hell couldn't they just have stayed in the leaders' gym? He'd never been concerned with being too public before. This room was slightly different from the one they'd just left; there were no weights or treadmills, only mats, dummies, and bags and a few benches placed around the space. Near one of these benches was a duffle, which Eric reached inside to pull out a black roll of wrapping.

"Give me your hands," he ordered. All at once it hit her. He'd brought her here to fight. To train her to fight. Honey immediately complied, holding her hands out for him to tape up. They were shaking. As he wrapped the long, black strip around and around her knuckles and between her fingers, Eric said, "You will not use what I'm going to teach you at the Mats. You will not tell your friends what you're learning. You will do everything I say, exactly the way I say it. You will not hesitate. You
will not be squeamish. You will not hold back. Do you understand?"

She nodded. "Yes, I understand."

He nodded in approval, not looking up from his task until it was complete. Then he led her to a mat where some kind of anatomical model stood on a pole bolted to the floor.

"You can't learn these techniques on a person, so we'll be using this stand in," he explained, all instruction and authority. "It's stainless steel, so if you hit it wrong, it will hurt you - just like a real body, but worse. We'll start with your hands wrapped until you get better or else you'll just break them."

Honey swallowed hard. *I will not be squeamish.* "Okay. What do I do first?"

Eric ran his finger along the eye socket of the model, tracing a black line marked there. "I want you to punch here. Like this."

He demonstrated how she was to hit, then moved behind her to show her how to apply that visual to her own smaller frame. Then he motioned for her to do it. *I will not hesitate.* Honey threw out her fist, exactly the way he'd shown her, striking the stand in hard on that black mark. The head tilted aside, much like a real person's would have, and the ridge of the eye socket crumpled under the force of her blow. She followed through and stood back, watching in fascination as the model straightened up again and its face returned to normal with a series of metallic clicks.

"Wow!" the girl chirped, her Erudite mind thoroughly impressed by the technology.

"Again."

And again and again. Eric spent the next hour showing Honey the most easily exploited weak points of the human body - the orbital bone, the nose, and clavicle - and just where and how to hit them so the bone would crack under her fist.

"You will come here every morning before breakfast, just like in initiation," he ordered. "And I will find time to train you later in the evening. Tell me the rules."

*I will do everything you say, exactly how you say it.* Honey recited his commands, just as he had laid them out for her. He nodded.

"One more," Eric added, even more stonily and forceful than before. "You will not disappoint me."

"I will not disappoint you," the girl immediately echoed, with steely resolve. Eric's lips twitched and he motioned her out of the room.

Back in his quarters, he had her shower and sat her on the toilet while he applied a salve to her raw, split knuckles. Then, Eric led Honey to the bedroom and stripped, laying back on his bed and letting her work off the last of her angry energy on his body. When the girl finally collapsed on top of him, not a single thought was left in her thoroughly exhausted mind. Bliss.

Three days later, Honey was still sore, which made every movement exhausting. And she only had herself to blame. Eric's training wasn't particularly rigorous, it was more about skill and proper application of power than endurance. It was her prolonged assault on the dummy and heavy bag in the leaders' gym that had overworked her small body. Still, she did exactly what he said, rising early every morning and slipping out of his bed - though, there was usually a bit of warm up between the two that left her nicely limber and loose for her practice sessions.
After breakfast and a stop into the office to get a few things done, she met up with Eric and the pair headed down to the initiate gym. Again she was struck by that sense of surreal de ja vu, watching the new class going over the same things she had not so terribly long ago. So much so that when Eric called, "First Jumper!" Honey nearly jumped out of her skin. The man smirked down at her and instructed Tris to get into the ring.

"Last jumper! Time to fight." Well, at least that was one opponent she now knew Eric hadn't chosen specifically to make an example of her. The last jumper of this class was another girl, tall and strong, but she was no Jacob. One of the others called her Tank. Honey was jealous, everyone called her Kid. Tris was as skittish as a rabbit in fox territory and they hadn't even started yet.

"How long do we fight for?" Tank asked, calm as the marsh.

"Until one of you can't continue," Eric answered.

"Or one of you could concede," Four added, reflexively.

"According to the old rules." The young leader seemed to take pleasure in correcting his former rival. "In the new rules, no one concedes."

The initiates started chattering like magpies, high and anxious. Tris's already pale complexion washed out a sickly green.

Low enough that the class couldn't hear, Four asked Eric, "You really want to lose them all on their first fight?"

Eric was unmoved. "A brave man never surrenders."

"A brave man acknowledges the strength of others," the dark eyed man countered.

"Dauntless never give up," the other fired back, his slate eyes never leaving the ring, where the two girls were circling nervously.

"Lucky for you, those weren't the rules when we fought," Four declared. Honey heard the vertebrae in Eric's spine crack as it stiffened. He moved towards the ring, leaving her and the other man behind.

"You'll be scored on this so fight hard!" He put his foot up on the ring and growled at the two girls. "Go!"

Honey stepped closer to Four, hissing softly, "Maybe I should stand between the two of you from now on."

When the broody security officer smirked, his pouty bottom lip always turned downward, like now. "For my protection or his?"

The girl narrowed her eyes. "For the kids. They'll be traumatized if you two whip out your dicks and start pissing on the ring."

Four made a choking sound and Honey couldn't tell if he was fighting back a laugh or was just shocked by what she'd said. In the ring, Tank made quick work of Tris, unsurprisingly, and, with a quick look to Eric for confirmation, delivered a hard punch to the smaller girl's face that put her down.

Tris was only unconscious for a moment, but it was enough to end the match. A couple of the others
hauled her out of the ring and over to the risers to recover with an icepack on her bruised cheek. Most of the initiates looked horrified and Honey wondered if her own class had been wearing those expressions at the end of her first match.

Of course, if they had, it would have been warranted, considering Jacob had been trying to kill her and she’d been carried out on a backboard. What did these transfers think would happen? They’d come to Dauntless and get tattoos and piercings and play at being warriors, but never get hurt or have to hurt anyone else? The girl hadn’t been happy about facing off with the much larger Amity boy, but she hadn’t been overly surprised and certainly not horrified. Suddenly, Joseph's words made sense. "You were, like, so Dauntless already and we were all still trying to stop being whatever we were before we transferred."

At the time, the Honey had been so caught up in her own poor performance and fear of washing out or ending up on the fence, she hadn't realized just how different her reaction to the violence of training had been from the others'. It had always been a reality to her, but to them it was a vague concept they didn't understand. She looked over the crowd of anxious faces. They'd better learn fast; this wasn't a game.

Honey didn't experience the surreal feeling when observing the Dauntless-born class's matches. These teens all knew what was expected of them in the ring, most of them had a pretty good grasp on fighting already. Their matches were much shorter than the transfer class; usually just a few hits and someone went down hard. This made the bouts far less traumatic and caused fewer injuries, because the Dauntless-born knew where to hit to end things swiftly. She truly appreciated why the transfers were kept separate for the first half of training - if any one of the Dauntless-born had stepped into the ring with even the best transfer fighter, the transfer wouldn't have had a chance.

None of this stopped Eric from belittling and intimidating them, however; just the same as the transfers. He was an equal opportunity hardass. One of the boys, a skinny redhead Honey thought might be named Lukas, had hit his firing range target dead center and turned to grin smugly at his friends, stupidly swinging his rifle in a wide arc that swept over most of the class. The young leader caught his hand and the back of his neck, engaging the safety as he did, then simultaneously pulled the rifle from Lukas's grasp and shoved the boy to his knees. The barrel of the gun dug into the crook of Lukas's neck and he was instantly drenched in sweat, green eyes so wide they looked like billiard balls set into his skull.

"Do you think it's a good idea to point a loaded gun at people?" Eric asked, conversationally. The initiate shook his head vehemently, but also tried to move as little as possible, so it seemed like his skull was vibrating atop his spine. "No. Not unless you're planning to shoot them."

With only a breeze to break the dead silence that had descended upon the rooftop the metallic click of the safety coming off may as well have been a gunshot. Lukas let out a whimper of terror and proceeded to wet himself. Well, Joe, atleast you didn't piss your pants in front of the class.
The Past is Never Far Behind

Chapter Summary

History rears its ugly head

Chapter Notes

Quick note: In my mind, the Chasm is a cross between the movie and the book - it runs along the Pit and has a proper railing and gangway, but is deep enough that the water doesn't just soak everything all the time. Otherwise, no one would really go near it much.

Honey stepped into the mess hall and scanned the room, her eyes easily spotting a pink and purple Mohawk. It was beside a head of copper wool. She moved through the room to join her friends. Hotdog, Beth, and Joseph were all sitting there, as well. Hail, hail; the gang's all here. They were all leaning close to the center of the table, talking in low tones about something. As she grew close, Honey could tell by their expressions, whatever it was wasn't good.

"What's wrong?" she asked without preamble. Calhoun slid over, making a space for her between himself and Daisy. That didn't bode well and the young ancillary felt the beginnings of worry sprout in her belly. She sat down and looked to her friends who were, to a man, staring back at her with wide, concerned eyes.

"Someone tell me what's going on. You're freaking me out," she hissed with growing alarm.

"I was at Erudite today," Calhoun said in a grave timbre. Honey's heart stopped. A million horrible things ran through her mind, all of them involving her family coming to some harm. Her stricken expression startled the big Dauntless and he rushed to reassure her. "It's not your family! God, Honey, I'm sorry. I didn't even think."

She slumped against the table, shaking with relief. "You asshole! You scared the shit out of me!" Honey barked into the metal tabletop, resting her head on her forearms. One large hand rubbed the small of her back and a smaller one between her shoulder blades, a still smaller hand reached out to take her own and squeeze.

"I'm so sorry," Calhoun apologized again.

"So what happened?" Honey asked the table, not wanting to lift her head until she was sure there were no tears in her eyes.

"They had some trouble there a few weeks ago. One of their people… raped a girl. They had a trial and everything, but kept it out of the papers because she was a dependant. He was tried in a closed court at Candor and exiled from Erudite."

"That's horrible, but why were you all looking at me like someone died? I don't have any sisters,"
Honey said. She knew none of her brothers or father were rapists; it didn't even warrant mentioning. "And I'm not Erudite anymore."

"I saw a bulletin at Erudite today that had his picture on it and I recognized him," Calhoun explained. "He asked to dance with you at your brother's wedding reception."

Honey's head shot up and she stared at her friend, mouth agape. "Kent?"

The big Dauntless's eyes darkened when she said the name, apparently confirming the man in the bulletin's identity. The girl had heard about Calhoun being furious to the point of violence over the ligature mark on her wrist when he'd thought Eric had abused her in some way, but had not seen it personally. The look on his face now made her so very glad of that fact.

"Is that..." he broke off and cleared his throat before trying again. "Is that what you meant when you said he was too interested in you? Is that why you came running back into the room shaking?"

Honey turned in her seat and clasped one of his massive hands between her own. "He didn't do that to me," she quickly insisted, needing that black look off her sweet, Amity-born friend's face.


"Yeah, I kicked his ass," she declared, proud and defiant. His eyes slipped shut and he let out a breath and she could feel the tension flowing out of him. Daisy slumped against Honey's back and wrapped her arms around the smaller girl.

"Thank God. I've been sick waiting to talk to you," the squad leader huffed into Honey's shoulder.

"She really was," Hotdog confirmed from across the table. "Like, literally."

Honey's relief only lasted a moment, because a gut wrenching realization struck her and she thought she might go the same way Daisy had. "I should have told someone. God, I should have said something."

Now it was Calhoun's big hand squeezing hers. "It's not your fault. They said it happened last year. The girl just didn't tell anyone."

"There could be others," Honey pointed out. Both Hotdog and Joseph were shaking their heads.

"No, they'd know," the security officer declared. His statement was backed up by the tattoo artist.

"Candor has a serum, too. Truth serum. They use it during initiation and trials."

"If he'd... hurt anyone else, it would have come out," Hotdog finished the point. With a soft huff, the small Dauntless leaned back into her friend's comforting embrace. Daisy squeezed her tight.

"So, now he's just out in the Factionless sector? With no one to stop him?" Honey frowned. Calhoun shook his head.

"He's dead," the big Dauntless stated flatly. "When a person gets exiled for something like that, even if the faction involved wants to keep it a secret from the other four, the Factionless always know. That kind of person doesn't last long."

After a pause, because Honey wasn't sure she really wanted to know, she asked, "How?"

Another pause, because Calhoun wasn't sure he wanted to tell her. "Someone beat him to death."
Someone. The girl closed her eyes and nodded, just trying to focus on how glad she was to be Dauntless and have had the ability to fight Kent off, how much her friends cared about her and how much faith they had to immediately believe her when she said nothing happened, even how poorly timed and public this conversation was; anything to ignore the little murmur in the back of her mind.

Someone beat him to death.

Honey had expected splitting her time between the canine unit - which was coming along nicely; the pups were fast learners and the officers she'd chosen for the squad had been spot on - and observing initiation to be a strain; even moreso with the extra time she was putting into her own training with Eric. What the young sub had not expected was the antsy, envious feeling that rose in her chest when she watched the initiates fight or shoot. The little Dauntless hated standing idly by and watching others do the things she enjoyed made it so much worse. Four seemed to notice and was sympathetic, ultimately taking pity upon his former student.

"Today we will be running high-low drills," he announced to the gathered transfers. "At each station, you will hit the target once at a standing position and once kneeling. You will not move on until you hit your target or I get tired of waiting for you."

That last bit seemed to be directed at poor Tris. It wasn't surprising that the former-Abnegation was having trouble, as slight and skittish as she was. The girl had heart though, Honey could see that.

"Honey, if you would be so kind," Four prompted, startling the young ancillary. He lifted his brows in a gesture of expectance and Honey all but scampered to the table where the rifles were laid out.

She snatched up a gun, enjoying the heft of the metal, loving the way the weapon felt like a part of her arm. Eric was standing there and he did not seem happy, but given the chance to do some shooting, the white-haired Dauntless had no problem overlooking it. This wasn't playing; she was just demonstrating for the class and if she happened to take immense pleasure from doing so, well, that was beside the point.

Honey took up her first position and fired, breathing the smell of gunpowder deep into her lungs. She made her way quickly down the line, two quick shots at each station, two hits close enough to the center of each target to call bullseyes. The girl barely managed to wipe the grin off her face before turning back from the last dummy and returning her rifle to the table to reload it.

As the initiates took their own guns and lined up, Eric glowered down at Honey. "You're supposed to be observing, not participating."

"I'm not interfering," she stated as she snapped a new magazine in place of the one she'd partially emptied. The girl started feeding bullets into the mag she'd just taken out, to replace the ones she'd fired. "I hate standing around. You know that."

"I know."

"So does Four," Honey shrugged. "He's being nice. People do that, you know."

"He doesn't need to be nice. He needs to train his class," Eric ground the words out between his teeth. That caught her attention and the girl looked up at her lover to find him glaring at the back of the trainer's head. With a jolt, Honey realized his anger had nothing to do with her exceeding the scope of her duties as observer and everything to do with Four offering her something he knew she very much wanted. Former rival? Apparently not.
Honey tried to smile. She really did. Turning her head back down toward the table to hide the way her lips twitched, she focused on loading the magazine. This was work, even if they weren’t in the office; it was the first time one of them had let their control slip and it had been Eric that did. Maybe she’d been too quick to think him a dickhead for making sure she was strong-willed enough to keep things professional between them.

Later that evening, as she and Eric were cooling down after their training session - her doing some stretching, him rolling the hand wrapping back up, Honey tried to quell that flicker of jealous anger that still lit her lover's eyes.

"You know, Four tried to warn me away from the Mats after this happened." The young sub flicked the ring in her ear. Eric looked over at her, frowning over her mention of the other man. "He said Ellis wasn't the only one who would try to really hurt me."

"Right. That's what all this is for, isn't it?" the leader all but grunted the question, indicating the room they were in.

"Yeah, that's kind of the point I'm making," the girl said, arching to the side until her spine cracked. "He knew there was a threat that I didn't understand, so he ordered me to stay away from it like I was still an initiate. As if that would work. As if I'd go hide from the big, scary monster, because I was too weak to face it."

Eric didn't need to know that the big, scary monster had been Honey, herself, and her capacity to harm others. Being a monster himself, he wouldn't understand the need to fight that urge.

Her lover let out a dry chuckle, tucking the wrap away in his bag. "He doesn't know you very well."

"No. He doesn't know me very well at all," she agreed, meaningfully. Four was sexy and strong and Four was caring and a good person, but Four was never someone who could have been what Honey needed. Eric stood and sauntered over to her, more relaxed than he'd been a moment before, smiling lazily.

"And he's a stiff," the man said, hooking his index fingers under the straps of her tight training tank and idly sliding them up and down beneath the fabric without actually touching her. So, Four was Abnegation; that explained a lot. "He wouldn't have any idea how to handle you."

"I wouldn't even want him to," Honey insisted. Maybe six months ago the broody man might have set her all aflutter, but his light touch on her knee was nothing compared to one look from Eric.

"What do you want?" the leader asked quietly, head tilted to the side as he watched his fingers move a hair's breadth away from her skin.

Honey adopted a thoughtful expression. "Well, I want some chocolate cake, but I'm not really hungry enough. So, first, I want you to shove my face into this mat and fuck me until I'm starving."

Eric didn't mind so much about Four letting her participate with the initiates after that, though Honey had needed to wear Eric's shirt back to her quarters, since hers ended up in tatters on the training room floor.

Eric and Honey weren't always with the initiates at the same time. His job was far more demanding than hers, so he was often in meetings or doing other work while she was observing the training. It was on such a day, up on the rooftop range, that one of the transfers worked up the courage to speak to her.
Tris had the same fidgeting problem Honey tried so hard to suppress and was pulling at her fingers as she approached the young ancillary where she leaned against the rifle table.

"Um… I know we're not supposed to bother you," the former-Abnegation began haltingly in a small voice. "But, you're so amazing with the rifle and I just can't seem to get it. I don't know what I'm doing wrong."

"That's what your trainer is for," Honey pointed out, not unkindly. Tris looked back over her shoulder at said trainer and flushed, dropping her eyes to the ground.

"He just… told me to shoot better," the blushing girl said. Honey's brow furrowed.

"Oh, that's helpful," she snarked. It was also out of character for Four, who was a great instructor. The ancillary couldn't fathom why he would blow Tris off; there had to be more to it. Honey looked passed the other girl, catching Four's eye and laying her hand on a rifle, brows up in question. He only stared at her for a moment before turning away. *Good enough.* She picked up the gun and handed it to the intitiate, motioning the girl to get back in line.

When Tris approached a station, Honey followed, watching the girl take several shots and miss every one. *Eesh.* She adjusted the former-Abnegation's stance, but their height difference made it impossible to help with her sight, so Honey was forced to grab an empty ammo box to stand on.

"Look along the barrel; keep both eyes open," she instructed. "This is easy - stationary target, low wind. Just aim where you want to hit. Take a breath and hold steady, then squeeze the trigger."

As simple as that, Tris actually hit the target on purpose. She turned to Honey, her sweet face shining with joy and gratitude. Before the girl could thank her, Honey patted her shoulder and stepped off the box.

"You need to practice your stance." She mimicked lifting a gun to her shoulder. "They have plastic stand ins down in the armory - get one with a laser sight. Lift, aim, then flick it on and see if you're on target; adjust and try again. Over and over until it just comes natural."

Tris nodded in understanding and turned back to her dummy. She fired again and missed, but the shot after that hit home. Honey left the initiate to her shooting, going back to where the sub had been standing before Tris had asked for her help, leaning her butt on the table. Four was there, had apparently been watching the entire thing.

"Trying to steal my job?"

"Someone's got to do it," Honey said pointedly. "Shoot better? Really?"

The broody man sighed, an aggravated sound. "She didn't even try to figure it out on her own," he declared in annoyance.

"Not all First Jumpers are self-starters like me, Four," the white-haired girl informed him wryly.

"I had the exact opposite problem with you, that I have with her," Four said, shaking his head. "You wouldn't stop; she won't go."

"I think the issue is that Tris doesn't know where to go," Honey mused.

"What do you mean?" his tone was tight and when the girl looked over she saw his shoulders were tense. He was leaning on the table, like she was, and his fingers were gripping he edge tightly.
"She was raised Abnegation. They don't even believe in standing up for themselves, let alone fighting, and would probably faint if you gave one of them a gun." He said nothing of her description of his former faction. "She probably doesn't even know what she's doing here. Weren't you even a little bit surprised when you got Dauntless on your aptitude test?"

Four shrugged, relaxing a little. "Maybe I didn't expect to go to Dauntless, but I knew what I needed to do when I got here."

"So did I, but Tris isn't you and she's not me; she's Tris."

"You're telling me to take it easy on her?" he asked, incredulous. They both knew that was absolutely out of the question, even before the new rules.

"Of course, not. I'm saying you should push her even harder," Honey told him. "If she doesn't get motivated, she won't make it."

She chewed the inside of her cheek, her mood turning dark and sour. If Tris made it, someone else would be cut in her place. No matter how hard they tried, some of the initiates would be Factionless in less than two months and for the rest of their lives. Honey very much wished she hadn't taken on the task of proving the new rules a mistake. Then she never would have known Tris had a fidgeting problem or that Lukas had a weak bladder or that tall, soft-eyed Al smelled like lemongrass and sage. Now, she would never forget. Just like Shay.

One thing Four didn't ask Honey to demonstrate was throwing knives. She'd never quite gotten the hang of it. Al seemed to have the same problem and the young ancillary just knew it was only a matter of time before Eric couldn't stand to watch the boy anymore. When his third knife of the day clattered to the concrete, Eric sidled up to the big Candor transfer.

"Well, that was pathetic." Al cringed, but straightened up before turning, apparently determined not to appear intimidated by the domineering leader.

Like Calhoun, Al had several inches on Eric and, like Calhoun, hated the man for traumatizing his small, vulnerable friend. The week before, after she had attempted to concede a match, Eric had forced Christina to hang from the Chasm safety railing under threat of being cut for cowardice. From the initiates' point of view, the act was horrifying and monstrous, but Honey knew better. It was an asshole thing to do, but not really as bad as it seemed.

She'd seen people hang from that very railing just four months before on Dare Day, some of them drunk, and for far longer than was required of the Candor transfer. Christina was small, but she was much stronger than she looked and feisty, so Honey had no fear that she would choose to become Factionless or that she wouldn't be able to hold her own weight. Even if the girl had slipped, Eric was standing right beside her, leaning on the rail she hung from, feigning disinterest. The ancillary knew her monster wouldn't hesitate to kill when necessary, but he wouldn't let an initiate fall to her death while he was trying to make an example of her. Even someone who hated the man would know better, if only because that would make Eric look like an idiot.

There was also the fact that, if not for the brutal leader's action, Christina would have been cut immediately for refusing to fight during her scored match. Horrifying and monstrous was a good distraction.

But Al didn't know what Honey knew and even if he had, the boy would still have hated Eric, so when the man insulted him, the big Candor stood his ground. A mistake Honey had made herself once upon a time.
"It slipped," the transfer insisted.

"Oh? You should try again, then," Eric said in the same exact bitingly superior tone he'd used on her. "Go get it."

*De ja vu all over again*, Honey mused. Maybe if she'd been born male, she might have been tall and broad like Al. He looked at the other initiates, who were still throwing their knives, knowing better than to stop and stare when Eric was tearing into someone. "What, while they're throwing?"

"You have a problem with that?" the leader asked.

"I'm not doing it," the boy insisted with uncharacteristic defiance. Honey actually mouthed along with Eric's next words, knowing exactly what they would be.

"Why, are you afraid?"

Al scoffed. "Of getting stabbed by an airborne knife? Yeah."

"Everybody stop!" the young leader ordered loudly. Every head in the gym turned towards him. The one with white hair tilted to the side. "Stand in front of the target."

That was new. After a moment's hesitation, the tall boy turned and walked defeatedly towards the blue target. The rest of the class looked at each other and hissed soft little whispers of confusion and fear to one another.

"Four, gimme a hand here," Eric called to the trainer. Honey instantly understood and lifted a hand to cover her smile. Apparently, her lover had learned his lesson after the last time - never trust a bunch of teenagers with knives. "Now you're going to learn to trust your fellow Dauntless. You're going to stand there while he throws those knives, until you stop flinching."

Poor Al looked like he was about to be sick. He didn't know Four could split a hair with those knives. The rest of the group was, once again, horrified - save for the Jacobs of this class, who were snickering and looking on with eager eyes. None of them seemed to realize that refusing a direct order from a leader of Dauntless was a highly punishable offense. Al was getting off very lightly.

Four sighed and picked up a set of knives, moving to stand before the shaking transfer. Eric motioned for him to proceed at his leisure, then moseyed off to the side to watch. He caught sight of Honey trying not to laugh and frowned at her, probably not because she was amused, but because she was being unprofessional. She wiped the grin off her face and tried for a more stoic expression; the closest the girl got was a smirk, which was good enough for Eric to quit frowning and turn back towards the range.

Honey wondered who would end the scene first, Al or Eric; the former, by realizing there was no chance Four would hit him with a knife, the latter, by getting bored and tired of waiting. Her bet was on Eric. But she never did find out, because just as Four reeled back with his first throw, Tris's small voice trilled out in the tense silence.

"Stop!" Again, every head swiveled to the person who spoke. The girl, far less timid now than she had been on the roof not so long ago, asking Honey for help with her aim, looked to their leader. "Anyone can stand in front of a target. It doesn't prove a thing."

That certainly sounded defiant and Dauntless, even if it didn't really make sense given the situation. Standing still in front of the target while knives were thrown at him certainly *would* have proven Al trusted that Four wouldn't hit him - or had at least mastered his fear. Either way, her objection had the desired effect; Eric was no longer focused on making an example of Al. Unfortunately, he had a
whole new target.

"Then it should be easy for you to take his place."

Honey wasn't sure what Tris had expected to happen when she spoke up, but from the look on the girl's face, it wasn't this. Still, she didn't back down and walked across the range to take Al's place.

"Don't go too far," Eric warned Al. The implication was clear, but Four spelled it out for the Abnegation transfer in his sights.

"If you flinch, Al takes your place," he told her, as if it were a reassurance. Tris nodded and took deep breath.

The whole thing was very dramatic. Four urging Tris to give up and let Al take his medicine. Eric insisting that Four could do better, get closer with his throws. Tris torn between hyperventilating or holding her breath completely - both of which would result in her passing out. This was serious and scary for the initiates, a point about trust and cowardice for Eric, and Four's big chance to really push Tris. And there was Honey, standing just behind and aside Eric, desperately trying not to smile over all the fuss.

The whole thing ended when Four intentionally - because it was Four, Honey knew it had been intentional - nicking Tris's ear and drawing blood. Eric awarded her points for bravery and giggled her for insubordination and then let everyone go early.

Eric had a working dinner planned with Max that night, so Honey didn't walk out with him. She lingered, watching Tris and Four. They were both tense and angry with each other. Honey had expected Tris to be pissed, but Four's raised hackles caught her notice. He seemed overly insulted that his trainee hadn't trusted him not to hurt her. Which was such a man thing to think, considering he had, in fact, done just that. Tris watched Four stalk away with a quiver in her chin.

When the transfer saw Honey watching, her kittenish expression twisted into a scowl and she stalked towards the young sub. Maybe Four and Eric had the right idea; Honey would have to put more effort into being unapproachable.

"I saw you laughing at Al," Tris declared with much offense. "How could you do that? I thought you were nice."

It would do the initiate no good to seek comfort in the arms of Dauntless. Not the kind of gentle handling she was looking for. So, the young crow shrugged, hoping to disillusion her before she got hurt.

"Honey cause I'm sweet. Badger cause I'm not," she said simply, neither confirming, nor denying whether she was nice. "I wasn't laughing at Al. Eric did something similar to me when I was an initiate, just without Four throwing the knives."

That stopped Tris in her tracks. The scowl faded into an embarrassed frown. The initiate's eyes, so like Dexter's, dropped as if ashamed. "I guess you weren't scared at all."

Oh, so that was it. The former-Abnegation thought Honey was judging her because the white-haired Dauntless must have been far braver than she. The ancillary chuckled.

"I was pretty nervous at first. I should have stayed that way," she admitted. Tris looked up confused and Honey gave her a wry smile. "When I let my guard down, someone threw a knife at my back."

If that didn't tell the girl everything she needed to know about Dauntless, nothing would.
Capture the Prize

Chapter Summary

It's worth the pain

Chapter Notes

Little bit of plot, little bit of smut. Important smut.

After eating a light dinner, Honey and Eric made their way to the armory to meet up with Four and Lauren. Today had marked the end of stage one of training, so tonight was war game night. Normally, it would just be Eric and Four captaining/chaperoning the initiates, but since there were so few of them this year, just twenty in total, it was decided the two ladies would join in. Lauren was pleased; she didn't normally participate in the initiate capture the flag game - it had clearly become a bit of a pissing match between the long time rivals. Sometimes Honey thought, if they didn't hate each other so much, Four and Eric would have made a great team. They were two sides of a coin.

Again, came that sense of surrealism as Honey accompanied the other three to collect the Dauntless-born - all of whom had known for years what happened at the midpoint of initiation and were raring to go - and went to wake the transfers. Her faction was not known for its kindness, but the girl thought it very kind to allow all the initiates to be together for one last wild night before cutting the ones below the line. At least they would have this, if nothing else. All, but Tris. Poor Tris who had lost her final match to the very snarky, insolent Candor transfer, Peter. He was one of the Jacobs of this class.

The former-Abnegation had gone down hard and stayed down long after the match ended. Peter's vicious kick put her into the infirmary. When Tris was hauled out of the gym on a backboard, when her classmates should have looked horrified and concerned, Honey saw only blank stares and listless resignation. They were so used to seeing each other dragged from the mat and out the gym doors, it had lost it's edge. Not that it didn't still upset most of them, but they lived in a constant state of anxiety and oppression; it had become the norm. This was not Dauntless.

As for Tris, Honey knew what it felt like to miss an opportunity because of a lost match. She'd been crushed when she'd awakened in the infirmary to find the entire day had slipped by. Tris would waken to find her entire life had slipped away. The young ancillary wished she hadn't come, but it was too late. She was on the train, surrounded by excited faces and aching on the inside for all of them, even the ones who she knew would remain tomorrow. They still had to make it through stage two.

Eric noticed Honey's melancholy and was keeping an eye on her. He wouldn't say anything - there was nothing to say - but he stood closer than necessary and had checked to be sure her jacket was securely zipped up. Now, standing side by side, the back of his hand brushed hers as the train swayed and Honey realized he'd removed one of his fingerless gloves so all the girl felt was skin.

Some commotion at the back of the car caught her attention, some loud voices. Loud happy voices.
Honey was too short to see what was going on, but Eric had also taken note of the disturbance and moved to push his way through the teens. She stayed close to his back, letting him part the sea around her, then peered passed once he'd stopped. Tris. Tris was the source of the hullabaloo; bruised and out of breath, but on the train.

"Who let you out?" Eric demanded. Instead of being cowed or contrite, the once meek girl met his eyes.


"You did?" the young leader parroted back in surprise. He eyed her appraisingly for a moment, making a decision that could hold the girl's future in the balance. He could tell Tris she was out, he could force her to stay on the train and not participate. Instead he accepted her act of courageous tenacity. "Okay."

Eric turned away from the shocked initiate and found Honey looking up at him with that wide grin. He scowled and grabbed her shoulders, spinning her around and giving her a shove. Giggling silently to herself, the ancillary wove through the crush of teens while her lover plowed them out of his way behind her until they'd returned to the other end of the car, where there was more space.

"She's got guts," Honey stated, knowing better than to express how pleased she was with the man for letting the spunky transfer stay. Eric leaned against the wall and nodded.

"Breaking out of the infirmary to hop a train and probably get shot," he summarized thoughtfully. "Kinda reminds me of someone. Can't put my finger on who, though."

"Certainly not with all these kids around, you can't," his lover quipped with a saucy wink. The young leader laughed. The sound startled the initiates around them. They probably thought Eric incapable of something so human as laughter. Honey knew better.

"The game's simple; just like capture the flag," Four announced to the trainees gathered around him and Eric.

Lauren snorted. "That's because it is capture the flag."

"Weapon of choice." Eric lifted one of the guns and showed it around. Honey knew every beat they would hit and watched with a small, nostalgic smile playing at her lips.

"Call that a gun?" Tank asked derisively to Peter at her side. An instant later, the tall girl fell back against the wall with a cry of pain, then slid to the floor. She whimpered in agony as Eric bent to retrieve the projectile he'd fired into her thigh.

"Neuro-stim dart. Simulates the pain of a real gunshot wound," he announced, holding the metal cylinder up. Smirking in mock sympathy down at the unfortunate initiate, he assured her, "Only lasts a couple minutes."

"Then it gets all tingly," Honey grinned.

She shook her head in affectionate reproach of the prickish leader. Incorrigible. Still, it was nice to see Eric enjoying himself so much. His lips were curled upwards in what was very close to a smile and his eyes were bright and eager.

"Two teams," he announced. "Four and I are captains. Honey is with me; Lauren, you go with Four."
"You had her on your team last year," Four pointed out.

Eric smirked snidely. "Yes, I remember. And she took out half of yours."

She did do that, didn't she? A year ago, Honey would have blushed at the focus of these two men being set on her, not to mention the eyes of every initiate in the car. But she was far more Dauntless now and simply borrowed one of Eric's superior smirks and tried it on for size.

Four shrugged. "You'd have lost without her."

"Are you implying I can't beat you with any team?" the leader asked. The other man shrugged again.

"You said it; I didn't."

Eric's eyes narrowed and he glanced down at Honey. Oh, this need to prove he was better than Four ran deep. "Fine, you take her."

"Maybe I don't want to be on Four's team," the asset in question said insolently, not particularly loving the way they were haggling over her like she was a rug at Sunday market in the Hub.

"Maybe you'll follow orders like everyone else," Eric replied firmly, tapping her on the nose with the barrel of his gun. To anyone watching, the move would have appeared officious and intimidating, but to Honey it may as well have been a teasing peck on the lips and her heart thumped warmly.

"You pick first," Four told his rival, even though it was the broody man's turn to choose first. Eric had no problem accepting that advantage. Especially, now that his best shooter was on the other team. He chose a boy named Edward, who was at the top of the transfer class. Four looked around thoughtfully, then said, "I'll take the stiff."

Eric sneered. "Oooh, pickin' the weak ones so you got someone to blame when you lose?"

The other man smirked back, "Something like that."

Honey looked to Lauren and rolled her eyes, then pantomimed holding an imaginary penis and peeing on the floor.

In addition to having guts, Tris seemed to have some brains, too. While the rest of her team stood around bickering back and forth about who should be in charge and what they should do, the girl went off and climbed the defunct Ferris wheel to get a better lay of the land. Smart. Four went with her. Interesting. Honey suppressed a grin when the two of them came back and Tris couldn't even look at her instructor. Oh, the little crow knew that feeling. Conversely, Four couldn't seem to stop looking over at the feisty Abnegation transfer. Well, well, well.

This team seemed to have the same strategy as Four's group the year before. Now that they knew where the green team's flag was, they hid their own and left two people behind to guard it, then went en force for the prize. This time, Honey didn't stay behind. It was odd, she thought, how similar the situation was to her own class's war games. There were two options - sit and guard or move and attack. Though, what could you expect from a bunch of teenagers with no training in combat logistics?

The green position was decent: a rooftop, with the flag safely tucked away in a tower. There would be at least one person in there to cover the stairs, maybe more. But the yellow team was coming in hard, with almost all their guns and given the impulsive, action-hungry nature of initiates, there probably weren't many who chose to stay and stand guard. With no dead eye to stem the tide,
whatever remained of the green team were sitting ducks.

Honey hadn't given Eric enough credit. As soon as her own team approached the green location, someone shouted from above.

"I can see them!"

"Light 'em up!" Eric shouted. A bright red flair flew through the air and hit the ground just behind the yellow team, illuminating them clearly in bright silhouette.

"Shit!"

Four of them were dropped in a second as the whole of the green team opened fire. They were all there. The flag in the tower, the rooftop, the memory of last year fresh in the trainers' minds - it was a trap. *Oh, well played.*

Honey ducked down behind an air vent, her small size making it easy to find cover, but the flat surface and multiple obstacles - vents, big power boxes, etc - made it hard for her to get a good clear view. The team captains were there to guide and Eric had certainly guided his team into an excellent strategy. Still, she took out one shooter. Then another. Rushed from cover to cover, working her way forward carefully. The girl remembered those darts and while the tingling wasn't unpleasant, the simulated bullet wound certainly was.

Maybe that was why she did what she did. And what Honey did was shoot her own team captain.

She'd been focusing on systematically finding and eliminating every green target, when she heard Eric shout in pain. Everything else was forgotten as the girl whirled towards the sound and watched her lover drop to the ground. Four fired a second shot into his chest and Eric snarled in agony. Her finger squeezed the trigger twice, back to back, and two darts struck her captain on the back of his left shoulder. With his own shout of pain and shock, Four went down just feet from Eric.

Honey left them there, continuing on her mission. The darts weren't real bullets, so they would both be fine and Eric would only be furious if she abandoned her team to help him. She didn't know how he would react to her shooting Four. That would just stay her little secret.

The girl managed to take out one more enemy when a high pitched whoop of triumph rang out. Tris and Christina stood on the tower's observation walk, holding the flag up victoriously. Moments later a yellow flair lit the sky. For the second year in a row, Honey's team had won. She celebrated by racing to drop beside her fallen lover, who was still panting in anguish.

Eric had pulled the dart out of his chest, but Honey saw there was another still sticking from his shin. She hissed through her teeth as she yanked it free. His face was screwed up in a grimace of anger and pain and she wished she could do something to ease it, but there was nothing. He grabbed her thigh, gripping hard, hard enough to hurt, hard enough to bruise. It didn't arouse her, because this wasn't that kind of moment. She just laid her hand over his and let Eric squeeze finger marks into her flesh, anything to give him some measure of comfort.

Eric limped the whole long walk back to the train tracks. The neuro-stim solution was taking far longer to dissipate because the dart had hit his shin, the prongs going right to the bone. He was furious. Not only had they lost, but Four had shot him because Eric had failed to maintain adequate cover. Added to that was the humiliation of having to visibly favor his injured leg and the pain from said injury as the cherry on top. Still, when the train came rolling by, he pushed Honey ahead of himself and ran along as if nothing were wrong.
She swung up into the second to last car and a he was right behind her. They had the car to themselves, thankfully; not surprising considering the leader's foul mood. Eric slumped to the floor, leaning heavily against the wall. He let out an angry grunt and banged his skull back against the metal. Honey dropped down beside the incensed man and caught his head in her hands to stop him. He growled at her warningly and grabbed the girl's wrists to yank her hold away.

"Stop it," she ordered softly. Honey didn't pull her hands free, but waited for him to release them. Then she scooted back and very carefully pulled his pant let free of his boot.

"What are you doing?" Eric demanded sharply, but didn't try to stop her again.

"I want to see it," she told him the simple truth. Tugging the material up, she revealed a small bruise surrounding four tiny punctures and a minute smear of blood. Just like the ones she'd had herself. Honey brushed her fingers over the skin just beyond the edge of bruising and the man stiffened, then relaxed when her light caress did not intensify his pain.

As she continued to stroke his skin, Eric began to calm down, bit by bit. Finally she kissed her palm and laid it over the mark. He sighed and let his head rest back against the wall. Honey removed her jacket and set it aside, then straddled his legs and opened his jacket in turn, pushing his shirt up out of her way. Another mark, just the same as on his shin, marred her lover's chest. The girl frowned at it, offended by its existence. That was her skin to mark. She leaned in and kissed the bruise, so softly, so carefully.

Eric's hands lifted to comb through her hair and Honey wondered if it was as cathartic for him as it was for her when her fingers were in his soft locks. She hoped so. Her tongue snaked out to slide over the injury, laving at it like an animal licking a wound. The man huffed out a breath and his fingers tightened in her hair. That was her skin. Mine. Honey sank her teeth into Eric's chest and he bellowed in pain and surprise. His spine arched and his fingers fisted in her hair, but he didn't pull her away. The girl released the sharp pressure of her jaws, but left her teeth in place for a moment, enjoying the way his heavy breathing lifted his chest against her lips.

When she pulled back, there was a perfect set of teeth marks obscuring the punctures and a growing bruise overtaking the one that had encroached on her territory. Better. Beautiful. Honey lifted her eyes to Eric's face. His head was arched back against the wall, eyes shut tight, his throat on full display and the young ancillary understood why Marta gushed about wanting to bite Max's leaders' marks. Instead, Honey leaned in and inhaled Eric's scent deeply, then ran her tongue up the path of one tattoo. His skin was salt and spice from the exertion of the evening; she could feel his pulse beating just beneath, fast and hard. His pulse wasn't the only thing hard she could feel, either. The girl pursed against his jaw before pulling his hands out of her hair.

Eric's head lifted, eyes heavily lidded and wanting, but she climbed off him altogether and he didn't stop her; just watched and waited. Honey knelt and began to untie her boot. The man shifted to rise, but she stopped him with a hand on his chest, silently commanding he stay put. His studs glinted the harsh lighting of the train at her as he raised his brow, but relaxed against the wall anyway. The girl made quick work of her boots, setting them aside, and stood to remove her pants and shorts. The doors to the car were wide open, but she couldn't be bothered enough to care. There was laughable chance of the pair finding themselves with unwanted company.

The young leader watched all of this in silence, his eyes dark and hungry, his mouth set in a hard line of impatient need. Honey stood over his legs and the instant she was within range, Eric grabbed her and yanked her down onto his lap. He caught her hair and crushed her mouth to his, he crushed her body to his and groaned heavily. The girl pressed her knuckle hard into the bite on his chest and her lover broke the kiss with sharp hiss between his teeth and a soft grunt. She pulled his arm from
around her waist and pushed it down to his side, shaking the hand from her hair and doing the same with that one, as well.

Eric growled at her, threatening and defiant and she caught his throat, pushing his head back against the wall. Honey leaned in again, nuzzling her lips against his ear and squeezing until she could hear his breath rasping as he drew it. She nipped the shell of his ear and shushed him softly. The throat beneath her palm worked hard to swallow. The girl placed soft kisses against the side of her lover's face, along his jaw, just above where her fingers bit into his flesh, shushing him gently between each.

Finally, finally, the hard muscle beneath her succumbed, slowly softening as the tension drained away. Once Eric was at last relaxed, she smiled and lifted her mouth to his in a slow, deep kiss. His moan vibrated against her hand, all the way down her arm, all the way through her body. Honey relaxed her grip and stroked her fingers against his neck as she reached between them to open his fly. The man shuddered hard as her fingers closed around his shaft, but his hands remained at his sides. The girl rewarded his obedience by wasting no time in slipping his cock inside her.

Like mirror images, both heads fell back and twin groans of relief erupted from arched throats. Honey leaned back, her hands sliding over his form, over her own, and back until they rested on his shins. The heel of her palm ground into the wound there and Eric grunted, openmouthed and needy. She shivered and rolled her hips against his, reveling in the way his dick slid against her already burning nerve endings.

"Fuck, Honey," he panted, flattening his palms against the floor. "Faster."

"Faster?" she purred the question, giving another slow roll. "Faster than this?"

Eric groaned as another shudder shook him beneath her and nodded. "Shit, yes, faster. Honey, please."

It was the way he said "please" that did it, like he was begging. Honey gripped his shins harder and arched her hips, rocking against him at a quicker pace. The man moaned, his own hips lifting against hers to push him deeper. He felt so good inside her; he always felt good inside her. All her fantasies about having Eric at her mercy paled in comparison to the reality and it didn't take her long, not with his moans so uncharacteristically pleading as they were. Honey sat up, one hand at his throat, the other gripping his hair, her nose resting against the side of his as she rode him hard and fast.

"Mine," she breathed against his mouth. Eric nodded without hesitation, his forehead bumping against hers. With a massive throb - in her chest and between her legs - Honey came apart. She buried her face against his throat, gripping a handful of his shirt as an anchor against the flood of intense pleasure that threatened to wash her away. Strong arms wrapped around her, crushing her tight against his body as her lover bucked up sharply and spilled inside her convulsing channel with a raw shout.

The girl collapsed against the heaving chest, but had no time to slow her heart or catch her breath before Eric surged forward off the wall. He pushed her down to the cold steel floor of the train, slipping out of her in the process. The vicious man knelt, dragging her thighs up onto his and rammed back into her with brutal force. Honey shrieked and arched up, her shoulders scraped sharply by the rough surface beneath them, even through her shirt. With a bestial snarl, Eric tore her shirt open and ripped her bra along the center seam, then caught her wrists and slammed them against the floor beside her head, pinning them there as he drove into her again and again.

His thrusting cock hit her cervix, her womb over and over, each time sending a jolt through her that her body couldn't decide whether it was pleasure or pain and either would have sufficed to ruin her, but together they pushed her passed the breaking point. Honey came hard again, screaming his name.
Eric worked her through her climax with an endless succession of near-violent thrusts until she stopped spasming around him. He released her wrists and leaned to the side, snatching something from the floor - her discarded jacket.

With quick, efficient movements, he twisted the garment into a thick rope and brought it down across her throat, pinning Honey to the steel and cutting off her air. Eric loomed above his smaller, vulnerable lover, slate eyes wide and wild, his jaw tight, teeth locked together as he fucked her into the floor. He grunted harshly through his nose, the sinew in his neck tight, shoulders bunched, shaking as he rammed his cock into her.

He was out of control, but Honey wasn't afraid. Her face showed only pleasure, her eyes only love. She reached up, stroking her hands against his face, even as her lungs screamed for air. Because she had no breath to speak, the girl mouthed what she needed to say. One word. *Yours.* Eric's whole body seized above her, wracked with hard shivers as he came again. He released the jacket and Honey could have breathed again if not for the sight before her. His eyes had squeezed shut tightly and his shoulders hunched. Eric's own breath came and went in sharp, short bursts through a slack mouth that hung open, his upper lip curled with the intensity of his orgasm.

The tension left him as abruptly as it came on and his arms shook trying to hold up the sudden dead weight of his body. The man swallowed hard and panted heavily, shining with sweat.

"I love you," Eric gasped out, eyes still closed, absolutely wrecked. He swallowed again and nodded, as if she would ever think to question his words. "I do love you."

"I know," Honey assured the man, pulling him down against her and holding him close. She rubbed his back and stroked his hair, pressing her lips to his temple. She hadn't needed the words to know, but the fact that he'd said them meant so much. Eric was hers and had given himself up to it the same way she had done herself to him. Her own brutal, beautiful monster.
The Dichotomy of Dauntless Monsters

Chapter Summary

Honey goes to a pretty dark place.

Chapter Notes

Warning - this chapter deals with suicide and self-harm. And there's some, what you might call "therapeutic sadism".

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Five. Five cuts. Five lives gone in a flash. Five lost souls sent out to waste among the Factionless. Five people whose names Honey knew, whose faces she would never forget. Clint, Isis, and Daphne from the Dauntless-born class. Myra from Erudite. And Edward. Edward who had the highest ranking among the transfers. He'd been walking back to the dorms and slipped. Just slipped on a damp, mildewed set of stairs and fell. The boy had hit his face on the corner of a step and crushed his orbital bone - the first place Eric had taught Honey to attack a person. The shards of bone had punctured and ruined his eye. He could not continue training, he could not stay at Dauntless.

Clint, Isis, Daphne, Myra, Edward. Shay, Tobin, Max, Cyrus. Gone all gone.

But not forgotten. Honey would never forget, no matter how hard she wished she could.

As an ancillary, Honey was not permitted to see the fear sim footage for the initiates, so with the matches no longer ranked, she had very little to observe and more time to focus on her canine unit. The pups were getting so big and they were all so smart, fast learners, eager to please their handlers. In just a few months, they would be ready to work. Then she would turn her focus to combat utilization and something else. Now that the young sub knew she could manage to split her focus and still maintain acceptable results - acceptability requiring a higher standard than most for the little Dauntless - she would take on another project. One that might never come to fruition, but she had to try.

Honey wanted to completely rework the standard of living at Dauntless. Or, more to truth, the standard for living at Dauntless. The elderly, the handicapped, those who did not meet the new requirements in training were cast aside like so much waste. And it was wasteful. Edward, poor Edward had so much to offer the faction beyond two perfect eyes to aim a gun.

They were throwing so much away, so much knowledge, so much experience, so much potential. It made her sick. It wasn't even the Erudite in her that railed against wasting resources; it was deeper. There was something very wrong in Dauntless, a festering cancer buried within the tunnels, in the stone itself that was killing the faction slowly. Killing it and turning it into something else. Something cruel and selfish and deadly. And one day, it might bring the whole thing down.

Not if Honey could stop it. Even if she couldn't, she had to try.
Once he was satisfied she wouldn't destroy her hands, Eric had Honey train without the wrapping. It still hurt, obviously; she was attacking a steel target, but it was nothing the determined girl couldn't manage. After learning where and how to hit a person to inflict the most damage in the shortest time in the most efficient way, he showed her how to evade and counter the same attacks he'd taught her to use. Unlike when Four worked with an initiate, Eric never struck his student; not once. His fist or elbow, foot or knee always stopped just short of touching Honey when he slipped passed her defenses.

Because the only time she worked with the man and not the stand in was learning defense, the girl was never forced to try to exert that sort of inhuman control, which suited her just fine. She didn't want to hit Eric. The very thought sickened her. If someone had known about the way they used pain as pleasure, such a person might find her squeamishness odd. They might not understand that as brutally as the pair sometimes treated each other's bodies, there was no intent to damage the other person. It might seem like a fine line, but to Honey there was no line, no barrier to cross, no fence separating the two. They were wholly separate concepts without any connection whatsoever.

Tonight, her instructor announced they would be moving on to the next stage. The curious little crow watched with her head tilted slightly as Eric removed a small box from his bag and opened it. Her brows rose towards her snowy hair when he held up one of the contents, something she recognized instantly.

"What's that for?" Honey asked, eyeing the neuro-stim dart warily.

"You're going to learn to fight while injured," he told her, setting the box on the bench. She cringed inwardly. It made sense. The small Dauntless wasn't a stranger to fighting through pain, not with her arm in the soft cast for a good chunk of initiation, but she'd seen the kind of hits Eric took down in the Hole and knew nothing she'd experienced even came close.

"Okay." I will not be squeamish. "Where do we start?"

"They'll want to hurt you as much as possible, but not knock you out. So, here first," he said, touching his fingers to her belly, just below her sternum. Yeah, she could see that, could picture a hate filled attacker grabbing her hair and putting his first fist into her stomach. "You may as well kneel down; you'll end up on the mat anyway."

Honey knelt and looked up at him, trepidatious, but determined. He offered her the dart. She accepted it with slightly tremulous fingers. I will not hesitate. The girl took a breath and jabbed the pronged end of the dart into her abdomen. Pain exploded into her gut, tearing her insides apart, wrenching a broken shout of anguish from her lungs as all the air left them in a rush. She toppled forward, hunching over her knees, her face pressed to the cool fabric of the mat. It was so much worse than she remembered. It couldn't have been this bad before.

Eric gripped her arm and hauled Honey to her feet. The anguished girl groaned in feeble protest, but he ignored her. "Come on. You've only got a few minutes before it wears off."

He yanked the dart free and tossed it aside, giving her a shake. Honey nodded, fighting for control of her own body. She tried to stand upright, but that felt like she was being ripped open and the girl just hunched over again.

"You took four of these a year ago and were smiling about it," Eric reminded her in an irritated tone. "Don't tell me you've gone soft, kid."

She shook her head, grunting because she couldn't form words around the pain. Honey gripped his
shirt, using him as an anchor, but the cruel man just tugged her hand free and gave her a little shove towards the stand in. She stumbled and dropped to one knee with a sharp cry as the jolt sent fresh anguish through her phantom wound.

"If you can't handle this, we may as well quit now," Eric announced with a tone of derision. Honey shook her head again, struggling to her feet. I will not disappoint you. The girl pushed through the searing ache in her belly, moving to stand before her steel opponent and assumed a fighting stance - albeit one that was a bit wobbly. "Good. Set one; go."

She performed the sequence of attacks that made up set one. What was meant to be a rapid succession of punches to the face and torso, culminating in a hard elbow to the jaw, was slow and sloppy and Eric was unimpressed.

"Again." And again and again. When the effects of the dart wore off, her pitiless instructor was ready with another. Her stomach first, then her shoulder, her thigh, her ribs, her kidney, and finally her face. The last dart, directly into her cheek, dropped Honey hard to the mat and for a moment of sheer, unadulterated agony, she really thought she wouldn't be able to get up. But she did.

Her vision was blurred and she was unsteady on her feet, but she was on them and that's what mattered. Honey knew that, because Eric told her so. Her showing was pathetic at best, but he hadn't anticipated much else. Not yet.

"I expect you to do better next time," he decreed in a firm, dictatorial tone as he led the exhausted and somewhat punch-drunk girl back to his room, a supporting arm around her waist.

"I'll do my best," Honey told him, slightly cotton-mouthed, but defiant.

"I've never seen you do less," Eric declared, which mollified her injured pride quite well and she slipped her hand under his shirt as they walked, petting his skin just because she could.

The blissfully hot shower her attentive lover started and put her into only seemed to intensify the tingles the residual neuro-stim serum always caused her and robbed Honey of what little strength she had left. The tingly sensation made it seem like the towel was so much softer than normal and her legs were shaking by the time Eric finished drying her off, so he carried her to bed. So strong, so wonderful the man was.

Before the young leader had even stepped into his own shower, Honey was out. She didn't even feel him slide back into the bed when he was finished, but her sleeping self still snuggled into his freshly clean body all the same. It was the first night in weeks the pair ended the evening without so much as a single orgasm between them. In the morning, Honey made it up to the considerate man (and herself, really) with a quick, rough fuck followed by a long, luscious blow job that made his toes curl.

"I think I might skip work today and just have you do that over and over," Eric grinned at his smug little Dauntless as she wiped her bottom lip. Honey giggled and grinned back at him, sucking her fingertip clean with a wet pop. She still didn't love the taste, but she'd learned to tolerate it, because the act and outcome were so worth it. They'd be going to breakfast soon anyway.

"Don't threaten me with a good time."

He chuckled and sighed in an extremely satiated way that just made the girl feel all kinds of pleased with herself. His long fingers stroked the back of her shoulder, tracing random patterns idly over her skin. There were still a few precious minutes before they had to get up and neither was inclined to
relinquish them. It was probably because he was so very relaxed, all warm and loose against her body, that Eric started to muse - that was how it normally happened.

"So, I've always wondered," he began in a light, lazy sort of voice that always made Honey glow inside. She wished he used it more often, but treasured it every time he did. "I know 'Honey because you're sweet' or whatever, but really; why Honey Badger?"

Most people were satisfied with her flippant catchphrase when it came to why her name was what it was and the ones who weren't were easily ignored. No one ignored Eric, especially not Honey. The girl shifted closer, crossing her arms over his chest and resting her chin atop them so she could look at him while she spoke.

"Do you remember first year Psychology?" Because of course Erudite would start teaching psychology to five and six year olds. Honey had never mentioned knowing Eric's birth-faction before, but he didn't seem surprised. He just nodded, looking even more curious than before. "The 'animal archetype' exercise."

Understanding lit his eyes. The exercise was designed to both introduce children to the concept of personality traits and recognizing them in others, as well as making them aware of how they presented themselves to others and what traits others saw in them. There was a short discussion of each student and their most recognizable characteristics after which the class likened them to an animal archetype that embodied those characteristics. Honey had been seen as angry and even a little vicious by her classmates, but also protective and stubborn. None of these were particularly favorable in a young Erudite girl.

"At first, everyone said I was a bear," the girl told her lover with a smirk. "But the teacher pointed out how tiny I was-" she'd always been a little bit of a thing "-so they decided badger was a better fit."

"Bears like honey," Eric pointed out teasingly. She ignored him and he chuckled. "So, you were always a little badger, huh?"

Honey bobbed her head from side to side noncommittally. "It's not very flattering for a little girl to be called a big rat. It did kind of fit, though, so I never really let it go. In year five zoology, I did my research project on badgers. I thought it would be a sort of fuck-you to my class. And I saw the words 'honey badger' skimming through an encyclopedia entry and I said… 'well, that's me'."

"It is you," he agreed with a smile of affection and just a hint of those soft eyes she'd given him, combing his fingers through her riotous curls.

"What about you?" Honey asked, tilting her head to rest her cheek on her arms in place of her chin. "Were you always Eric?"

"You didn't look at my files?" Now, he seemed surprised.

"Felt like cheating," she smirked at him. Only half the reason, but still true.

"So, I'm a cheater?" Eric challenged, his studs glinting.

"You're impatient," Honey told him without insult. She slid one of her arms free and started absently toying with his chest hair. "And you had to look at mine because it's your job."

"Right." He didn't quite smirk, then he moved on. "Yes, I was always Eric." He added sarcastically, "Sorry it's not more interesting."
"No, I like Eric," she assured her lover. Her lips curled into a wicked little smile. "I really like the way the K sound hits the back of my throat when I'm screaming it."

"I like it better when my cock-" he over-enunciated the K sounds of the word "-hits the back of your throat," Eric grinned widely.

"Oh, did you want to go again?" Honey inquired with smooth nonchalance, her own eyebrow lifting lazily.

"I need to save something for tonight," he deferred. "But I wouldn't mind hearing how much you like my name some more."

When the man moved to roll them over, she pressed his chest back down. "Wait. Tell me what yours was first."

He snorted and used his superior strength to get his way, pushing Honey back onto the mattress. "You tell me."

"Well, you are awfully bear-like right now," she frowned up at him playfully. He laughed and bent low to nuzzle the crook of her neck with a growl, making her giggle delightedly. Oh, she loved him like this.

Pushing her legs apart, Eric swiped his finger between her labia, ignoring her plaintive gasp as he pulled his hand away. Raising his head again, the man lifted the finger to his mouth and sucked it clean with an appreciative grunt.

"Like I said, bears like honey," he said with a grin so wicked and hungry the girl's toes curled into the sheets. Apparently, bears like honey so much it makes them late for work - which for Eric was still five minutes early.

Honey was eating lunch with Joseph and Damon, listening to them prattle on about tattoo designs and different styles. Damon was more of a minimalist, he preferred solid shapes - preferably black; clean lines and bold markings. Joseph was more abstract and wild, colors and shading, movement and flow. They contrasted each other so well.

"Just stay away from me!" The mess fell silent, all heads turning towards the shrill command. Tris was standing, tense and furious, her eyes shining with tears Honey could see glittering from her seat a table away. Al was a few feet away and retreating, backing up, his large frame hunched in shame, his face red and blotchy and sporting injuries Honey had not seen the day before.

"What the hell?" Joseph breathed.

"You are a coward!" Tris stabbed the word at him like a spear and the tall boy winced. "If you ever come near me again, I will kill you."

Al nodded and turned, walked away from the crying girl and her look of hate that followed him from the room. Honey's eyes remained on Tris, on the way her shoulders were so tight, they might snap off, the way her tears refused to fall and give away an ounce of weakness, the way she looked ready to kill, the way she looked sick and like she wanted to slip out of her own skin because she couldn't stand the feel of it.

Without a word, Honey stood, left her tray and friends behind calling after her, and followed Al from the mess.
She stalked the boy on silent feet, trailing him through the halls of Dauntless until he stood at the railing of the Chasm. It was midday, most people were at lunch or work or still sleeping in from their night shift the previous evening, so the Pit was sparse. No one noticed the tall boy staring down at the rushing waters. No one noticed the white-haired girl lingering not far off, watching him.

Al stood there for a long time, hands gripping the railing. Honey once thought he had soft eyes. She was wrong. They were coward's eyes. They were selfish eyes. They were covetous eyes. He didn't belong at Dauntless. It should have been him on those stairs instead of Edward. The Candor transfer wiped his eyes and sniffed mightily, taking a shaky breath and letting it out. He leaned forward slightly, then stopped and leaned back, but didn't release the rail. He swiped one large hand over his face. What had that hand done to Tris that she threatened to kill him if it came near her again?

Endless minutes passed and Al gazed down at the river as if it held an answer for him. Maybe it did.

Honey walked to stand by his side. He jumped and quickly tried to wipe the tears from his face, even more red and blotchy and puffy than it had been in the mess. The girl was unmoved.

"They kill your kind in the Factionless sector," she said softly, her voice robotic, void of anything resembling human emotion. The boy gasped, face draining of all color, eyes wide and full of fear. Coward's eyes. Honey walked away without another word, feeling as cold as the stone walls around her and hollow as the tunnels they formed.

Honey was sick. So sick. And so tired. She'd been numb for hours, sitting in her office, staring at her computer with unseeing eyes. Then Marta had rushed in to tell her one of the initiates had thrown himself into the Chasm. The ancillary hadn't even asked who. She knew. She might have known before she even spoke to the boy. Still, the girl made her way to the Pit, because some part of her had to see. The eyes she had once thought were soft were now empty, staring endlessly into the abyss.

The roar of the Chasm filled Honey's ears, the river rushing into her chest, pouring into her. Too much. Guilt and fear and regret and sorrow and pity and disgust and anger. And vindication. And satisfaction. And she vomited right there. Then again into the trash by the stairs, the same one where she had thrown away the blue ribbon Dexter had given her on Visiting Day.

Somehow, she made it back to her quarters and spent a long time kneeling in the bathroom, her body ejecting only bile by that point. Soon, there was nothing left to purge, but that didn't stop her stomach from trying for long, agonizing minutes more. When Honey could finally stand on her shaking legs, she stripped and turned the shower as hot as it could go, stepping in and sitting under the spray for almost an hour.

Her body ached as she dressed again, just a tank and her shorts, because she never intended to leave her room again. No, not her room - Eric's room. Honey was in Eric's quarters; so lost in her torment she'd sought out the greatest comfort she'd ever known without realizing. The man himself was working, away at a meeting at Amity that day, but there was enough of him there in his room that she could function.

Honey pressed a cold cloth to her face and laid it across the back of her neck, wandering dazedly around the small space. Into the bedroom where his scent was so strong, but she couldn't lay down. Back into the main room, trailing her finger tips across books she wouldn't be able to focus on to read. So many books. The girl made a circuit around the room, running her hand over the walls to feel their coldness, their solidity, trying to bring that strength into herself, but it wouldn't come. As she ghosted her palm over the little white-barked tree, the leaves tickling her skin, her bare bicep brushed against the metal shade of the UV lamp.
A sharp lance of pain sliced through the haze in her mind and she jerked away with a gasp. Honey rubbed her arm, working out the sting of the burn and looked down to find a small pink line where her skin had touched the hot metal. She stilled, staring at the tiny mark as the tempest of emotion and the fog that formed in defense of it rolled back to fill the void the sudden jolt had cut into the mire.

Slowly, slowly Honey reached out, intentionally bringing her sensitive wrist against the shade. Just a brush at first, light, glancing, nothing. Then a second time. And a third. The fourth she pressed into the metal, sucking a hiss between her teeth before jerking her arm away. The fog lifted, the tempest quieted. But only for a moment before rushing back in. Licking her lips, the girl pressed her now shaking wrist to the hot metal again, grunting as it seared into her flesh.

The door opened and Honey jumped out of her skin with a shout, whirling to face it. Eric stood in the opening, smirking at her in amusement, always entertained by how easily he could startle her. Then he took in her stricken, guilty expression and all trace of humor left his face. He shut the door and crossed the floor in an instant, frowning deeply when Honey stepped back from his advance.

"What happened?" the leader demanded. The trembling girl shook her head.

"One of the initiates-"

"I know," Eric cut her off, gripping her arms and stooping down to study her face. "Is that it? That's not it. What's wrong? Tell me."

She did. She told him about lunch and Tris and Al and the Chasm and her words - probably the last words the boy ever heard - and how very sick she was with herself, even though she knew he wouldn't understand. Couldn't understand.

But Eric held her close anyway, because he knew she needed it. That he understood. Protecting what was his. He tried to lead her to the bedroom, but Honey shook her head. She couldn't. There was too much inside her, too much to sleep, too much to let him touch her. She couldn't mix this awfulness with that. The taint would never wash away. He sighed shortly in frustration and took her to the couch instead, sitting and pulling her into his lap so he could hold her.

It was while he was stroking her shoulder, his chin resting on top of her snowy curls, that Eric noticed the little pink mark on Honey's skin there. He traced it idly with his finger and probably wouldn't have thought anything of it had she not stiffened and gone cold.

"What?" he demanded. When she didn't answer, he leaned back, pulling her away from his chest. The girl might have held on, if not for the fact that she was pressing her forearm to her own chest. Eric's slate eyes missed little and his mind even less, Honey knew. He caught her wrist and pulled it away, causing the girl in his arms to hiss between her teeth. There, ugly and stark against the paleness of her skin, five crisscrossed lines stacked up atop one another, each thicker and a deeper pink than the last.

"You did this." It wasn't a question. He wasn't happy.

"I'm sorry," Honey whispered, heat prickling her eyes. So weak.

"Explain," Eric demanded. She shrugged. "Explain it."

"It's too much. I can't stand it. I feel like I need to claw it out of me!" the girl said in a desperate rush. "I bumped into the lamp and it stopped for a second and I didn't know what else to do!"

"This is mine," the man declared in a viciously possessive growl, tugging her arm sharply. "You will never do something like this again. Ever. Do you understand?"
"I understand," Honey said in a small voice. He caught her hair and yanked her head back.

"Do you understand?" Eric demanded again, his face an inch from hers, his eyes wide and full of rage. And fear. Her heart wrenched in her chest, trying to tear itself free.

"I understand," she repeated, loud and clear and without doubt or frailty. He gathered her close again, pressing her to his chest and holding on tightly.

Selfish. So selfish. Honey hadn't even thought about how her impulsive action would affect Eric. He loved her; of course it would hurt him to see her do such a thing. More guilt on top of everything inside her and the girl thought she might split open and wished she would so the pressure would give.

Eric lifted her off his lap and set her on the couch beside him. "Stay here."

He rose and went into the bathroom, coming back with a tube of cream. He handed it to Honey and told her to apply it to her wrist, then moved away again, leaving her to the task he'd set. This time the man went to his desk, methodically straightening his messy paperwork and clearing the surface. He reached into a drawer and pulled out a pen, which he set on the desktop. Then, Eric disappeared into the bedroom. He came back out a moment later without his shirt, holding a pillow.

Going back to the desk again, he pulled the chair out and spun it, setting the back against the edge of the surface and placing the pillow over both. Then he turned to Honey.

"Come here," Eric ordered quietly. She immediately obeyed, moving to stand before him, though she had no idea what was going on. He pulled her shirt up and off, tossing it aside, then motioned for her to kneel on the chair and bent her over the desk so her torso rested on the pillow.

Honey thought he was going to fuck her, then, but he didn't. Instead, Eric stood close and leaned forward and began to massage her shoulders and back, stroking his hands over her skin firmly and skillfully. She sighed, eyes slipping shut. After a few moments, he leaned still closer to speak into her ear.

"Tell me if you're afraid," the man said. Honey looked back at him over her shoulder, beyond confused. Why would she be afraid? She was never afraid of Eric, not anymore. He lifted the pen and showed it to her, then brought it down to touch the back of her shoulder. The girl let out a sharp sound of surprise and pain as the pen burned her skin. Just for an instant and he took it away again. He must have set the metal end piece against the UV lamp while she was distracted. Tell me if you're afraid.

She wasn't. Honey turned her head away, resting it on her arms as she had been a moment before. She hissed as Eric touched the pen tip to her back again, trailing it lightly across her skin. It was barely a touch, a gentle sear against her nerves, leaving them singing in its wake. Again and again, long strokes of fire along her shoulders and spine, until there was nothing left in the world but Eric and Honey and the pen.

When he felt the last bit of tension seep away, when her breathing turned slow and deep, Eric set the pen aside and ran his hand over her back. Honey gasped as his touch stung and soothed at the same time.

"You are stronger than this," he told her, firm and deep, solid and sure. He trailed his fingers along the marks, renewing the sensation of burning, stroking the nerves to life. "You can't be broken. You are Dauntless. I believe in you."
Honey wept silently against her arms. Eric leaned in and kissed the back of her neck, slowly pushing her shorts down her thighs, giving her all the time in the world to stop him. She didn't. His hand slipped between her legs, carefully caressing her until she was wet and ready and beyond. When she moaned his name and spasmed around his fingers, he opened his fly.

Eric slid inside Honey while she was still twitching and moved slowly, like he had all the time in eternity and meant to spend every second deep within her. He bent low over her, sliding his hands over her own to lace their fingers together. The warm skin and soft curls of his chest and stomach teased and stroked her back, burning with every touch, pushing her higher and higher until she burst apart with a pleading cry. Eric spilled himself inside her a moment later, groaning Honey's name against the nape of her neck.

Later, he smoothed the same cream into the lines on her back and told her not to look for them in the morning. They were nothing. They meant nothing. He was right. It was his words that meant everything.

Chapter End Notes

Lots of hard feels. I've got a pallet cleanser for those of you who need something to lighten your mood after all that dark.

Also, I changed what happened to Edward because if he'd been attacked like in the book, Honey would have lost her shit that nothing was done about it, confronted Max, and ended up Factionless. Don't even know how Eric would react to that. Lost his mind, probably. So, I went with an slip and fall. Sorry, Edward.
"Here, I got this for you," Hotdog told Honey, dropping a brick-sized box into her lap. She'd been lounging lazily on Beth's sofa, endlessly entertained by watching the rest of her friends drink and play Candor or Dauntless. Just now, Daisy, Calhoun, Beth, and Damon were crowded around the door to the bathroom while Joseph made good on his Dauntless challenge - to shave a smiley face into his chest hair. Of course, being an artist, he had to get all elaborate with it, so it was taking a while.

The white-haired girl picked up the box and opened it. Inside was a long, pink tube of some kind, a little thicker than the barrel of a standard rifle. It looked like a giant lipstick. It was nice of Hotdog to give her a gift, but the girl had no idea what it was supposed to be. "Uh, thanks? What is it?"

"A vibrator." Honey fumbled frantically to get the box closed again, cheeks instantly beet red and flaming.

"What the hell, Hots?!" she hissed, looking toward the bathroom to make sure no one had seen the exchange.

"Daisy said you're going on a date with that guy from her squad. So, if you're gonna start dating, that's eventually gonna lead to sex, right?"

"I am not having this conversation with you," the girl insisted, shoving the box back into her very well intentioned, but insanely oblivious friend's hands. He refused to take it.

"Look, when Beth and I started having sex, it was difficult for her," he said as if there wasn't anything awkward about the topic. Fucking Candor. "Because she was Abnegation and I guess they don't talk about that kind of thing there, so she really wasn't prepared. Intercourse was tough."

"Oh my god, please stop talking!" Honey pleaded, covering her burning face with her hands.

"I don't know how Erudite handles their kids' sexuality, but this'll help you get used to it. You know, having something up there."

The girl grabbed Hotdog and clapped her hand over his endlessly running mouth. "If I take it, will
you shut up and *never* talk about my vagina again?"

He patted her shoulder and gave her a thumbs up, smiling behind her hand. She shoved him away in disgust and hurried to hide the box in her jacket hanging by the door.

"I hate you so much right now." Honey glowered at the happy idiot sitting on the couch.

"**Right now,**" Hotdog grinned at her over the back of the sofa. "Tomorrow, you'll love me again."

"Aloot can happen in a night," she pointed out, threateningly.

"I know, that's why I got you that."

"I'm going to kill you with it," Honey warned. The still grinning former-Candor held up his hands in surrender, then made a zipping motion across his lips. She rolled her eyes. It would take a truckload of cement to keep those gums from flapping. She sat back down, as far from him as she could, and grumbled to herself. "Should have hit you with my lunch tray when you asked about my name. Saved myself all the hassle."

Hotdog scoffed with a chuckle, stretching out on the couch and plopping his head into the irritated girl's lap, smiling adoringly up at her. "You'd miss out on all my loooove."

"I think I'd live," she informed him flatly, though they both knew she was full of it and, after a moment, she couldn't help but return the obnoxious loudmouth's smile.

"Oh, also, there's instructions in the bottom of the box."

When the others came back into the main area, Honey was doing her best to smother her friend with one of the couch pillows. No one seemed to find that odd. They all knew Hotdog well enough to assume he deserved it.
After her conversation with Four, Honey had made a point of keeping an eye on the loading docks for anymore suspicious deliveries. It had been months and nothing, but that didn't ease her anxiety. Two weeks before the end of initiation, her worry proved justified. Whatever the little black ants were hauling back and forth to the room by security didn't appear to be more computer equipment. There were wooden crates and reinforced cases, the kind field equipment - wireless transmitters, radar guns, short range com links, etc - would be transported in. She knew where it would be headed, but double-checked anyway on the off chance it was just tech for Patrol or something Kai requisitioned for the armory.

No, the shipment, whatever it was, was headed for that room by the security office. Honey's timing was poor, however, because just as she was heading passed, continuing on her way as though she was just going to the governmental offices, a group of people was coming the opposite way. Eric, Max, a few techs in blue lab coats. And Jeanine Matthews.

"Oh, Honey," the Erudite leader smiled, as if pleasantly surprised to see the white-haired Dauntless. "I was hoping to run into you."

"Oh?" the girl responded neutrally. Honey knew she didn't want to be the focus of Jeanine's interest, but she did need to know what was going on. Four had warned her away, Eric had warned her away, but the urge to disregard their very valid concern was so very strong.

Jeanine offered her hand. "Congratulations on your appointment to ancillary. The youngest in Dauntless history and under your own steam, too. Well done."

Honey took the offered hand and shook it, ignoring the way Eric's left hand was a fist at his side. She gave a chagrinned chuckle. "You know, honestly, when I said that, I was just trying to push Eric's buttons."

The blonde woman glanced back at the man in question and gave Honey a knowing smile. "Yes, I've heard about the two of you. I can't say I was surprised. You did wear his coat to my office on one of your visits."

The young sub ducked her head a little, as if caught sneaking cookies before dinner, when she was really just trying to cover being startled over the mention of the coat. Honey had thought they'd gotten away with that. Shit.
"Are you implying I was inappropriate with my apprentice?" Eric asked, mildly insulted.

"Eric wouldn't do that," the girl insisted, lifting her head and squaring her jaw, protective of her lover's reputation.

"But you were wearing his coat," Jeanine prompted for confirmation, wearing a little insinuating smirk.

Eric rolled his eyes. "She walked out into the snow without hers. This one thinks she's invincible."

When he said the last, the man smirked at Honey with obvious affection and, despite the tension she could sense coming off him, Honey knew it was genuine. She smiled softly back at him.

"That's why I was trying to piss him off," the young ancillary expounded. "Because he made me wear his giant coat and feel like an ass."

"A match made in heaven," Max chuckled, slightly derisive.

"Well, I'm glad it all worked out in the end," Jeanine said pleasantly. "Please, don't let me keep you. I'm sure your position is very demanding."

There was a very subtle undertone to her words that wanted to raise Honey's hackles, but the girl suppressed the feeling. Instead she nodded proudly. "I was just on my way to check some progress reports. The canine unit is coming along great."

"Glad to hear it," the older woman nodded in parting. Max and the others started walking away. Honey moved to continue towards her office, but Jeanine leaned in closer as the girl passed. "Honey, I want you to know my offer still stands. Feel free to stop by Erudite any time and see me. We can discuss your future in leadership."

Honey's skin crawled at having the woman so close, but she buried it and plastered on a pleasant, thoughtful smile. "I'll keep it in mind," she promised.

That seemed to placate Jeanine and she straightened up again, going to join the men. Honey forced herself to keep walking and, no matter how strong the pull, to not look back.

Instead of pretending to go to her office, Honey actually did just that. She shut the door and logged onto her computer, opening the shipping logs for that day and re-sorting them by faction of origin. There was nothing from Erudite. With a frown, she refreshed the list, but still there were no Erudite shipments, only Amity. The girl frowned at the viewscreen and felt her fingers start to get cold. Her heartbeat picked up and sweat beaded on the back of her neck. With a glance at her closed door, she signed off the system, then logged back in again. Using Eric's passcode.

Even though he'd given her permission, Honey had never even thought about doing this. Not even to look at his files, because the responsibility and risk were too great just to satisfy her curiosity. She had been content to wait until Eric told her about himself, learning about him naturally like a normal relationship. This thing with Jeanine and Erudite was another matter.

The anxious crow quickly brought up the shipping manifest again and was shocked to find there was still no mention of anything coming in from her old faction. The hair on the back of Honey's neck stood on end. A phantom shipment? It could be a mistake or maybe someone down in the docks was slacking and just hadn't logged the arrival yet. She brought up the record of every Erudite delivery since New Year, running her eyes down the list of dates, looking for that same Saturday her own shipment of harness materials had arrived. Nothing. Nothing for that entire week.
Honey's mouth was dry and she ran a leather tongue over sandpaper lips. She closed the shipping logs and opened something she shouldn't, something that could get Eric stripped of his office and herself made Factionless: the leaders' sensitive files. She looked only for mentions of electronics and Erudite. There was a file on the armed combat simulation Dexter's friend was working on. Another about tracking implants for exiled criminals. Several dedicated to various weapons in development. One terrifying file pertaining to some kind of nerve gas intended for Factionless riot control. None of which were in production yet, so couldn't account for the incoming shipments. Nothing about incoming computers or any electronic equipment at all.

Honey stared at the screen at a loss. It was like none of it existed. That scared her more than anything else, because it did exist. She'd seen it with her own eyes. It was at Dauntless, locked away in that room and waiting for whatever Jeanine had planned. That could be anything, but the sub knew it couldn't be anything good.

She quickly cleared the usage history and logged off, shutting down her station altogether and sitting back in her chair to try and calm her racing pulse. With no records, the girl had nothing to go on. Honey scrubbed her hands over her face. She had to get into that room and get a look at what was in those crates and cases, get a better idea of what kind of computers had been brought in. She stood and took several deep breaths, pacing and shaking her hands to work out the tremors that were running through them. Once the girl felt steady enough and the sweat on her neck had dried, she opened her door again and stepped out, making her way back toward the security office.

Honey knew what she needed, but had no idea how to get it. Four would know the master code that opened all the electronic doors in Dauntless, but she didn't have a code that would open the lock on his mouth. She had to try anyway. The girl was actually grateful that there was no chance Hotdog would have the information she sought, because she didn't know if she would be able to resist asking him for it. Her former-Candor friend would give the code to Honey in a heartbeat, she knew that. She also knew doing so could put him in danger. Thank God, he wouldn't know.

It was just as well that Honey had no idea what to say to Four to get him to cooperate, because he wasn't in the security office when she arrived. Of course he wasn't, he would be with his initiate class down in the sim training rooms. Stupid.

"Hey, Honey, you need some footage?" Zeke, who she'd gotten acquainted with while running down and sorting through security camera footage for Eric during her apprenticeship, was also a head of security.

"No. I need to talk to you," the snowy-flamed crow said. The words were out of her mouth before she knew she was going to say them, but there was no taking them back now, so Honey just pushed forward and added, in a playful tone, "Sensitive ancillary stuff."

"Oh yeah?" the man asked, intrigued. She nodded, but kept her expression relaxed and a little dismissive, as if the need for privacy was a only a formality. "Conference room okay?"

"Can't we just go in there?" Honey asked, motioning at the small utility room where the breakers and servers were kept. It would appear she was just in a hurry or wasn't really worried too much about the confidentiality of the "sensitive stuff", but really, the girl didn't want any video of her going off for a private chat with a head of security. Zeke shrugged and nodded.

"I guess." Just before stepping in behind her, the man turned back and spoke to the office at large. "No one tell Eric I was alone in a closet with his girlfriend."

The laughter and catcalls of the other officers were cut to a muffled clamor as Zeke shut the door. He leaned against it and grinned at her with a very come-hither expression.
"Alone at last," he purred. Honey rolled her eyes at the incorrigible flirt and he laughed. "So, what's all the cloak and dagger about?"

"I need you to give me the master code," the young ancillary told him. The security officer snorted incredulously.

"What?"

"The master code," Honey repeated. "The one that opens-all-"

"I know what it is," Zeke said, cutting her off. The amusement was leaving his countenance, being replaced by confusion and concern. "Why?"

"That's sensitive," she told him. He scoffed.

"So is the master code," he declared firmly. "You gotta gimme more than that."

Honey swallowed hard. "Actually, I don't."

"Excuse me?"

The girl lifted her chin, putting some steel into her spine and voice. "I am your ranking officer and I'm giving you an order. That's all you need to know."

Zeke's eyes narrowed and he stood off the door, looking down at Honey with challenge in his eyes. "Oh, is that how it is?"

She didn't back down. In fact, his pushing back against her authority lit the ancillary leader up inside and her face hardened to stone. "That's how it is. The code, Zeke. Now."

Honey offered him her mini-tablet, because it was protocol never to speak a security code out loud, in case of prying ears or bugs. The cocoa-complexioned man frowned mightily, but followed her command. He clearly wasn't happy about it, but orders were orders. As he tapped the sequence into the device, he grumbled.

"Why didn't you just ask your boyfriend?"

Honey waited for him to finish and hand her back the tab before answering, with a superior little quirk of her lips. "Because he doesn't have to follow my orders."

"Shit, Honey!" Zeke growled, scowling at her. "This isn't official, is it?"

"Not in the strictest sense," she admitted with a shrug, putting the tab away.

"Do I even want to know?"

The girl shook her head. "No. In fact, you should probably pretend this never happened."

He goggled at her with wide, disbelieving, and somewhat scornful eyes. "Right; after I just made an announcement to the entire shift that you and I were having a secret meeting. What am I supposed to say if someone asks me about this?"

"Just defer them to me," Honey told him. "I gave you a confidential order that didn't interfere with your work. Tell them to take it up with me."

"Yeah? And if it's your boyfriend?" Zeke asked with pointed irritation.
"If it's any of the leaders, tell them the truth," she said firmly. "I made you give me the code and you don't know why."

"I kinda want to know why," he insisted. Honey shook her head.

"It's better for you if you don't." She couldn't ignore that both Eric and Four had said basically the same thing to her. The girl only hoped Zeke wasn't quite as stubborn as she was. He sighed and scrubbed his palms against his eyes.

"You know, I used to think you were cute," he told her with weary annoyance. "But you're just as much a pain in the neck as any of the crows."

This crow chuckled dryly. "That's where Badger comes in."

"Yeah, to bite me in the ass," Zeke said, with a single exasperated laugh, a bit of his good humor coming back. "Fine. Maybe, I don't really want to know. Is there anything else you came to do to ruin my day?"

"No, I think that about does it." He opened the door and motioned for her to go ahead with exaggerated politeness. As she stepped back into the room, Zeke hung dramatically from the doorframe.

"God damn, I think you pulled out a filling," he panted with a big, dopey grin. "Phew, that Eric's a lucky man."

"You better hope he knows I'd never slum it with someone like you, Zeke," Honey tossed back over her shoulder without missing a beat. "Or you're gonna need alot more than a filling when Eric finds you."

"That's not funny!" the officer shouted as she left the room. Strange, the rest of the shift sure thought it was.

Getting the code only solved half her problem of getting into the mysterious room. Honey absolutely didn't want to be seen going in there. She didn't have a way to avoid the security cameras or cut the feed, that would take far too long to figure out and implement, even if she could get it done. The best thing the girl could do was wait for a shift change. Then the system would be compiling and storing the footage for the ending shift and the officers would be distracted by their logs.

Through normal conversation with Hotdog and her work under Eric, Honey knew the night shift had a change of guard at eleven fourty-five and that the system would compile the entire day's feed at midnight. Which gave her a roughly twenty minute window. Her other problem was Eric and how to sneak out of bed without him realizing. Fat chance. The man could be in a coma and he'd still wake up the second the girl pulled away from him. Normally, she loved that.

No, Honey would have to already be out of the room if she wanted to get away at all. The only thing that kept her and Eric apart was work and their respective friends, so she'd have to use one of those as an excuse. Work was out immediately, because her lover knew everything she was doing with both the canine unit and her observation of initiation. Honey couldn't tap her friends, because if she begged off early, they would know something was up and she didn't want to have to lie to them.

That really left only one option: Marta. Their relationship at this point was both close enough that going out to blow off a little steam after work was perfectly normal and new enough that the
Secretary wouldn't be overly concerned if Honey suddenly stated she'd had enough for the evening. So, the sub made plans with the woman to hit the Pit after dinner.

Honey was sitting with Daisy, Beth, and Damon in the mess, trying to enjoy her meal despite the nervous fluttering of her gut over what she had planned later that night, when a warm body leaned in behind her and two large hands landed on either side of her tray. She jumped with a squeal and everyone in the vicinity laughed at the sound.

Lucky for the person who owned the hands, the girl recognized them immediately so she didn't swing her tray into the head that a moment later rested against her own. Eric wasn't shy about their relationship and liked to make her blush in public whenever he could, but he wasn't normally quite this intimate about it. Honey leaned her head a little into his and set down her cutlery to lift her hands to his biceps.

"You know I punch people in the throat for this kind of thing, right?" she asked lightly, with playful warning.

"You'd feel terrible if you punched me," Eric insisted and she could hear the smirk in his voice. She snorted.

"Only my hand, cause you're made of rocks," Honey countered. He shifted back a fraction, so his mouth was near her ear.

"I am pretty hard when you're around," the man admitted in a hushed purr. There was the public blush. Daisy made a sound of disgust. The girl's friends never had warmed up to Eric, shocking no one. Damon was too scared of the man to say anything untoward to him and Beth was too nice; Daisy was neither and had no compunctions about letting her dislike of the young leader show.

Eric just chuckled smugly, touching his forehead to Honey's temple. His studs were cool against her skin. "I've got a meeting tonight. It'll probably run late, so don't wait up for me."

Well, shit. "That's okay. I have plans with Marta, anyway. So, I'll just see you later."

"Good." That was a little too firm; not in a disapproving way, but like he was relieved. "Have fun."

Then Eric dropped his head and kissed her shoulder. Honey was immediately concerned. Her lover was capable of great gentleness and sweet affection, but never displayed it for others. That was for Honey alone. Before she could turn to face him, he'd pulled back, sliding his hand across her shoulders as he turned and walked away. She watched him go for a moment, head tilted in thought. It had to be Jeanine; that she'd spoken to Jeanine.

"That's so fucking weird," Damon announced, drawing Honey's attention back.

"Huh?" she asked, not taking her eyes of Eric until he disappeared out the door.

"Him acting like a regular person," the artist snarked. "It's like watching a dog walk on two legs."

Honey swatted his arm with the back of her hand. "That's my man you're talking about," she warned. Mine. "When he's not being Eric, he's pretty normal."

Normal in a loose sense. She was pretty sure the things they did in private didn't really qualify, but beyond that fairly average. Eric cleaned his bathroom, read his questionable books, ate Dauntless
chocolate cake, standard stuff.

"Normal for an asshole," Daisy grumbled through a mouthful of spaghetti.

"I think it was really sweet," Beth protested.

"Of course you do," the squad leader snarked.

"I think you're good for him," the dark haired girl told Honey with an affirming nod. "He's so stony and cold. He needs some warmth in his life."

The little Dauntless chuckled and shook her head. "Trust me, he's got plenty of warmth to spare. He's good for me. I don't know what I'd do without him."

She hadn't quite intended to get that deep about it, but it wasn't anything Honey regretted saying. Daisy just rolled her eyes and shoved a meatball into her mouth. Beth smiled with a kind, softly knowing expression. Damon chuckled.

"You want me to tattoo his name on your ass?" Honey burst into laughter and Beth giggled, patting Daisy firmly on the back because she was currently choking on her meatball.

Giving Damon a silly grin, the white-haired girl told him, "It would be the last tattoo you ever gave."

Honey was doing her very best to not look at her watch, but that meant fidgeting had to be allowed. She poked her straw through the ice in her glass over and over, but Marta didn't seem to notice and if she did, she didn't seem to mind. The woman was on her third Long Slow Screw Over a Barrel and the girl didn't think Marta actually liked the drink; she just liked asking the bartender for it in the most suggestive way imaginable. She'd also been very entertained by Honey's drink of choice, a Virgin Fiery Slag - which was just cinnamon cherry syrup and soda water.

They were in a bar called The Hooligan Hole, which Marta frequented, but Honey had never been inside. For good reason. The place was a meat market, full of Patrol officers and fence guards looking to blow off a little steam in the steamiest way possible. Lucky for Honey, she was easily recognizable and only one foolish soul had come to drunkenly proposition her before scurrying away once she told him Eric might have a problem with her proving whether her hair color was natural.

"Ugh, you're ruining my night, Honey," Marta complained, jokingly disgusted. "Everyone's too scared to come near you!"

The girl grinned and shrugged, wholly unapologetic. "Now, you get why Eric doesn't hang out with my friends."

"And he doesn't want you near his because he's too damn jealous."

Honey snorted and shook her head. "No, I don't want to be near his because they're too damn Eric."

"You're not gonna convince me he's not caveman has hell with you and other guys," the secretary declared with a definitive swipe of her hand.

"Sorry to burst your bubble, but he trusts me," the young sub informed her. Marta eyed her suspiciously.

"So, he's never thrown you over his shoulder and hauled you away from some guy because you
were standing too close or something? Like Four? Four's hot, I'd be jealous if you were my girlfriend and making nice with that hunk of pent up Abnegation. I bet he just loses it in bed."

Honey's face pinched a little in amusement and confusion. "Eric or Four?"

"Four," the woman grinned, wide and lascivious. "He's so wound up." She made a guttural sound of lust.

"He's not the only one," the girl laughed. "Maybe no more of these."

She reached over and slid Marta's drink away. The woman snatched it back and slapped the back of Honey's hand, causing the girl to laugh again.

"Hey, sugar, come here often?" A low, masculine voice purred near Honey's ear. The girl startled with a loud squeak and slipped off her seat, falling into a strong, golden-copper embrace. Marta choked on her drink. The man's laugh rang out above white curls. "Hell, if I'd known it was that easy to get you to jump into my arms, I'd have skipped that whole date."

Honey pushed out of the Patrol officer's grasp, flushing brightly as she smoothed her clothes unnecessarily. "You're not funny, Kappa."

The tall, dark-eyed man pouted at her beautifully. "You used to think I was funny. 'Til you saw your boss down in the Hole and got all weak kneed."

If he'd sounded even the tiniest bit bitter saying it, Honey would have told him to fuck off, but he didn't. If anything, Kappa seemed chagrinned by the whole thing. Marta's glass hit the bar with a thunk.

"What?" she demanded with wide eyes and raised brows, grinning like a loon. "I need to know everything that is going on here."

The secretary swirled her finger encompassing Honey, Kappa, and presumably their short history together. The girl shrugged. "We went on a date. I saw Eric fighting in the Hole. That's it."

"That's it? That's crazy!" Crazy good, apparently, from the gleeful look on Marta's face. "What happened?"

"Come on, you can't do this to me twice!" Kappa admonished Honey with a laugh.

"Do what?" She had no idea what he was talking about.

"Let Eric ruin my night," he clarified. "Forget that guy and introduce me to your pretty friend, here."

Oooh, so that was his game. Honey relaxed and smiled. Perfect. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she apologized, patting the man on his broad shoulder. "This is my secretary, Marta. Marta, this is Kappa. He's a Patrol officer in the Mudhumpers and he's a very sore loser."

The loser in question laid a hand over his heart, looking wounded. Marta turned sweetly sympathetic and laid her hand on one of his bulging biceps. To comfort him, of course.

"Ignore her. She's just picking up her boyfriend's bad manners," the woman crooned.

"And I was nothing but a gentleman to her all evening," Kappa insisted, stepping closer to Marta, who eyed him with playful suspicion.

"A gentleman Patrol officer?"
He took her hand from his arm and bowed forward slightly, kissing it like something out of an old motion picture. "Absolutely. Please, let me prove it. A gentleman always buys a lady a drink."

As Kappa leaned over the bar to get the bartender's attention, Marta looked at Honey over his broad back, beautifully defined by his tight tee, and rolled her eyes heavenward with a look of elation. The girl bit back a laugh and gave her a covert thumbs up.

The dark-eyed man turned back to Marta. "What would you like?"

Honey knew what was coming, but snorted anyway when the woman said, in her most innocent voice. "A Long Slow Screw Over a Barrel."

"Okay, but what do you want to drink?" Kappa didn't miss a beat. Honey snorted again.

The woman grinned cheekily. "To drink I'll just have a tonic water."

"I think I hear your boyfriend calling you," Kappa informed the girl, smiling wide and invitingly at Marta, his eyelids a bit lower than before.

"You should find him before he goes all caveman," the woman agreed. Honey laughed. Things could not have worked out better. She wasn't worried about leaving Marta with Kappa. Daisy had been working with him for months and would never have let him near Honey if there was even a whiff of him being unsafe for a woman and the girl trusted the squad leader wholeheartedly.

"Alright, alright. I can tell when I'm not wanted," she slipped around Kappa's large frame and winked at Marta. "Make good choices."

Honey's heart was beating fast, like a bird's. She'd wandered around the Pit for a while, eating up the time between when she'd left Marta and Kappa at the Hooligan Hole and when she could finally head for the room near security. Now that she was on her way, her palms were sweating. She forced herself to walk at a normal pace, as if she were just heading to the office to check on something. At eleven forty-seven, she strolled passed the security office and heard several voices through the door. Good. Chatter would mean more distraction.

At last, Honey reached her target and quickly punched the master code into the keypad. With a soft chirp, the door unlocked. She quickly stepped inside and shut it behind her, flicking on the light and checking for cameras inside. None. At least, there was that. The girl moved swiftly through the room. It looked like some kind of mockup of an old mission control. There were computer stations along two walls, a row of stations in the middle of the room, and a large view screen bolted into the wall before them. The crates and cases were stacked neatly on the opposite wall, so that's where she went.

Nothing was locked, thank God, but what was inside the cases didn't seem to help clear up her mystery. Jet injectors - needless syringes - the kind used to vaccinate large numbers of people quickly and efficiently. She tried the crates next. They were all filled with glass ampoules of some dark amber liquid. Was it all some kind of medical response base? Honey remembered that sensitive file about the nerve gas Erudite was working on for Factionless riot control and her mouth went dry. What if they were working on something else? Like a biologic. This could mean they were planning to inoculate Dauntless before releasing some kind of bioweapon.

"Five finger fuck me," she hissed, shivering, suddenly freezing. Honey took another look at the ampoules to memorize the code stamped into the glass, LRCSS2248, then closed everything up
again. She darted over to one of the computer stations and looked it over, the serial number was too long to memorize, so she saved it in her tab, in six separate files, in the wrong order. *I'm only paranoid if no one's out to get me.*

Honey went to the door and listened, holding her breath. Nothing. She flicked off the light again and let herself out of the room, shutting the door silently. Then she strolled off towards her office. A hand clapped over her mouth, stifling her cry of surprise, and the girl was yanked into a darkened conference room.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

The only thing that saved her assailant from a broken nose was the fact that Honey recognized his voice. She still elbowed him hard in the ribs for scaring her, though. He grunted as she broke free of his hold and shoved him away. When Honey turned on the light, her former instructor was holding his side and glaring at her, but also his expression showed a hint of new respect.

"You've been practicing."

"You're an asshole."

No, back to just glaring, now. "How did you even get in there?"

"The same way you did," Honey said. Four shook his head.

"You shouldn't have gone in there," he declared angrily. "I told you to stay away from this."

Honey crossed her arms insolently. "And I told you I don't have to listen to you anymore."

"This isn't a game, Honey!" the broody man barked, stepping towards her menacingly.

"I know it's not. That's why I had to look," she insisted, not backing down. "I know you're trying to protect me, but you can't. Whatever this is, it's too big for that."

Some of his anger faded behind questioning. "Do you know what it is?"

"I have an idea, but I'm not sure," Honey admitted. "Those injectors, the vials. It's like some kind of mass vaccination set up. I'm worried Erudite and the leaders are planning some kind of biological attack on the Factionless."

Four shook his head. "It's not a vaccine. It's a serum," he told her. "It's not the same we use in the fear simulations, I know that much."

"I don't get it." The girl's brow furrowed in confusion. "Why would you need to mass inject a serum?"

"Exactly," the man said, meaningfully. "Why? What does it do?"

Honey shook her head. "I don't know. But I think I know how to find out."

Four frowned, his eyes beyond dark. "Honey-"

"Stop trying to stop me, okay?" she cut him off. "You can't."

"I've kinda figured that out," he told her ruefully. "Just be careful, okay? Don't take any risks you don't have to."
"Me?" Honey asked, with a cavalier twist of her lips. "Careful is my middle name."

"Yeah, but it's your last name that worries me."

Chapter End Notes

I was so glad I could get those two crazy kids together - Kappa and Marta. Too good to waste.
Rough Stuff

Chapter Summary

Eric and Honey have a rough go of it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After her little spy mission and run in with Four, Honey went straight to Eric's quarters. She'd had enough excitement for one night. Eric wasn't home from his meeting, yet; not without precedent. So, the girl just stripped out of her clothes and put on one of his old, soft shirts - he had a whole stack of them set aside just for her and that fact never ceased to warm her heart - and crawled into bed.

Honey had been dozing peacefully, buried deep in Eric's bedding which now smelled like the two of them, but still more strongly of the leader, when the door to the apartment banged open and woke her with a start. The sound of Eric grunting followed a moment later and she bounded off the bed, rushing to the bedroom doorway to see what happened. Her lover was staggering into the main room, but he wasn't alone. Ryland had the young leader's arm around his neck, his own about the bigger man's waist, holding his weight and helping him into the room. The girl's eyes widened in shock, ice running up her spine. Eric was bleeding.

His nose and mouth were oozing blood and there was a gash splitting his left eyebrow horizontally, almost down the center. His jacket covered a shirt that was clearly badly torn and there was more blood smeared on the skin beneath and, from the look of it, on his pants, too. His hair was wildly disheveled… and full of sawdust.

"Oh my god!" Honey gasped, taking in the sight of him. Ryland looked up and his mouth curved into the sort of smile that made a person feel eyes on their back.

"Nice legs, kid," he commented and the girl shivered, but didn't quite know why. Eric lifted his head, which appeared to take great effort, and saw her there in the doorway, her legs bare beneath the hem of his shirt. With a roar of outrage, he whirled on his secretary and shoved the other man hard into the bookcase, knocking several of the volumes loose.

"Don't you fucking look at her!" he snarled. Ryland still had hold of him and spun the two around, slamming Eric into the shelves now - once, then again - one of which snapped free under the strain, spilling its contents to the floor. He brought a knee up into Eric's side that made the bleeding man groan in pain. The injured leader pushed back against the wood for leverage and propelled Ryland into the doorframe of the still open front door. The entire bookcase tipped and fell to the ground with a crash.

Neither man noticed, as Eric began to land hard punches to his secretary's ribs. Honey snapped into action, rushing across the room to catch his arm. The powerful leader shrugged her off easily, but without the extra force she would have expected from a man so incensed, sending the little Dauntless sprawling onto the couch. Ryland bared his teeth and spoke in a hissing growl that made Honey's hair stand on end.

"If you don't want people to look, you shouldn't put her on display," he told Eric. Her lover glanced...
over at the young sub, who was struggling up from the sofa, his shirt rucked high diagonally across her hips, making it clear there was nothing underneath. Ryland took advantage of his loss of focus and palmed the leader's face, pushing his head back and trying to break his iron hold. Even injured and distracted, Eric was far beyond the secretary's strength and just pulled them back and slammed him into the framing again.

Honey sprang forward as Eric drew back his fist. She had to end this or Eric might very well end Ryland.

"Eric, stop!" she shouted. The girl had to think of something fast. Attacking him was not an option and she wasn't strong enough to bodily pull the thick, bulky man off his prey. She acted instinctually, using the only thing she knew could stop Eric in his tracks.

Honey pulled his arm back and spun around it, putting herself in the crook of his elbow, her back against his ribs, as if he were about to choke her out, then shouted, "I'm afraid!"

He staggered back from Ryland immediately, pulling Honey with him, turning his body to shield her from the perceived threat of the secretary. The idiot didn't know not to press his luck and advanced on the pair. Honey kicked out, catching Ryland in the gut. He hadn't been expecting it and stumbled back with a grunt.

"Get the fuck out of here!" she screeched. Eric, still holding Honey tightly against his side, moved forward again, throwing the other man into the hallway with enough force that Ryland's face rebounded off the far wall with a fleshy thud. Eric slammed his door and locked it, then pinned Honey against the wood. As Ryland began to pound on the door, the enraged leader wrapped his fingers around the girl's throat.

He didn't squeeze, though every muscle in his body was flexed and bulging. He was puffing like a bull, glaring at Honey with eyes blown out by adrenaline and fury, covered in sweat and dirt and blood. Never, not even for a second, did Honey think he was going to hurt her. She curled one hand over the back of his, her fingertips along his thumb where it rested above her carotid artery, and lifted the other to cup his cheek, letting him know without words that she understood why it was there. Eric wasn't restraining her, he was using her to hold himself back.

Ryland's angry bellows ceased, as did his banging on the door. Honey relaxed now that the threat of Eric murdering the man was gone. Her lover could feel her tension slip away, so easily now they were alone and she had nothing to fear. Eric collapsed to his knees, his head pressing into her belly, exhausted and hurting. She wrapped her arms carefully around his neck and shoulders, holding him gently against her abdomen, waiting for his breathing to even out.

Once Eric had calmed down, Honey pushed him back and curled her hand under his chin to lift his face so she could see it. He looked terrible, poor man. She combed her fingers through his hair, brushing out the sawdust.

"We need to get you in the shower," the girl told him softly. He nodded, but made no move to stand, only doing so when Honey carefully pulled him to his feet. She pressed herself to his side, draping his arm across her small shoulders, taking what weight of his she could, and slowly helped him into the bathroom. Leaning Eric against the sink counter, she turned on the spray so it could heat up, and knelt to untie his boots.

"You know," the girl began, with light thoughtfulness. "I've always wanted to take a shower with you. I just thought it would be sexier than this."

Eric might be too wrung out to laugh, but the man could be on his death bed and still smirk. She
grinned up at him and removed his boots and socks, then stood again to help with his jacket and ruined shirt, then pants and brief-shorts. Honey eased him into the shower, under the hot spray of water. Eric leaned both hands on the wall, his head falling forward with a heavy groan as the water hit his clearly aching body. It took just a second to slip his shirt over her head, then the girl stepped into the stall with him.

She wrapped her arms around her lover, pressing herself against his back, just needing to hold him for a moment. He sighed heavily.

"Honey-
"

"Shh," she hushed him, kissing his spine. "We'll talk about it in the morning. Okay?"

There was much that needed to be addressed about what had just happened, but it could wait; right now Honey needed to take care of the man her monster lived inside. Eric nodded, accepting that easily. He must really be exhausted. After another moment of just letting the water beat down on him, the young leader stood upright again and reached for the bar of soap. His little Dauntless lover took it from his hand and turned him to face her.

Honey very carefully and methodically washed the blood and dirt away, taking stock of his injuries as she went. While it had been bloodied and was bruised, Eric's nose didn't appear to be broken. Both of his lips were split in a line that bisected the two. The gash in his brow wasn't so deep that he'd need stitches, thank God; there was no way she'd be able to get him to the infirmary tonight. His left ribs were bruised deeply, but didn't appear to be broken - atleast, not badly so. There were more bruises, all over him, but nothing serious, the girl was grateful to see.

She knew he'd been to the Hole. Even without the sawdust, she'd have known. With the way he'd come stumbling in with Ryland, she couldn't even begin to guess how many fights he'd had. Another time, the thought might have set Honey's blood to flame, but not right now, not dealing with the aftermath of those fights. Eric groaned and sighed depending upon where her hands moved over his battered flesh, growing more and more weary from her ablutions and the heat of the shower on his overworked muscles. By the time the girl was finished, he was leaning sideways against the tile wall for support.

Honey dried him quickly, then, as he had done with her their first morning together - and a few more times besides - she sat Eric down on the closed toilet and tended to his wounds. He didn't even wince as the girl pinched the gash on his brow closed so she could apply a set of butterflies to it. She helped him into the bedroom and he fell onto the bed with a grunt of pain followed immediately by a long moan of relief. The girl pressed a cold pack to his ribs and tucked the blanket around him, then crawled into the bed to lay at his other side.

Eric pulled her close, ignoring any discomfort the move might have caused, and sighed when her head was finally resting against his chest.

"Did I really scare you?" he mumbled, fighting the fatigue that was pulling him down to rest.

"I thought you were going to kill your secretary," Honey told him, rubbing his belly gently, soothingly. "But you didn't scare me."

"Good. That scares me."

Eric grunted as he lifted his head to press his lips to her hair once. The effort cost the man what little strength he had left and his head dropped back again. She thought he might have been asleep before it hit the pillow.
Morning came with the tiny stab of Honey's alarm and the girl, who'd slept fitfully the night before, lifted her tired head to check on her lover for the thousandth time. Eric was still resting comfortably, his bruises having darkened and grown more defined overnight. Between the blow that had caused his bloody nose and the one that resulted in the gash above it, his left eye was now blackened. The topical anti-inflammatory had kept the swelling of his many injuries down, but he still looked like he'd taken on a train and lost. As if he'd lose that fight.

Honey shifted slightly, as little as possible so as not to disturb the sleeping man, so she could reset her alarm. She had no intention of waking him until she absolutely had to, giving them just enough time to talk and get breakfast before going to work.

"Don't bother," Eric spoke up in a voice whose roughness went beyond his normal, gravelly morning tone. "I've been up for a while."

"Well, go back to sleep," Honey insisted, frowning at him though his eyes were still closed.

"Don't you want to talk about last night?"

"I can wait," she told the man. He cracked his eyes open and looked at her dubiously.

"I don't want to put it off any longer than I have to," Eric declared. "Let's get this over with."

The girl's frown deepened, her brows coming together. "Fine." She pulled back and away from him, which he clearly did not like, and wrapped the sheet around her nude body, sitting with her legs folded lotus style. "You lied to me."

Eric's eyes opened fully now and he frowned right back at her. "I've never lied to you."

It was a point of pride for him and a point of solidity for her, which is why it hurt. "You told me you had a meeting." He sighed and rolled his eyes. "I did have a meeting. And it did run late."

"And you did know the whole time that you were going to end up in the Hole and you didn't tell me the truth," Honey said sharply, her throat tight with anger and betrayal.

"Not telling you isn't the same as lying." Of course, he'd think that. "I didn't want you to come down there."

"You don't get to decide what I do, Eric!"

"Believe me, I know," the man insisted, scrubbing a hand over his face in frustration. "That's why I didn't tell you!"

"Everyone's always trying to protect me. Am I really that weak?" Honey demanded, heat building behind her eyes. She thought he wanted her to be strong.

"No, I am!" he snarled suddenly. His furious declaration brought the girl to a dead stop. Eric glared at her, breathing a little heavily in his anger. "The thought of something happening to you scares the shit out of me and I can't get passed it. I wake up in a cold sweat some nights and if you weren't always right there beside me, I'd lose my goddamn mind trying to get to you, just to make sure you were okay. Sometimes I wish I'd never fucking met you at all."
He said the last so harsh and cruel that anyone who overheard would think it was meant to hurt her. Honey knew better. She wished she knew how to comfort him, how to ease his fear, because she knew bravery was the most important thing to Eric and not being able to master this was tearing him up inside. She couldn't promise never to be in danger; even if such a thing was possible, the girl couldn't live her life hiding from the world. Not even for his sake.

"Okay."

Eric scoffed, derisive and incredulous. "Okay? That's it? That's all you've got to say?"

Honey shrugged, reaching out to brush her fingers against his arm. "Were you expecting something more dramatic?"

He actually looked a little disgruntled. "Kinda, yeah, actually."

"Sorry to disappoint." Not sorry at all. He was always so supportive of her, lifting her when she fell, steeling her when she was weak. The last thing Honey would ever do was try to make Eric feel badly about being afraid. Of anything; least of all someone he loved being hurt. It must be absolute torture for him.

He eyed her, almost warily, as if not quite believing she'd let it all go so easily. It wasn't easy, but Honey was letting it go, because she loved him just as much and it was what Eric needed. And he needed it far more than the girl needed to be angry with him. She pursed her lips up to the side, dropping her eyes with a wry shrug.

"Here I thought you went after Ryland because he said I had nice legs and you were jealous," Honey said with playful disillusionment.

"If I thought for a second you'd show those legs off for anyone but me, I'd have been jealous," Eric told her, lifting his hand to her knee possessively.

"Really?" she pressed, eyes wide and kittenish. "You're not just saying that?"

He shook his head with too much sincerity, giving her knee a squeeze. "Not just saying it. I'd be beside myself with jealousy."

"Marta says that if you were really the jealous type, you'd throw me over your shoulder and carry me away," the girl continued to pout, though the little grin she didn't bother to suppress was sort of ruining the effect. Her lover didn't seem to mind.

"She's absolutely correct," he confirmed. "If you were the flaunting type, I'd definitely toss you over my shoulder and bring you right back here."

"And what, lock me away from other men forever and ever?" Honey giggled. Eric's eyelids drooped and his smirk turned into a lazy half smile as his hand moved up her thigh.

"No. I'd-" he broke off, the half smile widening into a lusty grin. "Nevermind, I'll just show you."

He moved to sit up and reach for her, but had apparently forgotten about his ribs and the motion made him wince hard and fall back against the pillows.

"Shit!" Eric huffed, cupping his side. Honey snorted out a laugh. She lifted the hand off her knee and kissed it a few times to head off any injury her mirth might do his pride.

"Maybe save that demonstration for later," she advised, eyes sparkling with humor.
"Yeah, maybe," he conceded with a chagrinned chuckle. The hand she was kissing tugged her forward. "You come here, instead."

"I don't think that's a good idea, either," Honey told the injured man, pushing his hand back to rest on his own chest.

"I don't care what you think," he grumbled. "Get over here and sit on my dick. That's an order."

Eric pointed at said appendage when he gave the command and the girl fell back, laughing loudly. He yanked the sheet away from her body and grabbed her legs, grunting with the effort of trying to pull her atop him. Honey sat up and went willingly, not because she had any intention of giving the young leader his way, but because fighting him would only exacerbate his injuries. The blanket was still between their bodies, an important barrier between his rapidly hardening cock and her bare pussy.

"Eric, stop it," the girl admonished, slapping his hands away from the comforter when he tried to tug it aside. "You need to rest."

"I'll feel very rested afterward, I promise," the stubborn man insisted in a growling purr as he pulled her down to claim her mouth. Honey veered to the side at the last instant, nuzzling the cheek that wasn't a purple and blue mess and he groaned in protest. "I know my body better than you. I'd have to be dead before I was too hurt to fuck you."

"I know," she laughed against his skin, the stubble there rasping against her lips. "But you're too hurt for me, right now."

Eric huffed in exasperation. Honey thought it must be because he didn't have to look at her when he said it that allowed the next words to come from his mouth. "I need you, Honey. Do you want me to beg? Because I will, if that's what it takes."

The blunt honesty of his words took her aback. She lifted her head and looked down at him, her heart slamming against her ribcage at the raw emotion she saw on his face, his gray eyes crystalline and needy. Her own eyes softened, her mouth lifting in a gentle smile that wasn't mocking, but understanding.

"How can I say no to that?" Honey asked with quiet ruefulness. His eyes fell shut in relief, but when he tried to pull the blanket away again, she stopped him again. "On one condition."

Eric's eyes popped open, scrutinizing her warily. His studs glinted as his brow raised in inquiry. "Oh?"

She grinned widely, which apparently did nothing to quell his suspicion. She pushed the man's hands away and quickly climbed off him and off the bed entirely, hurrying over to the dresser.

"What are you doing? Get back here!" he commanded. Instead, Honey pulled open a drawer and reached inside, grabbing her target and lifting it for him to see. "You're fucking joking."

The girl shook her head slowly, so very amused by his flat tone. She sauntered over to stand beside the bed, one hand on her hip, the two pairs of handcuffs in the other.

"The only way to keep you from hurting yourself is if you can't move." Honey's grin widened to fully Cheshire proportions and she said, so damn amused and pleased with herself, "The only way I'll go to bed with you, is if you're tied to it."

Eric groaned and dropped his head back against the pillow. He scowled up at the ceiling while the
girl just waited patiently. He made a sound of disgust.

"I should have just waited until you lost your cherry to that pretty boy from Patrol. Then you'd never know I had those," her lover grumbled childishly. Honey snorted out a disdainful laugh.

"Like you'd have let Kappa even get under my shirt, let alone in my pants." She rolled her eyes.

"If I'd known how much aggravation it would have saved me, I might have," he insisted, refusing to look at her.

"Bullshit. Spent weeks jacking off with just fantasies, while knowing some other man had his hands all over your strong Dauntless woman?" The warning growl that rumbled from Eric's chest was all the answer either of them needed on that subject. "That's what I thought. So, what's it gonna be, tough guy?"

With a great, heaving, reluctant sigh, Eric lifted his arms up towards the headboard. Honey didn't tease him about giving in, knowing how very difficult it was for him to give up any amount of control, let alone all of it. She quickly cuffed him to the bars, his arms out as far to the side as possible to keep them from having to raise too far above his head and save his poor ribs. Between locking down one arm and the other, she piled up the pillows behind his head and shoulders to keep him as comfortable as possible. Then peeled the blanket back off his very hard, twitching erection.

"Mmm," the girl hummed, stroking her fingertips up and down the underside of it lightly. At the same time, her other fingers slipped between her thighs, working quickly to ensure she was good and wet for him. Eric purred, watching her hand like a hawk, like a jackal waiting to feast.

"Do you still do that?" he asked, thoughtful but hungry. "Rub one out thinking about me?"

Honey grinned. "Sometimes. It's an awfully long time between breakfast and dinner, you know."

Eric's eyes fluttered. "What, you go off into the bathroom during lunch and finger yourself?"

"Only when I'm really busy. Normally, I sneak back here so I can lay in bed where it smells like you." Her grin turned wicked. "You don't know how tempting it is to just lock my office door and do it in there, knowing you're right down the way."

He groaned, his dick jerking under her fingers and spilling a thin stream of precum into the curls trailing down from his navel. She caught some on her finger and brought it to her lips with an appreciative hum. If his cum tasted like that clear fluid, she might never stop sucking his dick. So it was probably for the best it didn't, really.

"Do you think about things we do or things you want us to do?" he asked, before licking his lips and wincing just slightly over how that hurt the split in them.

"Oh, all kinds of things," Honey purred at him. "Things we do, things I wish we could do. Sometimes, I think about you jerking off while thinking about me."

"What do you wish we could do?" His eyes studied her face intently, very interested in the subject.

The little Dauntless smirked. "Things we can't. Like fuck against the Chasm railing or in the Observation Theatre."

"I could make those happen," Eric insisted, but she just rolled her eyes.

"Everything I want to do with you, I just ask for," Honey assured him. She let her eyes flutter shut,
pushing her fingers as deep inside as she could. Not nearly as good as his long digits. "And you give it to me."

The girl groaned out the words, long and guttural, shuddering with desire. "I'll give you anything," her lover promised with conviction. "Anything you want."

Honey removed her fingers and painted her slickness across his lips as she moved to straddle his pelvis. Eric opened his mouth and took them in with a moan, ravenous for the taste of her. So very ready, she slipped his cock into her pussy with her own moan, soft and grateful as he filled all the places left empty without him there.

"I want you to tell me if you need to stop," she told the man. He grunted in incredulity, happily sucking her fingers clean. Honey pulled her hand away and cupped his jaw firmly, saying in an equally firm tone, "I mean it, Eric."

He rolled his hips up into her, pulling a groan from both their throats. "I'll never need anything that badly."

Honey couldn't stop herself from rocking down against him now that he'd reminded her body how good it felt to move. "Fine," she gasped, gripping his shoulders. "A break then. We won't stop; we'll just take a little time. Okay?"

"Whatever you say," he agreed, just to get her to drop it. "C'mon, Honey, fuck me. Ride my dick."

She did, sitting up straight and arching back just a bit, scraping her nails against his thighs as she moved her hips up and back, down and forward, just the way he'd taught her. "Fuuuck, Eric," she whined. "You feel so good."

"Fuck yes, I do," he agreed in a rough grunt. "Fucking amazing so deep in your tight, little pussy."

As good as it felt, she wouldn't let her eyes close, keeping a close watch on his face and body. Sure enough, she caught him wincing. Honey slowed her movements, but he growled displeasedly, bucking up against her to make up the difference. The grunt that came from Eric's open mouth was as much discomfort as pleasure and the girl frowned at him.

"Just let me go slow," she insisted. The man shook his head, the muscles in his arms flexing as he pushed his shoulders and heels into the mattress to lift his hips harder and faster. He pulled his lips between his teeth, a mannerism she was very familiar with, but it made him wince again and a drop of blood smeared the soft, pink skin. "Eric."

"No, keep going," he ordered, panting heavily from both lust and pain, but not the kind either of them enjoyed. Honey flattened her hands on his chest and dropped her self hard against his pelvis with a cry of pleasure. He let out a bark, head arching back. "Fuck, like that! Just like that, Honey!"

She did it again and his face was a grimace, all screwed up with effort. He was sweating and panting and normally the girl loved the sight, but not with what it was costing him. Honey pressed her hands harder against his chest and stroked them down the flesh with unforgiving pressure. Eric practically squirmed beneath her, gritting his teeth and grunting through his nose. When she deliberately dug the heel of her palm into his bruised ribs cruelly, he finally broke.

Nodding quickly, Eric gasped out the words, "Okay, okay, time out! Fuck!"

Honey instantly stopped moving, leaving her hand where it was, just holding his injured side. She hadn't wanted to hurt him, but he'd have done worse himself if she'd let him keep going like he was.
"Time out," he huffed again, panting raggedly. Her poor, stubborn idiot. The girl stroked his throat and face soothingly, then bent forward to kiss his chest and press her cheek to the soft curls. Eric swallowed hard and huffed unhappily. "Goddamnit."

"Are you finished sulking?" Honey asked, raising up to look at him again. She didn't wait for an answer. "Good. Now just relax and let me make love to you, nice and slow. It's what I want."

And he'd give her whatever she wanted. Eric nodded, though it took a few moments of her gently rocking above him for the man to finally relax and give over to the slow, sweet build of pleasure she was creating between them. When his eyes slipped shut and every line of pain and frustration smoothed under the tender stroking of her fingers and he moaned so nicely for her, Honey purred with delight.

"That's right," she hummed approvingly, praising him in soft, loving tones. "Just like that. Everything I wanted. You're giving me everything, Eric."

He groaned her name, turning his head to kiss her palm. She wondered if her demanding, dominating, brutal lover had ever done this - this slow, gentle sort of tender coupling - a single time in his life. Maybe not. She might be the first. It was fair; he'd been her first, after all.

"You feel so good. You're gonna make me come so hard," she promised, squeezing him tightly inside her and pulling another beautiful groan from his lips. "Then you'll fill me up, won't you? Won't you, Eric? Please say you will."

"I'll fill you up," he said the words like a solemn vow, kissing her hand fervently.

"Oh, thank you. You're so good to me," Honey went on, telling him how wonderful he was and how amazing he made her feel, piling praise upon praise and urging him on in the softest voice, breathy and full of bliss. "Oh, oh! Right, there. I'm gonna come, Eric. You're making me come for you."

Her head flew back and her spine arched hard as she clamped down around his cock with a sharp, loud wail of pleasure. "Fuck, I'm coming!" she cried, bowing forward again to grip his shoulders and rock harder against him, shuddering from the intensity of her orgasm. "I'm coming, Eric!"

He stiffened beneath her with a raw shout of his own, hips bucking up as he thickened and throbbed and jerked inside her, keeping his promise and filling his little Dauntless until she overflowed.

The softness that Honey treasured so very much lingered in Eric's gaze until well after she'd uncuffed him and carefully worked cream into his raw wrists. Even after they'd both showered again, he still looked down at her, happy and content and loving.

Chapter End Notes

Has anyone noticed the pattern with Eric's trips to the Hole? What seems to precipitate his visits there? Just curious.
Honey finds some answers and isn't happy about any of them.

As much as it made Honey feel like a ghoul for thinking so, Eric's injuries and their amazing morning together made this the perfect day to slip away to Erudite. The young leader would be distracted and exhausted; he might not leave his office all day. An hour before lunch, she told Marta she was going down to the Hub to scout out locations for on-site training of the dogs; looking through the city blueprint archive for buildings that were dilapidated enough to provide a true to life environment, but sound enough to be safe. When the sub came back empty handed that evening, it would be chalked up to her Erudite-born perfectionism. Then, Honey left Dauntless and hopped on the train, riding it all the way to her former home.

It was too hot outside the cool tunnels of her actual home to wear anything hooded or long sleeved and not look conspicuous. So, she pulled a knit beanie down over her very recognizable white curls and kept her hands clasped behind her back to hide her snowy flames as much as possible. Walking too fast would also draw attention to her, but too slow and people were more likely to recognize the girl. She couldn't keep her gaze on the ground, that wasn't Dauntless, but she couldn't meet people's eyes either. It was an endless succession of calculations and careful decisions as Honey made her way through the Erudite compound and into the long, flat, warehouse-like building that was home to Tech Research and Development.

Dexter didn't have an office like she did; his work station was out in the open in the eleventh bay down from the entrance, but there was no help for it. Lucky for her, for them both, he was focused on tweaking some piece of machinery on his work bench when Honey approached. No one on the floor seemed to notice the young ancillary, but that didn't put her at ease - not with the mission she was on. She came up behind her brother and spoke before he could turn.

"Don't hug me and don't act surprised to see me," she said in lieu of greeting. Dexter looked over his shoulder and smiled warmly, albeit perplexedly.

"Nice to see you, too, sunshine," he quipped. "Give me a second to finish soldering this."

Honey leaned against the workbench, her back to the rest of the floor. "I need your help, Dex," she told the man, trying to make her tone convey exactly how serious the situation was. God bless him, he didn't even look up.

"Okay. What can I do for you?" Dexter asked without hesitation.

"Is anyone working on a serum called LRCSS2248?"

He shrugged and reached for a tiny screwdriver. "I don't know. What is it?"

"That's what I'm here to find out," Honey told him. "I found a weird vial on the train."
"You're a terrible liar, you know that?" her brother snorted, glancing at her for a moment with a smirk. The girl scoffed.

"I'm an excellent liar," she insisted, disgruntled. "You're just not entirely human. No one else can tell when I'm lying."

"Well, that's the advantage of being the big brother. You can see right through your deceitful little sister. So what's it really about?"

Honey drew a breath and scanned the floor behind her quickly, then sighed and spoke quietly. "There's an old warehouse in the Factionless sector one of our Patrols found some weird shit in. Crates of this stuff. We know it's a serum, but not what it does. We don't know whose involved and we don't want to start some kind of panic or a witch hunt. It's not suspicious for me to come see you, everyone knows we're close."

Dexter's shoulders tensed as his baby sister lied through her teeth, knowing he'd believe every word she fed him. The advantage of being the little sister is you know your brilliant big brother's biggest weakness is his need to prove he's smarter than you. He nodded and set his screwdriver aside, then stood and moved towards his computer terminal.

"Can you log on anonymously?" she asked. He smirked and chuckled superiorly.

"Can I log on anonymously," Dexter murmured sarcastically. Feed that ego, Dex. A few keystrokes later and he was pulling up window after window, his fingers flying over the keys. "Looks like it's some kind of long range sim."

"What?" the girl leaned in to look at the screen, confused. "Like for training?"

"Yeah," he chuckled and looked down at her, his expression one of ironic humor. "You remember that rig I gave you for the armed combat module? This stuff is a derivative of the simulation serum Dauntless rejected that led to it. Someone must still be working on it, trying to get passed the sense memory flaw. See?"

He pointed at a string of gibberish on the screen that was beyond her schooling. "I see alot of Greek."

"They removed the paralytic that keeps you in place while the simulation is running. They must be trying to tap into muscle memory. I have no idea how effective that would be, but I guess it's worth a try," he shrugged. "I also have no idea how it ended up in the Factionless sector. What other weird shit did you find?"

Honey kept her eyes on the screen, shaking her head, looking absolutely bewildered. "A bunch of salvaged computer gear, few big spools of copper wire, some medicine that went missing from Abnegation, a-" Dexter was chuckling softly, looking down at her with sympathetic eyes. "What?"

"Honey, I think your people just found a cache of stolen goods. The Factionless are always grabbing anything that's not nailed down," he told her gently, to lessen the sting of being duped. The girl frowned mightily.

"But the serum! And the computer gear!" she insisted.

"Were there any syringes? Any broadcast equipment?"

After a pause, Honey admitted sullenly. "No."
"I can see how that would look suspicious to a bunch of Dauntless," he conceded, trying valiantly not to appear as condescending as he felt. "But trust me, you'd need serious tech to get this stuff up and running and there's nothing the Factionless could possibly use it for, even if they had that kind of kit."

The girl huffed, rubbing her hands over her face. "So, this is all some stupid mix up." She shook her head. "Thank God we didn't go higher. If Jeanine found out... fuck, we'd never live it down. I could have lost my office!"

"Don't worry, kiddo," Dexter patted her on the shoulder, all brotherly affection and reassurance. "Your secret is safe with me."

Honey managed to give him a look of pained relief. "Thanks, Dex. You're the best."

"I know," he chuckled.

"I gotta get back before Max mobilizes something," she told him. "I'll stop by to see you guys again as soon as I can. It's crazy between the unit and initiation."

"And your boyfriend. Dad saw Jeanine at the café in the spire the other day. She was so surprised he didn't know you were seeing your former mentor," Dexter informed her in a mocking conversational tone, eyeing her disapprovingly.

Honey cringed. "Crap."

"I mean, I get why you'd be putting it off. Dad's not happy."

The girl nodded. Putting the reason she'd come aside, Dexter was her brother and she loved him and she didn't want him to worry. "Nothing happened between us until I was already an ancillary," the little Dauntless assured the bigger Erudite. "Eric didn't look at me twice - I was his student and not really worth his time. And I certainly wasn't interested in him; he was a huge jerk to me all through training."

"And that all magically changed once you got your stripes?" Dexter's brows lifted skeptically.

"Well, I stole his title. He was the youngest ever sub-leader before me, by a long shot, and I beat him out by six months. Max appointed me before lunch on the day my apprenticeship ended."

Her brother's eyes widened in genuine shock. "You never told us that! Why didn't you say anything?"

"It was Randall's day," the girl explained with a shrug. "I didn't want to make it about me."

The man stared at her, uncomprehending. Not wanting to be recognized for an achievement? Especially something so monumental as to be singularly unique in the entire city's history? No, Honey had never belonged at Erudite. Dexter shook his head.

"I guess I get it now. You proved you were better than him and that got him interested in you, so he started treating you with the proper respect."

"Something like that," the girl affirmed. *Nothing like that.* "He treats me really well, I promise."

"Does he know about...?" the man trailed off, looking concerned and uncomfortable. There was a
reason everyone in her family knew Honey was always meant for Dauntless. That came before the evaluation, the confidential therapy, the secrets and lies, before she'd learned to hide the way violence captivated her or bruises held her in thrall.

"He knows," she nodded. "He takes care of me."

Nice and vague. Taking care of someone can mean a lot of things. Dexter looked relieved. "He comes off like the kind of man who would take advantage of someone like you. I was worried he'd hurt you."

Honey shook her head, laughing at the absurdity of that worry. "Eric is the last person at Dauntless who would ever hurt me."

As she made her way back across the courtyard towards the main entrance of Erudite, Honey tried to convince herself that she and Four had been wrong. It was just Dauntless implementing the revised combat training sim. There was no vast conspiracy, just a series of misunderstandings brought on by a distrust of Erudite and a dislike of Jeanine Matthews. And not a single mention of new armed combat training in her entire apprenticeship under Kai or any staff meeting in the last ten months. And a series of unlogged shipments. And nothing in the leaders' sensitive files.

"Fuck."

As Honey approached the gate, the large man in a blue security uniform that had been standing guard there held out his hand indicating she should stop.

"Excuse me, miss," he said in the same emotionless voice that all the Erudite security used. As a child, the girl had firmly believed they were all androids cooked up in the tech sector. She still had her suspicions. "Ms. Matthews would like to see you in her office."

Shit! Honey eyed the big man, zeroing in on all the weak points Eric had taught her. She could take him. The thought was quashed as soon as it arose. What good would that do? Jeanine obviously knew she was here. The only thing Honey would gain by attacking a guard and running away was an investigation into her conduct. The girl sighed and turned to head back the way she came, making for the spire.

As she rode up in the elevator, Honey felt a prickle of awareness run up her spine. There was something she was forgetting and it was dangerous. No one at Dauntless knew she was here. There were no bugs in the tech sector, she knew, because those people were fanatical about keeping their research to themselves and the place was filled with countermeasures and jammers. Dexter wouldn't tell Jeanine about Honey's inquiry - if there was one thing the Erudite were better at than gaining knowledge it was keeping that knowledge to themselves. Four had said he would delete the footage of the girl going into the mystery room. There was nothing that could link her to-

Honey snatched her tablet from her pocket, quickly deleting the six files she'd saved the computer's serial number under. *Stupid, stupid, stupid!* She hadn't even needed the damned thing! She stared at the tab. Nothing was ever truly erased, bits of information stayed behind even after you tried to delete them. Any Erudite first year could tell you that. The elevator stopped and the doors slid open and Honey stepped into the too warm, uncomfortable lobby where the plastic-hair receptionist was sitting alone.

"Ms. Matthews will be with you shortly," the woman said, not looking up.

The girl looked around the room as if it held the answer to her problems. And maybe it did. Honey
shook her head and chuckled to herself over the irony. She tucked the mini-tablet into her back pocket, walked precisely three steps to her left, and sat down in one of the hard, plastic chairs with a soft crunch.

*Oops.* Eric would never let her live that down.

"Honey, I'm so glad I was able to catch you before you left," Jeanine said in warm greeting as the girl strolled towards her desk. Honey nodded in return and took a seat in one of the chairs.

"I was just visiting my brother. Apparently my father got some unexpected news and wasn't too thrilled about it."

The leader had the good grace to look apologetic, smoothing down her baby blue pencil skirt as she sat. "I'm sorry about that. Your family is so close, I just assumed you would have told them about your relationship with Eric."

"He and my father don't exactly see eye to eye," Honey said. "It's my first real relationship and I really don't need to make it more complicated than it already is."

"A wise decision. I'm sorry I undermined it."

The girl shrugged. "It is what it is. They'll just have to learn to deal with each other."

The woman's perfectly pink lips curved into an approving bow. "All young women should have that sort of attitude. It's that kind of self assurance that's needed in a leader."

"From your lips to God's ears," Honey chuckled dismissively.

"Well, my influence may not reach quite that far," Jeanine said, humbly. The girl didn't think for a second the woman believed that. Matthews was definitely the type to put herself on par with a deity. "I do have a fair bit of pull here on Earth. Honey, I know you don't want my help, but it's there if you need it. That's not why I asked you here today, however."

The girl perked with curiosity. "No?"

"Quite the opposite. I need your help."

That prickle was back, creeping up Honey's spine as she forced herself to remain calm and mildly interested. "How can I help you?"

"There is a threat to the Faction System that I mean to see eradicated. It is insidious and hard to stamp out. We at Erudite are ill equipped to fight it on our own; that is why we have been working with Dauntless for the past several years."

"Go on," the girl prompted, leaning forward in her seat, concerned and intrigued.

"It is called Divergence," Jeanine said, as if the word held great meaning. Honey knew what the definition of divergence was, but she could tell this was something different. "When you took your aptitude test and you received your Dauntless result, you knew it was right. It was where you belonged. Yes?"

"Yes." There was no need to affect or pretense. Honey had always known she was Dauntless.

"Yes. Just as I received Erudite and knew this was meant to be my home," the leader went on. "There are people on whom the aptitude simulation does not work."
"What do you mean?" The girl's head tilted to the side, perplexed.

"There is something inside them. Something wrong in their DNA. They do not fit into any faction, so the test fails and they don't receive a true result. These people are called Divergents and they are very dangerous. They undermine the entire System; our way of life."

Honey sat back in her seat, bewildered by the whole concept. "I can see how it would be crushing to not know where you belong, but how does that threaten the entire System? Can't we just give them a different test?"

Jeanine gave her the same sympathetic, yet condescending smile as Dexter. "We don't know who they are. There are people, other Divergents and sympathizers, who hide the truth with false test results. Serums don't work properly on Divergents, so if there was one in Dauntless, their Fear Landscape would be a lie. In Candor, the truth serum would be useless. Do you see how this could cause chaos?"

Honey nodded. She could see it. A criminal who could lie under truth serum could literally get away with murder. A Divergent in Dauntless could skate through the Landscape and make highest ranking, then take the leadership position that someone else deserved.

"How do we stop it?"

The woman looked pleased that the girl had asked. That sent a chill through her. "Unfortunately, the only way we can eradicate the threat is to eliminate the source."

Honey blinked. That couldn't mean what she thought it meant, but from the look on Jeanine's face, it must. "You… You mean kill them. You're talking about killing people."

"It's a necessary evil," the woman declared solemnly. "We must do what is needed to protect the System and the people who are a part of it. Divergents are not."

"Not people?" the little Dauntless challenged hotly before she could stop herself.

"I know it's hard," Jeanine offered the condolence, but Honey could tell she didn't mean it. These weren't people to her, they were bad apples that needed to be culled. "That is why you've never heard of Divergence. That is why they are so hard to find. They are our children, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors. It is human nature to overlook the flaws in those we love, to protect them at all cost."

"You can't tell the world they exist, because then people would protect them. And people can protect them, because no one knows they exist."

"Precisely," the woman lauded her grasp of the situation. "The aptitude test and fear simulation are the most reliable way to expose a Divergent, since they are so similar. Because the aptitude tests are performed by volunteers, a well established custom we haven't been able to get the council to overturn without tipping our hand, there is a chance for Divergents to slip through. The fear simulations, however, are performed only by Dauntless and any suspect footage is reviewed."

A explosion blasted through Honey's mind. Her eyes slipped shut because she couldn't stop them. Her mouth worked because she couldn't halt it. "By Eric. Eric reviews the footage."

She knew. Honey just knew. The meetings with Erudite. The way he never wanted her near Jeanine. This was why. This was Eric's secret.

"Yes," the head of Erudite confirmed. "Eric reviews the footage, reports any possible Divergents to
me, and we decide how to proceed." She went on as if that wasn't a crushing blow to the girl seated before her. As if Honey's heart hadn't just stopped beating. As if her mind wasn't filled with the image of Eric, her Eric, killing for Jeanine Matthews. "It is harder to find them in the other factions, but not impossible. Eric and Max have been invaluable in our pursuit to keep the System intact and stable."

Honey just nodded, then leaned forward to rest her elbows on her knees, rubbing her temples. The woman made a sound of compassionate regret.

"It's a lot to take in," she stated the obvious in an attempt at some Erudite version of comforting. Fucking noses.

The girl lifted her head, fingers steepled before her lips. "Is that what-"

Her mouth was suddenly filled with glue, stopping her tongue and gumming her jaw shut. She'd almost asked if the serum and equipment in the mystery room at Dauntless were connected to Divergence. Some primeval instinct buried deep in Honey's reptile brain yanked her back from the precipice at the last instant. There was very little chance Jeanine Matthews only had one deep, dark, deadly secret.

"Is that what…?" the blonde woman prompted. Her eyes were too sharp, her body too still. She knows. She knows. She knows. "Honey?"

The girl forced her lips and tongue and jaws to obey her, pushing out words with great effort. "Is that what happened to Al?"

Jeanine's head tilted almost imperceptibly to the side in puzzlement and Honey felt sick that she had anything in common with the woman. "Al? I'm afraid I don't know who that is."

"One of the initiates. They said he jumped into the Chasm," Honey explained, the lie falling from her tongue like lead. "He wasn't doing well in sim training, so I thought… since you said that's how we find them."

Jeanine shook her head. "No. But it was a good thought." -A good thought?- "It would follow the pattern. It's easy to see why you did so well in your apprenticeship. You catch things most others don't."

Bit by bit, Honey pulled herself together, pushing all the noise in her mind deep down and focusing on the very dangerous woman before her. "What is it you think I can do to help?"

Her question was met with a look of approval. "You're observing the initiation process this year. Has anyone stood out to you? Anything strange?"

The girl shrugged and shook her head. "There was Al, but you said he's not Divergent. We had a boy fall on the stairs, but they said that was an accident. I suppose he could have done it on purpose to avoid sim training. He's Factionless now."

"Good. That's excellent thinking," Jeanine praised, quite pleased. "Did you notice anyone in your own class?"

Honey actually let out a single, mirthless laugh. "The only one suspicious in my class was me. I went from last to first, remember? But I know I'm not Divergent. I'm sure you've checked."

"Yes, I did," the woman admitted freely, like they were just having a pleasant chat. "We were all very pleased that you are Dauntless through and through."
"Happy to please," the girl quipped dryly. "Is that all?"

"I'd like you to keep your eyes and ears open," Jeanine said. "Max told me you insisted on observing the initiates, so it wouldn't be suspicious if you continued to do so next year and so on. I'd like you to do that."

Honey nodded. "I can do that."

"If you see anything out of the ordinary, tell Eric or you can emessage me directly. Give me your tablet and I'll input my ID."

The girl chuckled with chagrin. "Yeah, about that… I have this nasty habit that everyone's been trying to break me of and it literally bit me in the ass in your lobby here."

Honey removed the crushed tab and showed it to the other woman, looking very embarrassed indeed. "Oh dear. Well, I suppose you can get it from Eric once you've obtained a replacement."

"I guess I'll have to," Honey said, tucking the ruined device away again. "Is there anything else I should look for? Do Divergents have any kind of… I dunno, tells?"

Jeanine sat back, looking thoughtful for a moment. "The core of Divergence is the lack of conformity to the Faction System. These people do not fit into any faction, though they may outwardly display the traits of a normal member. An otherwise normal Abnegation who is notably daring, for example. An Amity who is exceptionally intelligent. But these can be misleading and that Amity may just happen to have a good head on their shoulders; that Abnegation may just be headstrong. At the same time, that Abnegation could throw their faction into upheaval if they *are* Divergent. Imagine what someone like that could do at the Hub."

The girl nodded. A strong willed Abnegation. Someone who was selfless enough to put others first and strong enough to push changes through the city government to that end. An Erudite who was brilliant and honest enough to share that brilliance with the world. A person who was kind and honest and intelligent and brave and selfless enough to use those traits to better the city and everyone living in it.

Honey could imagine it.

Honey wished she could *be* it.

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's chapter... oh, it's gonna be rough.
Mistakes Were Made

Chapter Summary

Honey and Eric finally hash it out. The day doesn't get any better.

Chapter Notes

Warning - violence w/ sexual implications this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Honey leapt off the train onto the rooftop entrance of Dauntless, she wasn't surprised to find Eric waiting for her. She didn't fight him when he grabbed her and shoved her against the door to the stairs, either.

"What the fuck were you thinking?!" he bellowed, two inches from her face. "No, you weren't thinking! I told you to stay away from Erudite! I told you not to get Jeanine interested in you! I gave you an order! Why didn't you listen to me?!

"Did you really think I would?" Honey asked, softly, sadly. Her eyes welled with tears as she looked at the man she loved. The murderer she loved.

"Yes! I thought you trusted me! I thought you were smart enough to understand how dangerous she is!" Eric shouted, his voice taking on an edge of desperation.

"You didn't want to be the one to tell me that you kill people for her," the girl accused in that same small, sad voice. The man let her go like her skin scalded, spinning away to scrub his hands against his scalp, mussing his hair in the process and ruining all that tight order he imposed every morning. "You could have told me why she wanted me, but you didn't because you were afraid."

"You don't understand," Eric declared, shaking his head, not turning around. "This isn't about me. I'm trying to protect you."

"You're trying to protect yourself," Honey said, her sadness giving way little by little to anger. "You wanted to keep me in the dark where you could control me."

The young leader whirled on her, advancing menacingly. "Sometimes you need to be controlled! You never stop to think of the danger! You're going to get yourself killed or worse!"

"You don't get to decide how I live my life!" Now she was shouting, too. And the tears were falling and she hated every one of them.

"I'm trying to make sure you keep your life!"

"You're trying to make sure you keep my life!" the girl indicted him, furious and betrayed. "You said so yourself, you'll do anything to keep me right by your side. Lying to me, keeping secrets. Because what you want is what's most important!"
"I'd be doing the exact same thing even if you never loved me!" Eric roared, shoving her against the door again. "You think I'm manipulating you because I need you to be mine; I'm putting myself on the fucking line because I need you to be **you**! Because Jeanine will take everything that is good and Dauntless about you and twist it and use you up until it's all gone! And I can't let that happen and not just because I love you, because Dauntless **needs** you. Even if you never look at me again, I'll still be right behind you, making sure you're safe, because you're the future of this fucking faction!"

Honey stared at him, completely at a loss. She'd been dead sure that Eric had been keeping the entire Divergent matter from her because he was afraid she wouldn't love him since he was a killer. She wasn't sure he was wrong about that fear, but she was sure he was wrong to manipulate her just to get what he wanted. And now, this? The future of the faction? He believed it. One look at his face and anyone could see Eric believed it. Honey did not. She wanted to make Dauntless better, make it whole, but she wasn't a messiah. She was just a person with good intentions who wanted the best for her faction and for the city.

"If I thought for a second telling you the truth would do any good, I'd have told you the second we got out of the car after that fucking lunch with your family. But I knew it wouldn't. You **care** about **everyone**!" The man spat out the words like they were an insult. "Look at you. You're already trying to figure out how to stop me; how to change my mind so I'll stop hunting Divergents. You want to save the whole fucking world."

Honey couldn't deny it. She did want to stop him. She wanted to make him see how wrong what he and Jeanine were doing was. She wanted to save him, too.

"I'm not going to stop. Do you understand?" Eric shook the girl hard. "And you're not going to interfere. You're going to do your fucking job and keep your goddamn head down until this all blows over. And then you're going to be the strong fucking Dauntless woman I know you are and fix everything you think is broken here. Until then, you're going to keep your mouth shut and you're going to stay the fuck away from Jeanine Matthews! Do you understand?"

"Let me go!" Honey couldn't take it anymore. She had to get away from him and everything he was saying, everything she had learned today. It was too much. He was so very wrong about her in every way he could possibly be.

He just shook her again. "**Do you understand**?! I swear to God, Honey, if you don't answer me, I'll lock you in a goddamn cell!"

"I fucking understand, now let me go!" She shrieked, pushing hard at his chest. He did, but only one arm. Eric pulled her from the door and opened it, clearly intending to drag her down the stairs and to who knows where else. Honey couldn't stand to be near him for a second more, his touch made her skin burn and crawl. Using the skills he'd given her, she twisted out of his hold and kicked his feet out from under him, sending the surprised, furious man crashing to the gravel.

He bellowed her name as she took off across the roof. Any other day and Eric would have caught her easily, but not today, not with his ribs. He would be slow getting up after that fall he wasn't expecting. That would give her just enough time. Honey hopped up onto the ledge and stepped off without even a heartbeat in between. She didn't even feel the fall; her adrenaline was already at its peak. The girl hit the net and bounced, immediately rolling to the edge and dropping to the ground. The instant her feet touched stone, she was running again, knowing he'd be right behind her.

"**Honey**!"

Eric's desperate roar echoed through the tunnels as if he were hot on her heels, but it was already fading. Unfortunately, the pain he'd sent echoing through her chest and the confusion ricocheting
As vast as Dauntless was, it was still finite and Eric was a leader, so there was no place Honey could go that he could not follow. But he'd have to know where to look. She couldn't go to her friends, that would be the first, most obvious choice. Her office was out, clearly. In the end, Honey went to the only place she knew no one had any reason to go - the transfer barracks. It was empty now that the two halves of the class had merged and wouldn't be used again until the next Choosing Day.

She curled up on one of the abandoned cots and cried herself into exhaustion. It was too much. It hurt too much. The girl couldn't make sense of the jumbled mass in her mind. Divergents and serums and Jeanine and Eric. And Eric. And Eric.

Honey was torn down the center. He was a murderer. Not just a monster, not just capable of killing. She'd suspected he might have killed Kent, but had let it go because the part of her that was like Eric wanted the man dead. It was the same part that crowed with triumph when she saw Al's body. But her monster had killed people just for being different, because they scared Jeanine Matthews in her small, Erudite world where everything had a box and fit perfectly into that box and anything that didn't threatened everything.

And that was just one secret. She knew there was another, the serum and the computers. Who knew how many more? Eric was part of the cancer that was killing Dauntless. Not just Dauntless, the whole of the city.

He believed in her more than she could have possibly imagined. He thought she could fix their faction. He thought she was the future of Dauntless. He was a fool. Look at her, hiding like a coward. Eric had certainly chosen the wrong person to put his faith in. She was strong and she was brave and she was Dauntless, but Honey was not the future. Not by a long shot. Couldn't the man see how very unspecial she was? It wasn't rare in Dauntless for someone to be bold. There were those whose ambition was a hunger that could never be sated. There were far more intelligent people than Honey - he was one of them for God's sake. Stronger, too. She just wanted to keep people safe and whole, no more than that. He was mistaken.

She loved him; she loved him so much there was no end to it, no beginning, it just was. Even knowing what she knew now, Honey still loved him just the same. And she'd run from him when he told her what he truly felt. The monster opened his heart and she ran. Eric gave her everything and she ran from it. She didn't deserve him.

Honey had thought she'd cried herself dry, but she was wrong. These tears were hot and harsh and stung her cheeks and shook her body until there was nothing left to do but give up to oblivion.

Honey awoke hours later, cold and dehydrated and so very alone. She needed to get up; she needed to move. Her first thought was of Eric, but her being rejected it, the wound too fresh. The coward girl couldn't face him.

Four. The serum. She needed to find Four and tell him what she knew about the serum. Now that she had a purpose, Honey set to it, striding determinedly from the barracks and back into the tunnels. A quick look at her watch told her it wasn't even dinner yet. That meant he would still be with the initiates. It was a normal training day and that meant the gym or the firing range or the indoor target area. With her tablet crushed, she couldn't check the schedule to know which it was, so she'd just have to try until she found him.
The indoor area was the closest but contained no joy. Empty. Honey moved on to the gym. Jackpot. She hurried over to the broody man, who was watching two of his initiates spar and offering corrections to their form. He saw her approaching and frowned deeply, more deeply than usual. She didn't realize how puffy and red her eyes still were, how the dried salt on her cheeks gave her away.

"What happened?" he demanded, not even stepping away from the mat. "Eric was in here twice looking for you. We're all supposed to report in if we see you."

Honey shook her head, waving the mention of the leader away. "Forget that. I need to talk to you."

"I'm kind of in the middle of something," Four told her as if she didn't have eyes of her own. "And not reporting you right now is a direct violation of a direct order."

"And I'm kind of not giving a direct shit," Honey replied shortly. He huffed and motioned for her to follow him. They ended up on the knife range that was abandoned at the moment. "I went to my brother at Erudite and had him look up the serum in their system."

"I thought you were being careful," Four said, accusingly.

"Please, he thinks we found a cache of stolen shit in the Factionless sector and promised to keep it a secret so I won't lose my job," the girl scoffed. Her bad mood and inner turmoil were making her snappish and irritable. "It's a long range simulation transmitter. Dauntless had Erudite working on an armed combat sim to help with field training, but it wasn't working, because of how the memories don't stick. The stuff we've got here is a variation of that. They added range and took away the paralytic, I guess so the subject can move around while they're under and gain muscle memory from the experience."

Four ran a hand through his hair and gripped the back of his neck firmly. "So, basically, they put you under and you move around like you're in the simulation?"

"Yeah. And I thought we were wrong and it's all just some new training thing, but it can't just be that, because why all the secrecy? It doesn't make sense."

The man looked at her, so grim she might have thought someone just died. "Think about it, Honey. If you put a person in a sim, but they're moving around in the real world, you could make them see whatever you wanted; make them do whatever you wanted."

"What, like mind control?" He nodded. Her stomach dropped away. "Four, there's cases of that stuff in there."

"I know. Enough to create an army," the man said.

"We already have an army. What the hell are they planning that they can't just order people to do?" Four didn't have an answer for that. Honey didn't want to find out what it was.

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Honey left Four and headed straight for the Pit. She would have to talk to Eric sooner or later, probably sooner since he was looking all over the faction for her, telling people to report any sighting. The girl knew that alcohol was a depressant, that it dulled thoughts, and she certainly needed some dulling. It wouldn't take much, she was the definition of a lightweight, which is why she didn't normally drink. Today was not a normal day.

Honey ducked into the first bar she found, a cozy little place with pool tables in the back called The
Corner Pocket. When the barman said they didn't serve dependents, the little Dauntless rolled her eyes and pulled off her beanie to reveal the trademark white curls.

"They just call me kid," she told him flatly. "That doesn't mean I am one."

He chuckled and rolled his eyes right back. "Maybe you should wear a name tag. What can I get you?"

"I have no idea. Something I won't taste, but I'll sure as hell feel." Even Honey had to admit that was a pretty damn Dauntless way to order. The bartender laughed and nodded, then mixed her up something pink and fizzy.

"It's called a Wet Dream," he informed the girl with a smirk. "Tastes like cotton candy and lemon."

Honey accepted the drink and shook her head. "Do all cocktails have sexual names?" She took a sip through the little twisty straw he'd put into the glass and smacked her lips. Oh, that's tasty.

"Well, they are called cock-tails." The girl snorted at the pun and pulled out the straw, tipping the drink back. "Shit, kid, you ain't supposed to shotgun the thing."

"I'm kind of impatient," she told him, setting the glass down. "Can I get some soda water? That shit's too sweet."

Before he'd even filled the glass, Honey's skin felt flush and her fingers, toes, and ears started to tingle. Ten minutes later, she was pretty well buzzed. Perfect. She thanked the barman, who's name she'd asked, but couldn't remember, and headed out into the Pit. Now, she could go find Eric and tell him she was sorry for being a shithead.

"Honey?" Someone called her name as she made her way somewhat unsteadily across the Pit, which was starting to get packed. "Hey, Honey, where the hell have you been? Eric's looking everywhere for you."

It turned out the someone was Ryland. Good. Ryland would know where Eric was. That was his job. "Yeah, well, he didn't find me. So, I'm winning. Where is he now?"

The man, who was almost as tall and dark as Four, but not as good-looking, eyed her for a moment before answering. "Here, come on. He said to bring you to him if I found you."

"Well, let's go then. Cause you found me," the girl nodded swaying slightly as she motioned for him to lead on. Then went along as he headed out of the Pit and into the tunnels.

"Where were you, anyway? Eric's been going nuts," Ryland said, looking down at her. "He thought you might have left the compound, but the tracker on your tab wasn't responding, which meant you had to be in the tunnels somewhere that blocks the signal."

Honey shrugged and brushed a curl out of her eyes. "Wouldn't have worked anyway. I sat on it and broke it earlier today."

"So he couldn't track you anyway? Good thing you didn't actually leave, then, I guess." She stumbled over a crack in the tunnel floor, but he caught her and steadied her as they continued on. "Didn't catch you on the cameras either. No one has any clue where you are."

"Well, you do," she pointed out.

"Yeah. I do," Ryland agreed. "It'll take a while to find you."
"But you alread-" The man grabbed Honey by the back of her neck and slammed her into the wall face first. Her cheek rebounded off the stone hard, dazing her already cottony brain further.

"Fucking hurts, doesn't it?" he growled in that same hissing timbre he'd used the night before in Eric's apartment. Fuck, she should have known better than to go off with Ryland! What the fuck was she thinking? "You're gonna really be hurting before I'm done with you."

Honey immediately threw her head back, catching him off guard and slamming her skull into his mouth. Ryland barked in surprise and pain, flinging her to the floor. As she struggled to her feet, the girl heard him spit and grunt angrily.

"You little bitch," he crooned almost playfully. Sure enough, his first punch went straight to her stomach and she'd have collapsed to the floor if not for his hand in her hair. Ryland was bleeding from his mouth, his bottom lip split so badly she could see his teeth. "I know you like it rough. All Eric's little cunts do. So, you're gonna love me."

The bastard punched her again, but this time he let her drop to the ground. He put a boot to her hip and shoved her flat to the stone, then dropped down to straddle her legs. Honey tried to squirm away, but Ryland caught her hair again and pressed something cold and hard to her throat. She froze at the feel of the knife, then cried out when he dragged it across her neck. For a moment, the girl thought that was it, that he'd killed her, but he hadn't. He'd used just enough pressure to cut into her skin, but not so much that the blade went deep enough to do real harm. And he'd done it without hesitation - this wasn't the first time.

Ryland laughed at her, drinking in her fear the way Honey had downed the Wet Dream. "Just a little taste, Honey pie. I'm not nearly done playing with you, yet."

The knife sliced into the back of her pants, making them loose around her hips, and he yanked them down roughly. The hand that was still in Honey's hair wrenched her back hard, making her arch up painfully far. Ryland directed that chilling hiss into her ear.

"I'm gonna make you bleed from every hole," he promised. He slid the tip of the blade into the collar of her shirt and down, slicing the fabric like paper. When he reached the bottom and moved to tuck his weapon away in the little sheath at his waist, Honey grabbed his hand and pushed it down hard. Again, it was a move the man didn't expect, and the blade of his knife sank deep into his own thigh.

Ryland let out a wail of pain and shock, falling back off of her. Honey scrambled forward and turned, kicking the knife handle to drive it even deeper. The man screamed and tipped sideways into the wall, gripping the hilt, but unable to pull it free.

The girl got her feet under her and launched herself at the disgusting waste of flesh in her path, her small fists landing blow after blow. These were not blind punches of mindless rage, but precise strikes that had been drilled into her for weeks. Set one: orbital bone, nose, clavicle, sternum, jaw. Again. Ryland shoved her off, knocking Honey back into the wall. Her head hit the stone again, hard, and this time, she went down. The Chasm rushed in to fill the space between her ears and she was falling forever into black.

Honey came back to the world kicking and screaming, fighting with all she had. Fortunately, it wasn't much and she'd only managed to incapacitate one orderly and savagely bite another before the doctor got her sedated again. She awoke again five minutes later, in a much calmer, if confused state. Hotdog was there, sitting by her bed, eyeing her warily, ready to call the doc back in if she went off
"Hey, sweets," her friend said hesitantly. "You feeling homicidal anymore?"

"I feel like shit," the exhausted, hurting girl said in a raspy voice. Her throat was dry as a desert and filled with broken glass.

"You look worse," the former-Candor told her apologetically, concern etched into every feature. He got up and poured her some water from the pitcher by the bed, then held the cup while she drank. "If it makes you feel better, that orderly you knocked out got to go home for the day."

"What happened, Hots?" Honey demanded, her voice thick and tight and not at all steady. The last thing she remembered was Ryland cutting into her clothes and throwing her into a wall and now she was in a hospital bed and God, please, no, no, no.

He took Honey's hand and brushed his other over her hair lightly, afraid she might shatter. "He didn't rape you." Saying the words was very hard on Hotdog, it was clear, but she was so grateful he hadn't tried to euphemize the situation. The girl squeezed his hand back and covered her face with her other so he wouldn't have to see her tears of relief. "I don't understand, Honey. It was Ryland. He knows you. You work together."

"Yeah, he knows me," she sniffed, wiping her eyes. "What happened?"

"Eric came into security about an hour after lunch and said you were missing. Your tablet tracker wasn't working and he needed to find you immediately for some sensitive issue." Her friend was frowning deeply in confusion and concern. "He was really pissed off. So, he told us to look for you on the monitors and report if we saw you. He came back a dozen times, but we had nothing. Where were you? Did you leave the compound?"

Honey shook her head, but for some reason was reluctant to give up her hiding place. "How did… Who found me? Was it Eric?"

Hotdog shook his head. "No, we did. I saw you in the Pit coming out of that bar. Why were you in a bar? You don't even drink."

"I thought I might take it up. I was having a rough day." Her tone was angry and full of regret. Had Honey known how rough her day was about to get, she'd never have done it. So stupid. No one to blame but herself and her cowardice. "You and…?"

"I saw you and told Zeke. He sent a message to Eric that we'd found you and that you were with Ryland. We thought that was a good thing, like Eric had him looking for you, too. Then he ordered Zeke to go after you; that you weren't safe. So we all took off. Me, Zeke, Laika, all of us except Miren, who stayed to watch where you were going." His frown somehow deepened further, his eyes darkening with fear and anger and hate.

"Ryland really knew what he was doing. You guys just disappeared. We had to split up. Zeke found you and arrested him. Did you stab him in the leg?" She nodded. "Good. Too bad you didn't aim higher."

Honey managed a wan smile and squeezed his hand. "I did. You know I'm terrible with knives."

Hotdog didn't smile at all, but he did tighten his grip on her fingers. "Honey… Ryland, when Zeke got to you, he was c-" He broke off and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "He was cutting letters into your stomach."
Her eyes widened in horror and she immediately tried to pull back the sheets. Hotdog caught her hands and stopped her. "Don't! The doctor said not to let you take off your bandage. Honey, stop!"

She looked up at him, pleadingly. "What does it say? What did he carve into me?!" She started to hyperventilate. Hotdog pressed the call button and the doctor came in to up her sedative. Honey groaned in anguish, both mental and physical. "Tell me what it says!"

"He didn't finish. It just says 'Eric's C-u'."

The girl started to laugh, great, wrenching cackles that tore at her throat and wracked her aching body. It only took a minute for the laughter to die off as the medication kicked in, bringing her back down to some level of calm.

"He was gonna kill me, Hots, and wanted everyone to think it was Eric. He was writing 'Eric's Cunt'," Honey clarified for her friend, who looked so very stricken and it made her feel terrible. "That's what he called me. And it's funny, because that's what I am. Get it?"

She didn't sound like she thought it was funny. Hotdog just looked even more worried and upset.

"Honey..." For once the Candor was at a loss for words. He just reached out and stroked her hair with a shaky hand.

"You don't need to worry," the doctor spoke up, sounding reassuring in that way all medical personnel must be taught in school. "We performed a micro-graft using artificial skin, because the wounds were still fresh. There shouldn't be any evidence of the letters. It'll heal in a few days. The cut on your throat was very superficial, just the first few layers of epidermis, very little blood. You do have a mild concussion, so we're going to monitor your overnight, but you should be fine."

"Yeah, I don't think I'm gonna be fine, doc," Honey snapped, despite being so fucking grateful she couldn't express it. The man didn't seem insulted. They must trained them to be unflappable. Fucking noses. They were the cause of all her woes. The one in the mirror most of all.

"Yes, you are," Hotdog insisted, in a scolding tone. "That piece of shit isn't going to break you. He's nothing."

_You are unbreakable._

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Hots," the girl said, giving his hand a little reassuring jostle, forcing back the tears the memory of Eric's words was drawing up. "Does anyone else know?"

He shook his head. "I haven't left since we got here."

"Good. Don't tell them. I don't want-"

"I don't really care what you want, Honey," her friend declared firmly. "You're not going to try and shoulder this all on your own. I'm telling everyone and we're all coming back in here with cake and food and we're not leaving until you're released. We might just follow you around for the rest of your life, I dunno yet."

Honey couldn't stop the tears, then; big, warm ones that soaked her cheeks and made her breath hitch and hurt her heart, but only because it's a fragile organ and can only hold so much gratitude and love before it aches. She motioned the wonderful loudmouth down so she could hug him and Hotdog carefully rocked her side to side until the tears dried up again.
Chapter End Notes

Yeesh. The kid just can't win.
A Candor always keeps their word, even if they turn Dauntless - especially if they turn Dauntless - and an hour later, despite the staff's protestations, Honey's friends had invaded the infirmary. There were only so many chairs, so Beth sat cross-legged at the foot of the bed, Hotdog leaning half his butt on it beside her. Calhoun was folded into one of the chairs, making it look comically small, Daisy on his lap, and Joseph and Damon sat in the other two. They brought Honey fried sausage balls and chicken with parmesan and carrot sticks and an entire cake - which they were kind enough to help her eat. Calhoun brought his guitar and played for a while, the kind of soft, lilting melodies that reminded her of the better part of Visiting Day.

Apparently, news of her attack and Ryland's arrest had traveled through the faction like wildfire. In addition to her closest and most dear, much to the irritation of the doctor in charge, Honey had a parade of visitors. Four came to check on her, followed by Marta, then Cliff. Jasper, Gertie, and even a shockingly sober and concerned looking Chris. Every single one of her canine officers - the human ones, anyway. Max stopped by in a half-official capacity, but the snide tilt had left his gaze. Several of the initiates came in, which surprised and humbled the girl; Tris and loud Christina with her boyfriend Will. Zeke came in with his little brother, Uriah, who was part of the Dauntless-born initiate class. Even Dante showed up to ban the kid from the Mats until further notice.

Only one person never made an appearance, but Honey wasn't surprised. Hurt, crushed, soul-stealingly bereft, but not surprised. He wouldn't come. And she knew why. I will not disappoint you. She'd failed to keep her promise in so many ways that day. She didn't blame him one bit.

"You people can't stay here all night," the doctor announced, scowling at the group. "Honey is not the only patient here and, besides that, she needs to rest. I'm sorry, but you have to leave."

"We really don't," Daisy contradicted him, not even looking his way.

"He's right, you guys. I'm okay, really," Honey insisted.

"And you're going to stay that way," Beth declared in a rare show of obstinacy. The doctor huffed and straightened his lab coat - white, with black and blue striping down the arms and side seams.

"Two. Two of you can stay," he compromised. "Or I'll have you all removed."

Daisy just snorted as he left the room. She was Patrol, after all and Hotdog was a security officer.
Who was he going to get to remove them?

"There, two. Then you can spell each other for bathroom breaks and naps and I'll never be alone," the girl in the hospital bed said. It was very reasonable.

"Well, I'm staying. I don't care," the squad leader announced defiantly. The others began to talk back and forth to decide who else remained, because they all knew better than to try and contradict Daisy.

"If I can't stay, I'm taking the rest of this cake with me," Hotdog announced.

"Should we cut off a piece for Eric, you think?" Daisy asked, without her usual vitriol. It was kind of her to suspend her dislike of the man while her friend was laid up. Honey's mouth went dry. She took a breath, steeling herself so her voice didn't shake when she told them he wouldn't be coming.

"Do you think they let you bring food down there?" Calhoun asked, stopping the crow's tongue.

"It's worth a shot," Daisy shrugged.

"What are you talking about?" the confused little crow asked. Her friends all looked at her and then at Hotdog who cringed under the scrutiny.

"You didn't tell her?" Beth asked in disbelief.

"I was gonna wait until tomorrow," her boyfriend replied in defense of whatever it was Honey didn't know.

"Are you kidding? She's just been sitting here this whole time, thinking- for fuck's sake, Hotdog!" Joseph turned to the white-haired girl. "Eric's down in the detention center."

"What?" Honey immediately threw off her blankets and tried to get out of bed, only to be waylaid by a big barrier made of former-Amity muscle.

"This is why I was waiting," Hotdog insisted with a huff.

"What happened? Why is he locked up?" Honey demanded, falling back against the bed because it hurt too much to push against the Calhoun-shaped wall.

"He tried to kill Ryland," Joseph supplied the answer. Hotdog expounded, apparently not seeing any point to holding back now that the cat was out of the bag.

"He got here right after we brought you in. Eric asked the doctor if any of your injuries were life threatening and when the doc said you weren't in any danger, he took off. He caught up to Zeke and Laika escorting Ryland to lockup and started wailing on him. It took six guys to pull him off."

"They arrested him for that?" Honey was outraged, but Hotdog shook his head.

"No, they had to lock him up because he tried it again twenty minutes later, down in detention. Max told them just to toss him in a cell until after they take Ryland to Candor in the morning."

Daisy added with a sympathetic frown. "He beat on the cell door for an hour."

Honey covered her face in her hands. That certainly sounded like her monster. Poor Eric. "He must be going out of his mind in there," she groaned miserably. "I have to go see him."

"You are not going down to detention," Hotdog decreed in a steely voice. "He's a leader of Dauntless. He can handle it."
"You don't understand!"

"I don't care."

Honey scowled at him, ready to fight tooth and nail if she had to. The others suddenly burst into laughter, shocking the two of them into bewilderment. Beth leaned into her boyfriend and wrapped her arms around him, kissing his cheek while she giggled.

"It's like he's your dad!" Joseph guffawed, then mimicked in a very unflatteringly shrill impression of Honey. "You don't understand me!"

Daisy took on the role of Hotdog, with a rather accurate tenor. "As long as you live under my roof, you'll obey my rules!"

"I'm gonna run away to Amity and then you'll be sorry!"

"No daughter of mine is gonna be a banjo strummin' softy! Get back in here and finish your cake!"

Everyone started laughing again, even Hotdog. Everyone but Honey, thinking about Eric locked in a box, alone, feet away from the man who tried to take what was his and completely helpless to do anything about it.

Honey tried to leave the room so many times, the doctor threatened to restrain her. And then he made good on that threat. He couldn't sedate her into unconsciousness, because of the concussion, so the girl ended up strapped to the bed so tightly she couldn't move and no amount of pleading could make Daisy and Calhoun - who were the two that stayed - let her loose. She stared at the clock, counting the seconds until morning, until the doctor would let her go, until Ryland would be gone from Dauntless forever, until Eric would be free again. Between the fight with Ryland, her resultant injuries, the constant slow trickle of sedative, the belly full of food warming her from within, and the effort she'd put into struggling with her restraints, Honey didn't even know when a blink turned into sleep the moment her lashes hit her cheeks.

Sometime early that morning, Honey's bladder woke her with a vengeance. She nudged her head against Daisy's to wake the snoozing squad leader who was curled up beside her, one arm thrown protectively over Honey's shoulders. Calhoun had pulled his chair up to the bed and fallen asleep leaning back against the mattress, his feet propped up on another chair and his head resting on Daisy's butt in lieu of a pillow. The whole scene would have been sweet if not for the circumstances.

"Daisy, I gotta pee," Honey grumbled, nudging her again.

"Can't you just hold it?" her friend grumbled right back, nuzzling into the pillow beside Honey's head.

"No, so if you don't get up, I'm gonna aim it at you." Daisy made a sound of disgust and moved to sit up. She paused and looked down at Calhoun's head on her rear with an amused little smile that was full of affection. Normally that would make the snowy crow smile herself, but just now it caused a jolt of pain to lance through her heart and that made her harsher than was warranted. "God, could you hurry the hell up?"
"You never were a morning person." Daisy reached across the girl and pressed the call button on her bed rail. A moment later, a nurse poked his head in the door. "This one has to pee."

Honey was escorted to the bathroom by two very large orderlies who eyed her warily the entire time. That was unnecessary; she wasn't about to run anywhere, feeling about to pop like she was. She absolutely would have tried it afterwards, but they each had a hold of one of her arms and frog-marched her back to the bed and strapped her right back down.

"Feel better, princess?" Daisy asked, tucking the blankets snugly around the scowling girl.

"You know, sometimes I'm glad I broke your nose." The lovely Patrol officer just smiled and kissed Honey's cheek.

"I love you, too. Now, go back to sleep."

But Honey couldn't sleep. Not now that they'd cut the sedative, not now that her stomach was empty and growling. Now that her heart ached like Ryland's knife had cut into it, watching Daisy smile sweetly with her eyes closed as her fingers stroked Calhoun's copper-wool.

Just after seven, the door to Honey's room opened and the doctor came in to change her bandage.

"Keep this new one on until tomorrow. Keep it clean and dry. Then you can take it off and shower, but don't scrub the graft site," he instructed. "As I told you last night, it will only take a few days for the skin to heal, but you'll have some pain until the tissue below mends. I'm prescribing a mild painkiller and an antibiotic."

"You can keep your painkiller," Honey sneered.

"Honey's not into mind altering substances," Daisy supplied, making up for her friend's bad attitude.

"Then don't take it," the doc shrugged. "But I'm giving it to you, anyway."

Honey just glowered silently until the doctor left. Then, she just glared up at the ceiling. She almost told her friends they could leave, but didn't bother, knowing they wouldn't listen. She almost told them to stop smiling at each other, but didn't, knowing they'd make her explain why. If those pills the doctor prescribed could work on a broken heart, she'd have taken the whole bottle.

At precisely eight am, a cheerful orderly brought a tray of food for Honey. The famished girl curled her lip at its contents. Rubber eggs that were an unnatural shade of dandelion yellow, burnt bacon, dry wheat toast, a handful of grapes, and a small bowl of what was either the slimiest oatmeal she'd ever seen or baby vomit. Calhoun went to the mess and brought back two trays for the three of them to share, full of fluffy pancakes, properly cooked bacon and sausage, buttered toast, orange slices, and the carrot sticks Honey liked to end her meals with.

Daisy fed Honey, since the young sub was still tied down. It all smelled delicious, but the girl may as well have been eating the hospital "food", because she didn't taste a bite. The growling in her gut had ceased, but the meal did nothing to loosen the knot in her stomach.

At eight thirty, a worker came in and changed the garbage, then ran a quick mop over the floor. At eight forty-five, a female nurse entered to check Honey's blood pressure and pulse and ask her several questions about how she was feeling, while checking the dilation of her pupils. This wasn't the girl's first concussion, so she barely paid attention at all and Daisy had to nudge her twice to give
the nurse an answer.

Just before nine o'clock the door opened again and Honey didn't bother looking, not caring about whatever disapproving expression was on the orderly's face that the infirmary tray hadn't been touched or who was there to clean what or what pills the doctor had come to give her. She just wanted them to unbuckle her fucking straps and let her go.

"Get out."

Honey's head snapped up and she gasped, eyes wide, heart stilled in her chest. Eric looked awful. His hair was a mess and his shirt untucked and wrinkled. He looked paler than usual and drawn. Dark half-moons of exhaustion underscored his abnormally dull gray eyes. His knuckles were raw and scabbed over with dried blood.

Daisy looked to Honey in question, but the girl only saw the man standing just inside the door. Her friends stood as one and walked towards the exit. Just as they reached Eric, the leader opened his mouth as if to speak, but didn't. Instead, he gave a single, curt nod that acknowledged what he didn't need to say - thanking them for staying with her.

"We saved you a piece of cake," Daisy told him softly, nodding back towards the beside supply station, where a slice of chocolate cake rested on a paper towel. Then, she and Calhoun left, with just a glance back at Honey and a wave. The door shut and the lovers… former lovers were alone, staring silently at each other.

Eric walked slowly to the bed and every step was like a beat of Honey's heart, sending the cruelest anguish surging through her veins in place of blood. He stopped beside her and reached out to the band holding her chest to the bed. There was another across her waist, which the girl's wrists were strapped down to and one for her ankles as well. He unbuckled her without a word, but more importantly, very deliberately without touching her.

Honey couldn't stand the silence and by the time he'd freed her hands, she broke.

"I'm sorry, Eric," she choked out. His eyes jumped to hers in surprise. "I'm so sorry."

For a long, brutal moment, the man only stared at her, then he looked away and shook his head, focusing on her restraints once more, unstrapping her feet and freeing her entirely. "You don't have to apologize to me. I don't need it."

Honey's heart shattered and as much as she'd sworn to herself she wouldn't do anything to make Eric feel worse about the situation, the over-stressed girl couldn't help it and burst into tears. Eric had never seen her actually cry, not once in all the time they'd known each other, in all the harsh situations he'd seen the girl endure. The sight seemed to startle him and he drew back to look at her in irritated bewilderment.

"Why are you crying?"

Honey covered her face and sobbed into her hands, shrugging her shoulders helplessly.

"Well, stop then." She shook her head. She couldn't stop. Eric leaned his head back and took a deep breath, then puffed it out at the ceiling.

"Fine, if it makes you feel better, go ahead and apologize. Tell me how sorry you are," he said the words with weary resignation.

"I was so stupid," Honey said in a rush against her palms, her words crowded and stuttering. "I don't
"deserve any of it. I'm such a coward. And I didn't even think. And Ryland. And they wouldn't let me out-"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Eric demanded. The girl looked up at him with wide eyes ringed with pink, puffy skin, tears streaking down her face.

"Everything," she insisted. "You told me everything I wanted to know and I ran away like a fucking coward! And then I was stupid and too drunk to recognize Ryland as a threat and I couldn't even fight him off and this happened. And you got locked in a fucking cell because of it. And I couldn't make them let me go so I could go to you last night, an-"

"Honey, stop," he reached for her arms, but Honey pushed his hands away.

"No! I'm so, so sorry I'm not the person you thought I was, Eric. And I let you down so bad. I'm so sorry."

"You're exactly who I think you are. How have you let me down?" he asked, angry and confused.

"I couldn't stop him!" she all but wailed. "All that training for nothing! And I ran away from you! Look at me; I'm such a fucking disappointment!"

Eric knocked her hands away, catching her face between his own as he sat on the bed and looked into her tear-filled eyes. The dull cast was gone from his own gaze, leaving it sharp and clear. "I told you, no matter what you do, you will not disappoint me. Ever."

She did stop. Stopped and stared, brows up and together, eyes so wide and kittenish. You will not disappoint me. Said with such force and authority. The girl thought he'd meant she wasn't allowed to disappoint him. He was telling her she couldn't.

"Do you understand?" She nodded. She understood now. "When were you drunk?"

"I went to a bar in the Pit," Honey admitted with much shame, but without hesitation. "I thought if my mind was numb, it would be easier to apologize for running away and hiding. I was an idiot and when Ryland-"

"You managed to break his nose and collar bone and stick him with his own knife. While you were drunk. If you'd been sober, you'd have killed him." He said it like it was a given, like she was stupid for not already knowing.

"You should have known better than to meet you on the roof, anyplace so wide open. You hate being caught off guard. What did I expect you to do?" Eric shook his head, brushing his thumbs under her eyes and carefully wiping away the tears. "I could have killed Ryland the instant I got my hands on him, but I had to hurt him first. It's my own fault I ended up in that cell, Honey. Not yours."

"I don't understand," Honey said, laying her hands over his.

"I'm not angry with you," he told her. "I don't blame you for what happened. It's as much my fault as yours. Actually, it's much more my fault than yours."

"Then why were you so cold?" she pleaded, searching his eyes beseechingly. "Why did you tell me to apologize like that? Like you didn't want to hear anything I had to say?"

Eric sighed and took her hands in his and placed them into her lap. "I thought you were apologizing because you felt bad about not loving me anymore; because what we have is over."
Honey snatched her hands away and mimicked him, catching hold of his face. "I'd have to be dead to stop loving you," she told the stupid man fiercely, scowling at even the thought of it. "I'd have to be dead and gone and even then I'm not so sure, Eric. Don't you ever think that again. I don't care about Jeanine Matthews or Divergents or that you don't want me anymore. I will never stop loving you."

He caught her elbows and pulled her arms as he leaned in, so her hands slipped off his cheeks and over his shoulders. "How could you think I wouldn't want you?" he murmured in astonishment an instant before his lips met hers.

Honey's arms tightened around him as she pressed into the kiss with a needy sound. He still wanted her. He still loved her. She was still his. The girl had to get closer, she could never be close enough. She crawled into his lap and Eric shifted to sit further on the bed, helping her, wrapping her legs around his waist. Her patient's gown was open down the back, baring her to the room and anyone who came in from the base of her neck to her ass, but that didn't matter. Nothing mattered, only that Eric was there, holding her; hers.

She rocked against him and he shushed against her lips, laying a hand on her hip to still her movements. Honey whined into his mouth, pleading and needy. He stroked her back soothingly and she melted against him, her lips slipping away from his as her head fell to rest on his shoulder. Eric buried his face in her white curls, his warm breath huffing against the back of her skull.

"I'm a heartless man, but I do love you," he murmured into her hair. "If I have a soul left at all, it's yours. Always."

"You're not heartless, Eric." Honey kissed his shoulder, stroking her fingers firmly against the back of his neck and the base of his skull.

"Not anymore," he conceded, barely above a whisper. "You're my heart."

She sniffled and tried to pull back, so she could look at him, but he wouldn't let her go even that far and the knots inside her were slowly loosening because of it. Eric rested his forehead against hers, their breaths mingling together.

"Make love to me," Honey begged in a whisper.

The man shook his head, his skin moving against hers. "You're hurt. I'm not gonna make it worse."

"You're the only thing that can make it better," she insisted. "Please, I want to be whole again."

"You are," Eric assured her, brushing their lips together. "You're so much stronger than you think. I wish… If you could just see yourself, Honey. You'd never feel like you weren't enough ever again."

"Eric, I thought I'd lost you. I-"

"You can't lose me." His words were steel set into stone and he sealed them with a soft kiss.

"Please." Honey's plea was spoken fervently against his lips. "I'm begging you, Eric. I need it. It's wonderful and clean and I can't take a shower and I need to wash yesterday off me."

Eric kissed her again and nodded and she could have wept with relief because he understood. Maybe she did a little. He carefully lifted her off his lap, depositing her on the bed, then went to the door. There was no lock. Opening it, he leaned out and barked an order at the first person he saw that no one was to come into her room or he'd see them and whoever interrupted him Factionless. The person was quite perceptive and protested.
"Sir, you can't do that here!"

"I do whatever I want, wherever I want and if you want to stay in Dauntless, you'll follow my orders and make sure I'm not disturbed," the leader said in a dangerous tone that could not be defied. He shut the door again without another word and when Eric turned around, Honey expected to see that hard, authoritarian expression on his face. Instead, he was looking at her as though she was something impossibly fragile that he needed to protect at all cost, which he was trying very hard to keep from devouring.

She immediately reached up and untied the knot that held her gown closed, while Eric's long legs made short work of the space between them and he sat back down on the bed. When she pulled the garment away, he stiffened, his face twisting into a shifting mask of rage and disgust and guilt and fear. Her belly was covered in a thick white bandage and they both knew why it was there, what had happened to her. Honey shifted onto her knees and reached for her lover. The determined crow wasn't going to let Ryland have any control over her; she wouldn't let him make her ashamed of her body.

Eric pulled her back into his lap without hesitation and his mouth took hers, demanding everything she could give, because she needed to let out everything. His body was hard and tense, the muscles corded along his arms flexing with heavy strain. Conversely, his embrace was so very careful, his touch impossibly light and gentle as he gathered her close and set himself the task of touching his fingertips to every last inch of her body. Honey pulled his shirt up and off, pressing herself to his chest with a grateful sigh. The soft curls were such a blissfully welcome warm tickle against her skin that she shivered. The girl brushed against her lover like a cat seeking to be stroked and he purred encouragingly into her mouth.

Eric's hands petted their way down her back to palm her ass, squeezing gently. The fingers of one hand dipped lower, sliding between the folds of her pussy to find her already slick and hot. He groaned, pushing the digits into her and making his lover respond in kind.

"I'm going to go so slow, Honey," he murmured against her lips. "Don't push. Stay with me."

She nodded, scraping her nails gently against his short, buzzed hair as his fingers sent little ripples of pleasure through her. He did go slow, taking his time to ensure she was as ready as possible. More than ready. Aching. Burning. Then he tipped her over the edge as gently as he could, kissing the groans as they fell from her lips when she spasmed around his fingers and shook against his chest.

Normally, her demanding, impatient lover would have pushed his cock inside her pussy while Honey was still twitching from climax, but Eric was nothing if not determined. He waited, holding and stroking her until the girl's breathing was even, before reaching between them to open his fly. Her heart leapt as his erection was freed, rising proud and hard just bare inches from where she needed it with every fiber of her being.

Honey curled her fingers around his shaft, measuring his length with a stroke of her palm and Eric didn't stop her. He cupped her backside with both hands, lifting her and pulling her hips toward his belly so she could guide him into her easily. They both moaned with relief when his dick slipped inside her channel, filling the girl in a gorgeously smooth motion that made her feel whole and new.

"Yours," she whispered. He nodded.

"Mine." That sentiment went both ways. Felt like coming home. Again, the man waited, just breathing, letting her feel him deep within her, only taking action when Honey made a quiet sound of want and started to squirm.
"Let me do the work," Eric ordered and pleaded at the same time. "Just relax and let me, Honey, please."

"Anything you want," she assured him, nodding several times. His shoulders relaxed at her promise, but only for a moment before his muscles bunched under the girl's fingers. He lifted her, letting his cock slip nearly all the way out before bringing her body back down onto him, pushing back inside her pussy with a rumbling growl of pleasure. Honey sighed against his jaw, remaining passive and accepting as Eric moved her, doing all the work, making her ride him at a beautifully torturous slow pace.

When her head fell back, he kissed and nuzzled her neck as though the bandage that covered the gulch Ryland's knife had sliced into her throat wasn't there, as though it didn't matter. It didn't. Nothing mattered but Honey and Eric and the love and pleasure that existed between them, that they gave each other freely, without reserve and demanded back again because they were owed no less.

She told him how much she loved him, how beautiful and wonderful he was, how good he was making her feel and how grateful she was that he was so very strong in so many ways and could give her what she needed. Eric shivered, his muscles rippling under Honey's words and the worshipful stroking of her hands. He didn't speak, she didn't think he could. Instead, he showed her without words; every slow rise and fall on his length, every brush of his lips and tongue, every hitched breath and groan, every rapid, pounding beat of his heart telling the girl she was loved and cherished and, more important to her, that he knew he was, as well.

When Honey's body finally reached the shining pinnacle of bliss that Eric spent an eternity building for them, she didn't shatter - she melted into molten light and he was right there with her, moaning her name like a prayer as they shook in each other's arms. The luscious, lustrous liquid heat slowly solidified into achingly sweet, perfect peace.

Eric and Honey lay in the hospital bed for hours more, at last finding the restful sleep that had been impossible during the night.

Chapter End Notes

Phew, scared ya for a second there; didn't I?

So many feels!
Going Forward

Chapter Summary

Honey and Eric move forward after the Ryland attack

Chapter Notes

Some more feels in this chapter, guys.

Ryland was tried in a closed court at Candor that afternoon. Under the effects of truth serum, all the horrifying facts came spilling out. He had intended to kill the young crow and implicate her lover, seeing Eric's very public, furious search for her as the perfect incrimination. The secretary had not been motivated by the need to strike back at Eric for attacking him the previous night; that would just be a lovely secondary outcome of his actions. As the assistant of a leader of Dauntless, Ryland was primed and ready to become the next ancillary leader of the faction - until Honey had come along. She'd taken the office he felt was his and when the opportunity to punish her for that presented itself, the man been unable to resist.

Honey would have been the first woman he'd killed, but she had been right thinking herself far from the first he'd ever used his knife on. Ryland listed half a dozen names, but those were only the ones he could remember; there were more besides and those who's names he never knew. Few Dauntless, young women who were too afraid and ashamed to speak out; mostly Factionless, who had no one to speak out. He was executed an hour later. Eric, as a leader, was afforded the opportunity to carry out the sentence. He accepted with relish. Honey never wanted to see Ryland's face again and waived her right to view the execution, staying buried under Eric's blankets until her lover drew her back into the world so she could eat something.

The next morning, Calhoun, Beth, and Eric's friends Xander and Brent helped move Eric's things into Honey's quarters - because her apartment was the bigger of the two and Eric had fewer possessions to move. His bed replaced hers, his white-barked tree now basked in the true sunlight that shone through her windows, his questionable books waited to be read between his maroon sofa and her over-large, gray recliner.

The man cancelled every meeting for the next three days, staying by her side every moment. He worked from a computer station set up in the corner of her tiny office as though nothing were out of the ordinary about that and accompanied her to wherever Four and Lauren had their class training when not in sim and amused himself by horrifying the initiates.

While Honey's friends handled her with kid gloves, Eric refused to give her any concession, because she was not weak or broken and he wouldn't coddle her as thought she were. She was to go to work every morning and take her meals in the mess as usual with her chin high. He even insisted they continue her training - if the little Dauntless could take on someone as experienced and brutal as Ryland and nearly kill the man while being hampered by drunkenness, then the young leader had been taking it too easy on her. He pushed her even harder, until her knuckles bled. Honey loved him
fiercely for all of it.

The only time Eric's manner softened was when he took her in his arms after she'd washed away the sweat and tension of the day. There his touch was gentle and reverent and constant, until she came undone beneath his fingers, or mouth, or body, or all of the above. Then he wrapped his massive self around her smaller form in what was now their bed and Honey knew it made him feel as safe and whole as it did her.

"I have a meeting at Candor this afternoon," Eric told Honey on the fourth day as he folded a warm flatbread around the eggs, peppers, and sausage he'd taken from the brazier in the center of the table. "I should be back in time for dinner, but I can't be sure."

Honey nodded. So, today he would set his little bird free once more. She hid her soft smile behind a bite of pancakes. Not that the girl felt anything resembling being trapped or smothered by his constant presence and watchful gaze the passed few days. Far from it; it felt good to have him there. It also felt good now, knowing he was confident she would be fine on her own. Eric really was a wonderful man when he wasn't so damned Eric.

"Alright. Lockbox has an early set down in the concert district," Honey informed him. "So, if I don't see you for dinner, just come find me there."

He nodded without pause or hesitation, not even a flick of his eyes to indicate an iota of doubt or worry that she would be just fine. Her heart warmed at his faith. It bolstered her own. There was an infuriating, niggling little worm of a feeling that kept trying to find purchase in her mind, in her chest. A seed of misgiving that wanted to take root, to grow into a choking vine of fear and self-doubt. Ellis hadn't been the only person in Dauntless that wanted to really hurt her. Ryland wouldn't be the last. Even now, there might be someone in the mess watching the girl, waiting for the chance to strike out and bring her down low.

Honey's own inner strength kept her spine straight and her head high, but she'd be lying to herself if she didn't admit that Eric's confidence shored up her steely constitution with stone supports.

"Does that little singer of theirs still have a crush on you?" Eric asked amused, his brow lifting with a glint off the studs as he took a bite of his flatbread wrap.

"If I say yes, are you going to get jealous?" she teased with a cheeky smirk. He eyed her thoughtfully while chewing.

"If I say no, are you going to flirt with him to try and make me jealous?" he finally asked in place of an answer. Honey's smirk turned into an impish grin.

"Would that work?"

Eric wiped a crumb from his lip. "No." The girl's resultant playful pout made him chuckle. Then Honey's lips curled slowly into a wicked little knowing smile.

"What if I told you Jasper was my first kiss?" she asked, smooth and insinuating.

He snorted with derisive skepticism, but paused in his chewing when her smile only grew. "Was he?"

Honey nodded slowly, looking just a bit smug. He swallowed the bite. "And, you know, he had a
very exciting challenge for me on Dare Day."

"Which you declined," Eric pointed out without question. She shrugged. The young leader licked his lips, eyes narrowed. "Careful. You're walking a fine line, here, Honey."

"Oh am I?" she challenged cavalierly. "Between?"

"Between me throwing you over my shoulder and carrying you out of the concert district and me breaking your little friend in half," he informed her, his voice just a shade above a growl. Oh, that sent a tingle right through her, but she certainly didn't want Jasper hurt due to her teasing. Honey's face split into a wide, tickled grin.

"Then, he'll have a crush on you, too!" she declared in an elated squeak. The ridiculous, yet very possibly true comment shocked Eric into loud, booming laughter that startled several of the people around them.

"Don't get any ideas," he warned her when his mirth subsided, still chuckling as he spoke.

"Too late," the girl said. She motioned at her temple. "Full of ideas."

"Well, forget them," Eric ordered. "Not gonna happen."

"Dare Day's only three years away," Honey grinned. "And I believe I owe you a challenge."

Eric rolled his eyes and she giggled happily, then kissed his bicep - half to apologize for the teasing and half just because she could, because he let her do that sort of thing, even if it was bad for his Most Dangerous Man in Dauntless image. And because he liked it so much when she did.

"Did you see the girl from Amity? Did you see the black eye she gave to me? I think I'll get it tattooed in place, her pretty fist print on my face."

Honey sat on what had somehow become the group's designated couch, leaning her head on Hotdog's shoulder, her feet curled up under her, as Jasper crooned about the prettiest Amity girl he ever saw and how she punched him in the face when he kissed her on Dare Day. The song always made Honey smile; knowing Jasper, it was probably based on true events. Beth was sitting on Hotdog's other side, feeding him bits of a cinnamon roll the couple was sharing. Damon was lounging on the floor with his back against the sofa and Joseph was laying beside him with his head in the blonde man's lap. Daisy was perched, as usual, on the back of the couch, because it afforded her the best view.

"There's a dodgeball tournament going on in the southside sports annex next week," Damon said, looking up at the others.

"Dodgeball?" Hotdog asked, licking a bit of icing from his lip.

"Yeah. You've played it before, right?" The Candor-born shook his head.

"We didn't grow up throwing shit at each other, babe," Joseph scoffed up at his lover. Damon gave him a light, playful slap.

"Don't you sass me." They both chuckled at what was clearly a long running in-joke between them. "It's not a hard game. Two teams throw a bunch of balls at each other and try not to get hit, while
trying to hit someone on the other team."

"What kind of balls are we talking about?" Beth asked with a silly grin. Both Hotdog and Honey snorted at her awful attempt at innuendo, but Damon missed it entirely.

"Just regular gym balls, like kids play with," he assured the dark-haired weapons designer. "I mean, it stings like hell when you get hit in the face, but it's not dangerous at all. It's just a lot of fun chaos."

"And you're bringing it up, why?" Daisy asked from high above.

"I thought we could enter the tourney. We've got enough for a team," Damon answered, leaning his head all the way back to look up at her. He tugged Joseph's hair. "This one's got a great arm. I know you're really agile. Beth, you're wiry. Honey's, like, the smallest target possible. Calhoun can be our bruiser. And Hotdog probably won't embarrass himself."

"I'm not entirely sure how I feel about that statement," the unlikely to embarrass one said thoughtfully.

"Me either," Honey agreed. "The only thing I offer is that I don't offer much?"

"You could offer to convince your boyfriend to sign up, too." Joseph laughed, then said, "We'd always win, because no one would throw at him."

"I have trouble picturing Eric playing anything," Beth mused.

"I have trouble saying 'Eric' and 'playing' in the same sentence," Hotdog said in agreement. Daisy nudged Honey with her knee.

"Is he playful, sweets? Huh?" she asked, teasingly. A little flush of pink rose in the little Dauntless's cheeks. Eric could be very playful, though it was usually followed by something that left her with fresh marks on her skin and an exhausted smile on her face.

"No, he's not," a firm, unamused voice intruded on the conversation. Honey bit her bottom lip to hold in a giggle that said otherwise as Eric looked over her friends with regal disdain.

"Yeah, I didn't think so," Daisy said flatly, unimpressed.

In the last few days, something in the dynamic between Honey's friends and her lover had shifted and some sort of understanding had been reached that the girl couldn't quite grasp. Maybe it was the way they'd all rallied around her in support and protectiveness in the infirmary. Maybe it was the way Eric had gotten himself locked up attempting to kill Ryland and the bruises that still showed on his arms and the sides of his palms where he'd beaten on and thrown himself into his cell door trying to get out to finish the job. Maybe it was that everyone in the faction knew the first thing the young leader did after his release was go straight to Honey's room and comfort her in a very loud way, where most men would be too put off or afraid to even touch a woman after such an ordeal.

Likely it was that Eric no longer viewed her friends as pathetic initiates, but as a solid support system that could and did bolster and care for Honey when he could not. Likely it was that her friends saw a little of her monster's human side when he turned up in her room that morning, disheveled and exhausted, guilty and angry, and so very obviously loving her to the point of anguish.

Whatever the case, the animosity the group had always harbored and displayed (especially Daisy) towards Eric had simply faded away. As much as he was looking down on them now, the derision in his gaze was paper thin and Honey knew he was glad they were with her. It was hard to really accept, let alone appreciate, that anything good could come from what had happened to her. The girl
was so very thankful that all the most important people in her life weren’t at odds with each other anymore, yet had to struggle against the reflexive bitterness that rose up knowing that it had taken her nearly being killed for that to happen. As much as Honey refused to let it break her, Ryland’s violation touched every corner of her life and it would take her a long time to scrub him away.

"I’ll see you guys tomorrow," the girl told her friends, shifting away from Hotdog’s shoulder. She stretched her limbs and stood, but Eric did something none of them could have predicted.

"No rush," he said simply and sat himself down, right there on the couch, his long legs just an inch from Damon’s shoulder, and pulled Honey down into his lap. She was too shocked to even comment as he gathered her to his chest. For a brief moment, her friends all stared, in just as much disbelief as the little crow nestled in the leader's arms. Then they all quickly looked away, not wanting to offend the man or embarrass their friend.

Honey was floored. And so very touched by the gesture. She knew with everything she was that Eric loved her, but sometimes the way he showed it struck her like a bolt. Her heart swelled and thumped achingly in her chest. The girl tucked her head under his chin, turned into his throat just a little as she rode the wave of emotion until it crested and left her floating in a sea of sweet content. In the spirit of being perfectly frank, there was also a soft undercurrent of amusement at how very awkward this must be for everyone besides herself that Honey very much enjoyed.

The song about the Amity girl ended with her turning up on Choosing Day and blowing Jasper a kiss with her middle finger before jumping off the ledge. Honey chuckled; she liked that part the best.

"She's Dauntless now, my pretty Amity. Did you see the sweet kiss she to blew me? Inked into my heart, she's there to stay. And I'm countin' the seconds til' the next Dare Day!"

All at once the conversation from breakfast came back to Honey and she laughed and laughed. Eric made a sound of disgust.

"I changed my mind. It's time to go," he announced wholly unamused. That just tickled the girl in his lap even more.

"Aren't you enjoying the music?" she grinned up at her lover. He shoved her off of him and stood, clearly expecting her to do the same.

"Well, it was fun while it lasted," Damon chuckled from the floor. When Honey didn't get up, Eric took hold of her arm and pulled her to her feet. She couldn't resist goading him further. It was his own fault for doing something so sweet in the first place and putting her into such a good mood.

"Wait; I've got to say goodnight to Jasper!" the beaming imp of a girl insisted, tugging from his hold. She squealed as Eric made good on his word and grabbed her up, tossing her over his shoulder like the caveman Marta always suspected him of being.

When her stomach hit the hard muscle of his shoulder, Honey's gleeful laughter hiccupped as a throb of pain jolted through her. She immediately forced herself to keep giggling, though the sound was a bit thinner and a little strained. Eric stiffened, recognizing the source of her discomfort. Thankfully, he only paused for a moment before turning on his heel and carrying the girl away from her stunned friends. Honey was grateful. The pain she could handle, so long as she believed it was nothing, meaningless. If Eric behaved in any way contrary to that belief, his concern would only feed her doubt; it could give that hateful, choking seed the chance to burrow so deep into the little Dauntless, she might never dig it out again.
Honey had been eagerly anticipating just what it was her jealous caveman would do once he got her back to their quarters. Apparently, it was carefully undress her and devour her pussy until she screamed and then slowly fuck her until she saw stars. Not quite what the girl had expected, given that cavemen weren't known for their gentle natures, but it wasn't as though she could complain. Eric was amazing. Still...

Once she could feel all her toes again, Honey slipped out of bed, leaving the lazy man there to smile contentedly to himself, and went to take a shower. That had been the plan, anyway, but now the girl just stood in front of the big mirror that covered the wall behind her sink and stared at her belly as the shower ran empty behind her. She wasn't entirely familiar with the micrograft procedure, but had assumed it involved covering the cuts with thin strips of artificial skin. Not so. The surgeon had peeled back the top layers of her own skin all around the injuries and grafted the replacement over the whole.

There was no visual evidence of Ryland's letters, only two strips of what truly looked like flesh, just slightly paler than Honey's own milky skin. The edges of the strips were outlined in pink that had faded much from the bright, angry red which had been there when the girl first removed her bandage - actually, it had been Eric who removed the bandage. It had been Eric who ran his fingertips so lightly over the skin she couldn't feel because it wasn't hers and Eric who carefully washed away the iodine and blood left over from the surgery.

Honey felt ants crawling along her skin and shuddered, fighting the urge to dig her nails into the grafts and tear them away, revealing the letters below. The doctor assured her that the cuts weren't deep enough to cause any significant scarring and the graft medium would prevent any visible indication that the injuries ever existed. The cut on her throat had already begun to heal and fade; it really had been almost a non-injury.

"In a month, it'll be like nothing even happened," the doc had said, with solemn reassurance. What the fuck did he know? It would never be like nothing happened.

Ryland's marks might not show, but Honey knew they were there. She could feel them, like the bastard was inside her. Like he was hiding away within her body and it made her sick. If she couldn't see something, how could she fight it? The girl contemplated getting a knife and ruining all the doctor's good work, just so she'd be able to see the poison that son of a bitch had left beneath her skin.

It wouldn't be difficult. If Honey touched her belly, she could feel the cuts; she could trace the pain of every letter. She needed to see them. It was driving her insane. The girl reached under the sink, into the box that held her meager supply of makeup and closed her fingers around the single tube of lipstick she owned. Bright, Dauntless red; fitting. With slow precision, she followed the ache under her flesh and carved carmine letters into her visage.

E-R-I-C-'S
C-U

Setting the lipstick down, Honey stared at the symbols. Ryland's mockery of what she and Eric shared shone garishly upon her skin. She was Eric's, in a way a creature like Ryland could never comprehend. God, she wanted to cut the letters from her flesh. Dig deep and gouge them out until nothing remained and let the blood wash away the taint he'd left behind. This was her body. This was Eric's body. His desecration did not belong.
All at once a feeling of strange certainty slid its way up Honey's back, climbing the ladder of her spine, over her shoulders, to settle into her chest. It didn't belong. This was her body and the only way a person could truly mark it was if she let them. The only person Honey allowed that privilege was Eric. Eric's hands, Eric's mouth, Eric's touch and voice were the only things that could etch themselves into her flesh. There was no Ryland. He was nothing. He could never touch her in a way that held any meaning.

She picked up the lipstick again and smirked, superior and steely and powerful as she painted the color over her skin. The C became an O so very easily. A U made a fine lazy V.

ERIC'S LOVE

Honey smiled. Fuck you, Ryland. Rot in hell.

She stepped into the shower and washed away the red along with the sweat of the day and the slickness Eric had left so graciously on her inner thighs. She used his shampoo, because she could and liked it when she caught a whiff of the fragrance while she worked and they were apart. Honey stood before the mirror again, drying her hair and looking at her body. It was strange and still held the echoes of discomfort, letting her gaze move over her own form. Always so soft. But she was strong inside and wasn't that what mattered?

The bathroom door opened as the girl ruminated and Eric stepped into the room. "I was starting to get lonely," he said in explanation. She could see from his reflection that the man was concerned, but trying not to show it. Anyone else might have been fooled, but he'd let Honey see too much of himself to hide anymore. To think Eric had once been totally unreadable. Now she usually knew what he was feeling at a glance.

"You could have joined me, you know," she told him, hoping her affectionate smile would be reassuring. One side of his mouth quirked upwards.

"The point of a shower is to get cleaner, not more dirty."

"We'd get clean eventually," Honey insisted with a cheeky grin. The man seemed to relax a bit then, moving behind her to take the towel from her hands and take over her task.

"I don't know, it seems like a vicious cycle to me," Eric mused, ruffling her hair, then stroking the rough fabric over her neck and shoulders. "You're all wet and slippery, either I've got my hands all over you or you've got yours on me or I'm watching you rub soap all over that delicious body of yours."

Delicious? He clearly thought so. That made Honey blush and smile shyly. He'd been looking down at the top of her head as he said it, but happened to glance up and catch her eye just then. Eric groaned and dropped his forehead against her still damp, wildly mussed curls.

"Fuck, Honey, I'm trying to have a conversation with you. Stop looking so damn innocent and tempting, please," he complained, which made her giggle. "That's not helping!"

"I'm sorry," Honey said, the very picture of contrition. "Go on with what you were saying. I'll try to be more dour."

He snorted into her hair, but did go back to drying her and speaking. "So, all of that would just get me hard as a rock and you'd end up against the tiles or, if I was a lucky boy, on your knees. Either way, you end up dirty all over again. So, we'd need to get you cleaned up and do you see where I'm
"Someplace sexy," the girl immediately broke her promise to be serious. Eric frowned and shook his head, but still chuckled anyway. "You're not making a compelling case against showering together, you know. I'm not seeing a downside."

"Eventually we'd pass out from heat stroke or low blood sugar," he smirked at her in the mirror. Honey snapped her fingers ruefully.

"Damn. And you can't bring a chocolate cake into a shower." The man grinned and agreed, no you could not. "I think I'm going to get another tattoo tomorrow."

If the subject change surprised him, Eric didn't show it. He just tossed the towel aside and started combing the tangles from her hair with his fingers. "Oh yeah? Not of a chocolate cake."

The girl rolled her eyes good-naturedly. "No. I haven't really decided yet, but I want something new. Any suggestions?"

Her lover brushed her hair back over her ears, then wrapped his arms around her and nuzzled her temple. "You could get my name across your ass like your friend Joseph."

Honey gasped in shock. "Joseph got your name tattooed on his ass?!" she demanded. Eric's head slipped from her skull to her shoulder as he laughed heartily. It never ceased to fill the girl with self-satisfaction when she got the severe leader to do that.

He kissed her shoulder, then stood up straight again, eyeing her appraisingly in the mirror. "Just one request. Don't get it someplace I like to put my mouth."

The girl clucked her tongue off the roof of her mouth in annoyance. "That severely limits my options, Eric."

He smirked at her, then lifted his arms away. "Fine. Just not here or here." Tracing the fingers of one hand across her shoulders and throat and the other over her breasts. Then, sliding both hands down over her thighs and between, "Or here. Okay?"

Honey licked her lips. The flush his words had brought up in her cheeks now deepened and spread from the touch of his hands. She opened her mouth to agree, but a thought popped into her mind that waylaid her. Laying her own hand over his much larger one, she turned her thigh outward.

"What about right here?" Eric's eyes darkened in the mirror and she leaned back against him lazily.

"What would you get there?" he asked, his voice markedly lower than a moment before.

"That bruise you gave me the first time you used your amazing mouth to get me off," Honey purred, reaching up her free hand to stroke her fingers against said amazing mouth. The man parted his lips and caught her fingertip between his teeth. She shivered. "It was so pretty. I liked looking at it."

"I'll do it again," Eric breathed around her finger. The girl shrugged sadly.

"But it'll just fade again." He all but spit out her finger and grabbed her, spinning Honey around and shoving her against the sink. The man loomed over the girl, huge and imposing, crowding her against the counter.

"Then I'll give you another one," he rumbled, almost menacing. Eric dropped to his knees and pushed her legs apart. Honey braced her hands against the countertop as he tossed one thigh over his...
shoulder and pushed the other one up and aside, surveying it with slow intensity. "You just have to ask."

"Please," she begged immediately and shamelessly. He purred in approval, nuzzling her sensitive skin. Honey grabbed his hair tightly and pulled, in no mood for his slow, teasing displays of dominance tonight. "Please, Eric. Give me a pretty mark I can look at and touch when I'm sitting in my office wishing you were fucking me."

Well, that had the desired effect. With a harsh growl, he struck like a snake, sinking his teeth into her thigh and making her shriek and arch her spine so far it cracked. Eric released the bite quickly, but instead of soothing it with kisses and licks as he had the first time, the man nipped at his teeth marks sharply. Honey cried out and squirmed, yanking at his hair ineffectually. When she shouted his name desperately, her lover abandoned the bite and buried his tongue inside her soaked and aching pussy.

The girl groaned in relief and pleasure, but the sound broke off into a high squeak when Eric laid his hand over the injury he'd just inflicted and squeezed her thigh. Honey was lost, caught up in a mind wrecking swirl of pleasure and pain and fuck, if she'd known it could be like this, she'd have attacked the precious brutal leader the morning he walked in on her early practice session so long ago. He shoved his fingers into her channel, fucking her mercilessly with the digits as he sucked hard at her clit. Honey wanted to scream, but couldn't breathe deeply enough to make that happen, so she just sobbed an attempt at his name and came apart at the seams.

Eric groaned heavily as she squeezed his fingers, not stopping to even let her catch her breath before viciously demanding a second orgasm from the shaking, whining girl. Her mind was a white expanse of glorious sensation and she gave the wonderful man everything she had. Honey had known she missed his harsh touch the last few days, but hadn't realized just how much. His hard attentions left her spent and shivering, leaning back against the cool glass of the mirror.

"Mmm, thank you. You're so good to me," the girl sighed, so very blissful as her fingertips caressed the still burning bite mark. Eric chuckled, using her towel to wipe his face.

"Still always so polite," he teased. Honey nodded.

She grinned at him with sleepy, but hungry eyes. "Gimme a couple minutes to feel my face again and I'll show you how polite I can be."
Damon pattered around his station, setting up the things he would need for Honey's tattoo. She was sitting in his chair, looking through the parlor's portfolio, seeing if anything caught her eye.

"You're not planning for this to be on your stomach, right?" the blonde man asked. He looked up at the girl, who had tensed at the question. "I mean, that is what this is about. I get it."

"You're picking up habits from Joe," Honey told him, trying not to frown over his very genuine concern.

"Candors aren't the only ones not afraid to say things that need to be said," he replied firmly. She sighed irritably. "I'm asking because, firstly, if you did want that, it's too soon. When your real skin replaces the fake stuff, the ink will fade out. But even if that wasn't the case, I wouldn't tattoo you there anyway. Trying to cover it up is a bad idea."

"Well, I don't want it there," Honey insisted. Now she was frowning.

"Good," Damon nodded, ignoring her sour expression. "Then whatever you want, I'm all for it."

"Really? Whatever I want?" He nodded. The girl wasn't sure why she felt the need to push, but a sudden swell of bitterness had risen in the back of her throat. "So, if I want it to say "Fuck off" across my forehead, you'd be all for it?"

He actually smiled at her. "If it makes you feel better. If it makes you feel in control of your body, then yeah. What font?"

And now she wanted to cry. Honey huffed and slumped a little in the chair at just how clearly he understood why she was there. "I'm sorry. I know you're trying to help. And I know you're right. I really wasn't planning on getting anything on my stomach."

With a soft click of his tongue against his teeth, Damon shook his head. "Honey, you can snap at me all you want. Seriously, you're handling the whole thing amazingly well. Including all the well intentioned meddling of your friends."

"God, do all your consultations get so deep and insightful?"

He chuckled. "No. Mostly people just want something that looks cool. Only thinkers like you get the deep stuff."

"Lucky me," Honey snorted, going back to scrolling through the images on the tablet she held. The girl had intended to just find something that screamed Dauntless, the same way the flames on the ceiling of the Observation Theatre had, and sear that into her skin. A reaffirmation of who and what
she was, for her own peace of mind. But nothing seemed to stand out. Nothing felt right.

Not to mention, she couldn't get the memory of her reflection the previous night out of her mind. The red scrawl across her stomach. There was zero chance she was going to get that anywhere on her body. Honey had never been a fan of tattoos with words and "Eric's Love" seemed so absurdly pretentious, sickeningly sentimental, and wholly insufficient. Two small sets of letters couldn't encompass the depth of that feeling, of how much Eric meant to her. She could cover her body in words and still not convey what she wanted to express. No tattoo could capture that, really, but words least of all. How he was always there for her, supporting her, loving her, tempting her, teaching and encouraging her, and giving brutally honest and correction when she needed it. Like both the devil and angel on her shoulders.

Honey grinned over the notion. Then chuckled. Then laughed.

"Did you get to the section with all the dicks?" Damon asked, smiling widely, apparently mistaking her humor. The girl's laughter turned incredulous.

"What?" She started flipping through the offerings faster, struck by the need to see what that was about. "Tattoos of dicks or on them?"

"Both. What are you laughing about, then?"

"I think I know what I want." Honey turned the tablet towards him, demanding. "Here, get me to that section, first. I gotta see this!"

Honey had chosen Damon for her tattoo because she liked his simple, clean, bold style. When he'd finished drawing up the design she described, it was exactly what she wanted. The tattoo was much smaller than her first, so it only took a few minutes, but the placement made the pain far worse - she'd refused the analgesic again, because of course she did. She thanked Damon profusely, so very pleased with how the ink had turned out, and hurried off to meet Eric for their evening session. She went back to their quarters to change and arrived just as he was stepping out the door.

"Perfect timing," her lover said, leaning against the wall with his bag. Honey took a moment to appreciate how his training tank showed off his thick arms and shoulders, while covetously hugging every muscle it hid. Eric smirked and pushed the door open. "Stop ogling me and change. I don't have all night."

"Yes, sir," the girl saluted insolently, but did what he said and went to switch out her clothes.

As they made their way through the tunnels, Eric seemed to be taking an idle inventory of Honey's form. He leaned forward and back, looking her over thoughtfully. At one point, he tucked a finger under the back collar of her shirt and pulled it out to peek inside. She laughed and swatted him away.

"What are you doing?"

"Where is it?" the curious man asked. "Is it on your leg? Tell me you didn't get a butterfly on your ankle or something stupid like that."

"What's wrong with butterflies?" Honey challenge, lifting a brow. Eric lifted his right back.

"Do I really need to answer that?"

The girl rolled her eyes. "It's not a butterfly. And it's not on my leg, either. But don't worry, I didn't get it anyplace naughty."
He grunted in affirmation. She just knew he was barely keeping from saying something like, 'you better not have'.

"Are you going to tell me or am I supposed to go looking for it later?" Eric inquired with a lascivious slant to his words.

"Oh, there's an idea," Honey purred playfully.

"But if it's nowhere naughty, I may never find it," the man said, his grin superior.

The girl laughed up at him. "For someone so off-putting, you're shockingly bad at making a discouraging argument."

"How about an encouraging one? If you don't show it to me - right now, I won't fuck you tonight." Honey snorted skeptically, but Eric just raised his brows, studs glinting at her in challenge.

"But you'll still-" her words faltered just for an instant as she made sure they were alone in the hall, sort of ruining the brazenness she was going for. "You'll still eat my pussy."

The man chuckled deep in his chest over the combination of bashfulness and dirty talk. "Nope. Just fingers for you. Maybe just one finger. I'll let you pick which one."

Honey groaned despondently, shoulders slumping as she sulked her way down the hall. Eric only laughed. It would do no good to threaten to deny him sexual gratification. They both knew she'd never be able to back it up. Eric might be the demanding one, but Honey was even more insatiable than he was. She huffed in defeat and stopped. She was standing on his right side, so the girl only had to turn her head away to let the tattoo face him. Lifting her hair up out of the way, she touched two fingers to the shell of her ear, pulling it forward and fully exposing the ink.

Tucked safely behind Honey's ear on the ridge of bone there just below her hair line, was a small, black snake. The creature was coiled up cozily, its head raised and extended just slightly towards her ear, tongue flickering, as if whispering secrets to the little Dauntless. The bag hit the floor and Eric's fingers slid into her hair, gripping her skull; his other hand caught her jaw firmly, tiling her head more as he leaned in for a better look. The little snake had the same diamond-like markings as the one that slithered across his own ribs. The girl could hear him swallow.

"Is that me?" Eric whispered, his breath falling warmly on her skin. Honey tried to nod, but his hold prevented it.

"Yes," she whispered back. It had taken all of half a second the morning they'd discussed the animal archetype exercise for Honey to realize the connection between Eric's tattoo and her name. Serpents were considered sneaky and manipulative, but also intelligent and powerful. She could easily see a six year-old Eric already more clever and bold than his classmates. Which would be why he'd just snorted at her when the girl asked what his animal had been. "Always hissing something important in my ear."

"Not always what you want to hear," he murmured, his thumb rubbing the corner of her jaw almost hard enough to be uncomfortable.

"Never something I don't need to hear," Honey stated, her voice just as soft as his, but firm and sure.

Eric suddenly released her jaw and grabbed her arm, using that and the grip on her skull to turn her towards him as his mouth descended on hers with crushing force. He pulled her hair, arching her head far back, looming over her, huge and imposing and incredibly arousing. His hold on her arm was iron, impeding her from holding him properly, so the girl grabbed at his shirt, her nails scraping
against the tight fabric as they tried to gain purchase. Her other hand gripped his bicep, flexed and bulging, hard as stone. She moaned into his mouth.

Just as quickly as he'd yanked her close, Eric pushed Honey back again. He spun her away from him, shoving the girl against the wall face first. The rock was a sharp chill against her already flushed skin and she gasped, looking back at him in surprise. The man pressed against her back, pinning her to the wall as his hands roamed her body. His hot, wet mouth moved ravenously over her neck and shoulders, his teeth scraping deliciously over her flesh.

One of Eric's hands slithered into her pants and stopped. A finger trailed over the waistband of what was clearly not a pair of shorts hidden beneath. A rumbling growl of question rolled through her back from his chest and Honey grinned over shoulder.

"Problem?" she asked, all insolence and invitation. Without regard for where they were - a brightly lit corridor with no cover - the lust filled man tugged her pants down to her thighs. The scandalized girl gasped sharply, "Eric!

With a hand planted between her shoulder blades, Eric held Honey in place against the wall as he leaned back to get a look at what she was wearing. A pair of soft, cottony underpants, cut in the ironically named boy-short style. They were nothing like the boys' shorts the girl normally wore. Snug and smooth, the black fabric cupped her backside perfectly, showing off the shape and letting just a touch of cheek peek out from beneath the red lacy edge. Because of course, they had to be red and black.

"Where did these come from?" Eric demanded in a low tone that made her want to shiver. She might have thought he was displeased, if not for the way one fingertip was tracing the lace that rested against her thigh. That did make her shiver.

"Marta gave me a thank-you gift for introducing her to Kappa," Honey explained cheekily. The secretary had rationalized the present by saying she'd needed to buy new panties for herself now that she had someone new to see them and knew Honey wore 'those gross man-shorts', so it was 'the least' she could do. "Don't you like them?"

"What do you think?" He dropped to his knees, grabbing a cheek in each hand and squeezing hard. The girl giggled, but it broke off into a gaspy moan when his teeth nipped sharply at the flesh beneath the lace. Eric titled her backside up until Honey was practically on her toes, then nuzzled her pussy through the material. It was almost instantly soaked and he snaked his tongue over the fabric, dampening it further with a pleased groan.

"Eric, don't!" the girl protested weakly, her fingers pressing hard into the stone. His insistent tongue slipped under the edge of her panties, teasing her labia and further to prod at her entrance. Her voice trailed off into a needy moan and she pushed back against his face, seeking more. Eric chuckled, his fingers squeezing and massaging her backside as he lapped at her pussy with light, teasing strokes that set her on fire. "Oh, my God…"

"I love when you call me that," her lover said in a deeply arrogant rumble. He pushed her thighs apart, scraping his teeth against the bruise he'd placed there the night before. Honey groaned loudly, grinding her forehead against the cool stone before her. "Not so shy now?"

She shook her head, whining softly, pleadingly for more. Eric nipped at the lace again, then stood, massaging her ass with exaggerated movements. He pinched the lace and pulled it away, before letting it snap back against her skin lightly.

"Was it just the one pair?" he asked against the back of her neck. Honey shook her head again.
"No. There's a bunch."

"Then I don't feel bad," the man purred. Before the girl could even formulate the obvious question, he gripped the soft fabric and ripped it from her body, startling a sharp cry from her lips. His fingers stroked over her hips and thighs, anywhere that might have been stung by the harsh pull of the material as it tore. "Sorry, I got a little impatient."

He didn't sound sorry at all. With one hand, Eric tilted her ass up again, the other pushed the front of his jogging pants down. He hissed as his cock brushed against her cheek, leaving a smear of precum there to cool instantly in the chilly air of the tunnel. Honey whined, in want or protest, she didn't know, as he lined himself up with her entrance and slid inside. Her whine was shadowed by his deep, heavy groan and there was no confusing the pleasure and possession it carried.

Eric's hand came up, palming the side of Honey's face and pushing her cheek into the stone. The girl whimpered and for an instant, she was back in that Erudite hallway with the painted brick chilling her skin. But then her incredible, dominating lover curled a fingertip around the shell of her ear, pulling it gently forward, and kissed just below her fresh tattoo. As the man drew his hips back and started to fuck her with deep, hard thrusts, he whispered an endless litany against her skin and into her ear.

"You're so fucking pretty. So sexy. I get hard just thinking about you," Eric hissed. "By dinner, I'm dying to get back into your tight, perfect pussy. Just like this. So fucking deep and I never want to leave. Just stay inside you and make you come again and again for the rest of my goddamn life."

Honey moaned his name, the hallway at Erudite forgotten, the very public tunnel they were in forgotten, everything forgotten but his cock and his words penetrating her over and over.

"You'd let me, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you, Honey?" She nodded, groaning out something incoherent that still managed to be an affirmation. "I knew you would. You love me and you'll give me whatever I ask for. Oh, I love you, too. I know you're wet all day; thinking about my dick, wanting it inside you. All you have to do is ask. Any place. Any time."

He would, too, she realized - even his office, if she asked. God, the possibilities. Honey whimpered, pushing back into Eric's thrusts. One hand clawed at the wall, trying to gain some kind of leverage so she could shove harder back against him. She reached the other over her shoulder, nails digging into the muscle of his behind it and that was just as hard as the stone.

"Harder," she begged, unable to look at her lover because of the way he had her face pinned to the rock. He immediately gave her what she asked for, driving into her harder, the sound of his skin hitting hers echoing down the tunnel along with their moans of pleasure.

"Harder? Like this?" Eric huffed, panting against her nape. He snapped his hips forward, driving her body into the wall again and again. "How hard do you want it? You want to feel me all day tomorrow?"

"Yes!" the girl gasped. He let out an approving growl.

"You want me to fuck you so hard that in the morning you'll only be able to handle my tongue?" The man went on, his voice lusciously low, dominant and dripping with lust. "So hard that I'll have to go so slow and gentle tomorrow night because anything more will make you cry because you're so fucking sore? Is that what you want?"

"Yes, Eric, please!" Honey all but sobbed, wanting everything he offered the instant he offered it. With a snarl of praise he released her momentarily, pushing his arms between her body and the stone.
His arm looped around her middle to anchor the girl in place as his thrusts became downright violent. His opposite forearm crossed her chest, his hand coming up to cup her other cheek, cushioning the little Dauntless's face when the brutal pistoning of his hips tried to slam her into the rock wall.

Eric panted obscenities through clenched teeth, his head pressing against Honey's. She cried out again and again, his name, yes, don't stop, please and then just a desperate shriek as her inner walls locked down around his cock as it plunged deep into her again and again. The man shuddered against his lover's back, groaning her name long and loud when the first spasm of her channel triggered his own orgasm and he flooded her with his cum.

Time stood still, yet moved far too fast as the pair twitched and exulted in tandem, caught together in the whirlwind of intense pleasure that centered where they were joined. As his climax faded, Eric peppered Honey's skin with soft kisses and whispered words of adoration and praise. The girl shivered and mewled, nuzzling into he hand that cupped her face, still gripping his shoulder as hard as her jellied muscles would allow.

"You're fucking amazing," Eric panted, finally lifting his head, checking the hall to make certain they didn't have an audience that needed to be dealt with. Honey looked back at him over her shoulder, eyes barely able to stay open, lips curved upwards in the laziest, most sated of smiles.

"You did all the work," she insisted in a soft, raspy voice, her throat just a touch overworked. He chuckled and kissed her cheek, then temple.

"Trust me, that wasn't work," the man told her. Stroking her hip soothingly, Eric drew his hips back and slid out of his lover with a soft grunt, nuzzling her shoulder and neck when the girl whimpered quietly. He pulled her pants back up, then his own, using only one hand so the other could keep her supported against his chest. "If my knees are rubbery, yours have to be like gelatin."

Honey giggled. "You're so full of yourself, but you're not wrong."

"A second ago, you were full of myself." He chuckled, then stepped back, keeping his grip in case he was more right than either of them knew. The girl turned towards him, catching hold of his shirt when she did stumble just a little. "Well, that settles that."

"What, that you're a sex god of some kind?" The little Dauntless grinned at him. Eric smirked and shook his head.

"You're not getting any training done tonight," he clarified, keeping her steady as he bent to retrieve his bag. He pulled Honey against his side and turned them back the way they'd come.

"I think we got a pretty intense workout in," she contradicted, continuing to grin at him. The man laughed softly.

"Yeah, but neither of us can use those moves in a fight."

Honey giggled exuberantly at that statement, afterglow making her a bit silly. "They'd never expect it!"

She leaned against him heavily as they walked back towards their quarters. She probably would feel him all day tomorrow and be pretty damn sore in the morning. Eric was so good to her.

Chapter End Notes
That Eric has a dirty mouth.
Look Deeper

Chapter Summary

Honey... looks deeper.

Chapter Notes

Lots of exposition. No smut. Sorry. :P

It was a strange feeling, both wanting Eric as close as possible, but also wanting him to loosen his hold - metaphorically, not literally, because Honey would never want that. He worked from his little station in her tiny office for a further three days before finally going back to his own. Their unspoken agreement to keep lunches professional and spend them apart continued to fall by the wayside most days, but the man was giving his little Dauntless lover more space, letting her and himself get back into a sense of normalcy. It had been a week and four days since Ryland's attack when Eric finally took a meeting outside of the Dauntless compound. It was only to Candor - which was closest to Dauntless geographically - but he'd finally left.

Honey's stomach was in knots and there was a cold sweat on her back, but not because of her strong, protective lover's absence. At least, not because she felt unsafe with him gone. Fifteen minutes after he'd left for the meeting, the girl shut her office door, asking Marta to announce any visitors because of her "nerves". She then logged into the system under Eric's passcode and immediately brought up the initiate files. The young leader's slate eyes missed little and his brain even less so, but that didn't mean there wasn't something he'd overlooked - especially since he'd been distracted for the last few months. She'd never been so happy to be that distraction as now, knowing what it was she'd been taking his focus away from.

It wasn't as nerve-wracking as the last time Honey had logged in this way, strangely enough. The purpose for doing so was just as dire, but this time she had an explanation ready in case she was caught; something that would keep Eric and herself safe. She was looking through the initiate files and sim footage to further her assistance to Jeanine, of course. To help the woman in her quest to find and eradicate Divergence. And, she'd gotten the leader's passcode while apprenticing under him, because he'd been distracted enough by his attraction to Honey that he'd failed to follow protocol on one random occasion; and she was a knowledge-greedy Erudite by birth, after all.

Eric himself had said Honey was an excellent liar; nearly flawless. And the best lies have a string of truth running through them. In this case, the girl was looking at the files because of Jeanine and Eric's hunt for Divergents; she just wasn't trying to help in it.

Matthews had said that the aptitude test was a way to spot Divergents, but that sympathizers or other Divergents would mask an abnormal test with a false result. There were times when a result had to be entered manually because of a system error and that fact would allow for the deception, so that was what Honey looked for. There were sixteen manually entered results in this year's round of testing. Jeanine must have people like Eric in the other factions looking for Divergents, but Honey
would have no clue where to begin, so the girl focused on Dauntless. There were two manual entries for dependents who went on to choose Dauntless - Uriah Pedrad and Beatrice Prior. Tris and Uriah.

Honey brought up Uriah's file because it was first on the list and opened his fear sim training results. He was fast, but not the fastest. She watched the footage of his first simulation. Uriah seemed to be lost, confused and unsure, which was to be expected. He was being chased through the tunnels of Dauntless by men with no faces. The initiate couldn't escape; every time he turned a corner, another pursuer was there, trying to grab him with too many hands. It went on and on for twelve minutes before Uriah finally spun on one of the men and attacked viciously, ultimately taking the nightmare figure to the ground and strangling him. That was where the sim had cut out, bringing the boy back to reality.

The crow narrowed her eyes at the screen. If she were a Divergent, she’d certainly be worried about unknown pursuers, but at least two of the initiates in Honey's own class had also harbored fears of being chased or hunted and not being able to escape and Lauren's own Landscape featured faceless men. Uriah's next simulation featured a fear of being buried alive under a collapsing tunnel. He'd lain beneath the rocks, screaming and hyperventilating for eight minutes before finally closing his eyes and forcing himself to breathe normally. It took a further three minutes for the boy to calm his heart rate to within the normal range and end the simulation. The girl watched two more of his sim runs before closing his file. If Uriah was a Divergent, he was doing a very good job of hiding it.

Of course, Eric would do his due diligence and check Uriah's family, since he was Dauntless-born, so Honey brought up Zeke's file next. Zeke's aptitude result had also been manually entered, which put the girl on edge and she had to remind herself that Zeke was alive and well and had been a head of security for two years. If Eric had found him suspicious, that wouldn't have happened. Of course, that didn't mean Zeke wasn't Divergent. His sim times were worse than his brother's, nothing special, not even in the top third of his initiate class and there was nothing remarkable about his fears. Honey closed his file as well.

Beatrice Prior. Spunky Tris from Abnegation. Her first simulation time was just over three minutes. The young sub's stomach dropped. Three minutes. That was an absurd result. Honey quickly brought up the footage. It was fuzzy and a little unclear, but Tris was being attacked by a flock of birds of some kind. Was that why the former-Abnegation had ravens tattooed on her skin? It was hard to make out in the video, but it appeared that Tris ended the onslaught by dropping to the ground. That didn't make sense to Honey at first, but after a moment she realized that Tris's fear had been set out in the marsh and if there was one thing everyone knew about the marsh, it was that the place was wet. So, if the initiate had dropped into a pool of water, that certainly would have allowed her to escape a literal murder of crows. Alright; suspicious, but explainable.

Tris's next session in the simulation came up "File corrupted" with a time of four minutes and thirty-eight seconds. Given that the transfer's aptitude test result had to be entered manually and the distortion in her initial fear sim footage, it wasn't strange to see the program having another error. Even if all the subsequent sessions' footage were relatively clear. The technology wasn't perfect, after all, and it was being run by non-Erudite personnel. The remaining sim runs hovered between seven and ten minutes and nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary. Eric certainly hadn't seemed to feel the need to investigate further. Honey, however, had to look deeper than the leader if she wanted to get ahead of him.

Tris's aptitude test had been performed by Tori Wu, a Dauntless volunteer who normally worked as a tattoo artist. Tori had been Dauntless-born, received a Dauntless result on her aptitude test, and there was nothing suspect in any of her sim footage. However, Tori had a brother, George, whose test result had to be entered manually. George Wu was listed as deceased and all of his simulation footage was missing. Honey's mouth went dry. The woman might not be Divergent herself, but even
from the limited indicators Jeanine had given, it was immediately clear that she was a strong candidate for being a sympathizer.

The snowy crow brought up the aptitude results and sorted them by who had administered the test, easily finding Wu at the bottom of the listing. Tori had manually entered the results of fourteen people in the five years she’d been volunteering, four of whom ultimately chose Dauntless. Tris was the only one of these initiates still alive. That was why Eric and Jeanine hadn’t done anything about the insurrectionary tattoo artist. They were using her, watching her test results to find potential Divergents. The three initiates who Wu had tested and were now listed as deceased had all been Dauntless-born, so their fear simulations had been overseen by Lauren. Tris was the only transfer to Dauntless that the tattooist had entered a manual result for, so she was the only one who fell under Four's instruction.

It was well known throughout the faction that Four had been first in his class - a very impressive first, at that - and that Max had been trying to recruit him for leadership ever since. Did that make him above suspicion? Honey brought up his file. Immediately, her perspective on the man tilted on its axis. Birth name: Eaton, Tobias. Four was the estranged, defector son of Marcus Eaton, who led not just Abnegation, but was the head of the entire city government. The son Marcus was vilified in countless news reports for abusing and driving out of his birth faction.

The girl had always thought those stories were lies concocted by Erudite who were trying to discredit Abnegation. Honey's birth faction had a long running, deep seated hatred of the stiffs, born of the fact that Abnegation governed the city with their compassionate selflessness instead of Erudite's vast knowledge and cold logic. She could remember when the rumors first started. She'd been a child then and couldn't fathom someone from Abnegation ever raising a hand to another person for any reason; it just wasn't who they were. The whole sordid business had recently made a resurgence in the news, because both the children of Andrew Prior - another government official - had defected from their faction; one to Erudite and one to Dauntless. Honey had never consciously connected that Tris was Andrew Prior's daughter until now.

The white-haired girl opened the footage files for Four and was surprised to see his Fear Landscape at the top of the list. For a moment, she thought it was a mistake, but no. They used to do the Landscape first? Worse than that, all the files were Landscape runs. That was ridiculous. It had been brutal enough on her own class facing just one fear at a time and that was after five weeks of initiation and settling into a Dauntless mindset. How many initiates had Dauntless lost on the first day in the years before that practice was changed?

Honey played Four's Landscape and was astonished. Firstly, because of the number of fears: four. Most people have ten to fifteen fears in their Landscape, some have even more, few have less. It's possible to overcome fears, lowering your number, but to have only four to begin with? Unheard of. So, that's where he got the name. Secondly, because the final fear was Marcus Eaton, wielding a belt, striking a cowering sixteen year-old Tobias again and again until the boy finally exploded with murderous rage and the simulation ended.

Honey felt cool wetness on her cheeks and quickly wiped it away. She hadn't even recognized the heat behind her eyes until it spilled over. So much about the man who had trained her and been something close to a friend was explained. His desperate need for control, his fear of losing it, of seeing her lose hers.

"Oh, Four," she whispered, her chest aching, even as her gut boiled with fury and hate.

This was where the news articles had come from. Max and whoever had been aiding in his Divergent search before Eric had fed the information to Jeanine Matthews and she, in turn, had
leaked it to the press at Candor. They'd used his pain to further their own agenda, exposing his abuse for their own gain. Honey was furious, her teeth grinding together, her spine so tight it might snap. They knew it was true and had done nothing. Marcus could have been prosecuted, punished for the years of torture inflicted on his son, but they'd let it go, using the scandal as a way to attack and discredit Abnegation as a whole instead. And Marcus had gone on, leading the city, free. It was enough to make the girl sick with rage.

It took Honey a few minutes to calm herself to the point that her hands no longer shook when she touched the keyboard. As horrible as what happened to Four was, the matter at hand was still more pressing. The man's second Landscape trial was missing, File corrupted, but the rest were intact and remained the same. Four fears in each one. And Four's aptitude test had a normal, system determined result. That result had been Abnegation - He did say he hadn't expected to end up at Dauntless. - but that wasn't suspicious, given his violent home life. Anyone would have transferred to get as far from a monstrosity like Marcus Eaton as possible.

Nothing about Four gave indication that he was Divergent. He was Abnegation by birth and by aptitude, but he'd forced himself to become Dauntless by necessity. However, Divergent or not, that was what made him the kind of person who would frighten Jeanine Matthews - a selfless Dauntless. And one with firsthand knowledge of what it was like to live under the strain of constant fear, knowing at any moment you could be attacked or even killed. Eric and Max might not think so, finding only weakness in his flight from Abnegation, but Honey could easily see Four as a sympathizer, caring more about keeping others safe from persecution than his own wellbeing. Four had never been what Honey needed, but he was surely the kind of person Dauntless needed. And, apparently, the kind of person Tris needed.

It was painfully obvious that the Abnegation transfer was a strong candidate for Divergence. The little crow couldn't begin to hypothesize what Eric's reasons were for not acting on it before now. Unless he had. What if that was the reason Al had attacked Tris and felt so guilty he'd thrown himself into the Chasm? No, she rejected that notion violently. If Eric was going to see someone dead, he would do it himself, not send a boy in his place. Her monster had more integrity than that. Then why was Tris still alive? There had been a very real chance she would not make it through stage one of training; the former-Abnegation had barely eked her way above the line at the very last moment thanks to her performance during capture the flag and Edward's unfortunate incident on the stairs.

Had Eric been hoping she'd get herself cut and made Factionless so he wouldn't have to deal with her? Honey didn't know. She knew him so well, his mannerisms, his likes and dislikes, his daily worries, his strengths and weaknesses, but he was somehow even more of a mystery than ever before. He didn't want her even to speak to Jeanine, wanted her to have nothing to do with Divergents or anything else Erudite. He had to know what they were doing was wrong. He must know, yet he still assisted Matthews in her madness. Eric still hunted and killed people for a cause he couldn't possibly believe in. Why?

Honey hovered over Eric's file for long minutes, just staring at his name on her screen. She didn't want to peel back the layers of his life, studying her lover like a slide under a microscope. She wanted him to tell her the things in the file, wanted to hear the words in his voice and see the events through his eyes. In the end, Eric decided for her, in a way. He'd given her his passcode specifically for this, to look through his files and lay his past bare before her; possibly because he'd spent so long shutting himself away, hiding the man deep within the monster, that he simply couldn't find his way out again. She opened the file. And smirked in spite of everything.

Eric
Unsurprisingly, Eric had been an only child, born to a woman who worked in botany, like Honey's own parents. Their home must have been full of plants, pictures of plants, as hers had been growing up. Was that where the little white-barked tree had come from? Single parents weren't unusual in Erudite, since people tended to focus more on their research than their relationships; mothers were more common than fathers, since it was rare a woman would go through the exertion and pain of pregnancy and childbirth just to give up the fruit of all that effort.

Eric’s mother, Rebecca, was listed as deceased. She’d died in a laboratory accident just over two months after Eric’s initiation ended. A canister of pesticide had been damaged and was leaking and the odorless vapors of poison had overcome not just Rebecca, but the four others working in the same lab space. At the time, her son was apprenticing under Art, the leader who he’d eventually replaced. That meant Art had been in intelligence, which meant Eric would have accompanied him to meetings at Erudite.

*If you don't do this, you may regret it.* Those had been the man's words to Honey as they rode to that first meeting with Jeanine, when he'd been pushing her to visit her family. Had Eric been given the same opportunity and refused? She felt sure he must have. Why? She could hazard a guess - Eric’s behavior on Visiting Day seemed like a strong indication.

One of the man's weaknesses was his pride, anyone who'd seen him interact with Four could tell that. If Rebecca hadn't come to see him, why should he make the effort to see her? And his mother had died soon after. Honey's heart broke. It must have destroyed him inside, knowing he'd passed on the opportunity to see her, squandering his last chance to speak with the woman who'd raised him out of sheer, childish spite. The girl wiped away more tears and sniffled. Poor Eric.

That must have been when Jeanine made her first move, just as she had done with Honey, offering her influence to assist the young, ambitious transfer in his future at Dauntless. It was clear he'd accepted. After finishing his apprenticeship, he'd had been appointed to Max's staff. Six months later, he was an ancillary himself.

Young Eric appeared to be an idealist. He'd spent his first years in office changing the initiation process. It was his proposal that split initiation into two stages. He was the reason they now had fear sim training at all; allowing the initiates to grow and learn to overcome their fears instead of being thrown into the Landscape straight off and being crushed by them. He had separated the Dauntless-born from the transfers, easily seeing how unbalanced the matches were. As the canine unit had been Honey's baby, the initiation process was Eric's. Always focusing on shaping the future of the faction, pushing the initiates to get the best from them so they could give their best to Dauntless.

*This* was why Eric had supported her proposal, why he'd sponsored it himself instead of letting it fall to some crow to oversee. Not because of Jeanine Matthews or atleast not entirely. The young leader had seen himself in Honey, his own idealism and drive to improve his faction in the little Dauntless girl. She felt a great swell of pride at this realization. It had taken her so long to believe that Eric had faith in her, so long to feel like she could ever possibly live up to his expectations, knowing that he'd believed in her so strongly for so much longer than she'd ever imagined was overwhelming and there were more tears that needed to be wiped away.

Not all of Eric's reforms were positive, as far as Honey was concerned. Some were overly harsh, some just seemed cruel. It had been Kai's idea to develop the neuro-stim dart for training purposes,
but Eric had implemented them in the initiate war games. He'd also tried to install a curfew and several social restrictions on the initiates that had been voted down by the leaders. He'd cut the number of points the initiates were allowance. He'd tried for six months straight to abolish Visiting Day altogether. There were no officially condoned sanctions for accepting gifts from your family in the Dauntless charter, but as a leader, Eric could do as he pleased as far as reprimanding the initiates, so he apparently consoled himself with that.

Even so, the two guidelines in place now didn't sit right with Honey. It fit with his harsh, cold outlook on what bravery was that Eric would implement a no-concession rule. The man might be so singly focused on that skewed ideal (Dauntless never give up) that he couldn't see how such a standard would be at cross-purposes with his desired outcome. As Honey had said, it wouldn't lead to the bravest showing their determination, but allow the weak to mask their cowardice. She'd been keeping track of who fell the quickest in matches and how long it took them to recover afterward, whether the blow that felled them led to any visible injury, whether it was even in a place that would cause incapacitation. Honey felt sure she could have the counterproductive guideline overturned at the end of initiation.

It was the first of the new rules that really bothered her. Someone so focused on improving the faction would know better than to think only combat oriented positions were essential to its growth and wellbeing. Eric would know better than to think accepting so few new members could ever possibly be a sustainable practice. The rule's only purpose seemed to be to render as many initiates Factionless as possible, which was absolute madness. Her monster might enjoy inflicting pain in various ways; pushing, manipulating, and humiliating people, yes. Breaking bones and making opponents scream and bleed, yes. But destroying a life? Destroying ten lives this year and how many the next? And for what? Aside from sheer, unabashed sadism, Honey could not ascribe a reason to it. That was the defining characteristic of madness, she supposed - being without reason.

The girl shook her head and closed out the files - all the files. As brutal and incomprehensible as the guideline was, it was not the reason Honey had looked into the system. Divergents. Helping to keep innocent people, people who might have far more to offer the city than anyone else, safe. She cleared the usage log and shut down her computer. Eric's meeting could take ten minutes or last for hours, the crow had no way of knowing. She also didn't know when his next meeting outside the compound would be, so she had to make the most of his absence while she could.

Honey left her office, telling Marta she was going down to observe Lauren and the Dauntless-born in the gym. Instead, she headed for the fear simulation training rooms. She needed to talk to Four while she had the chance.

There was a small training gym across the hall from the simulation room, where the initiates waiting their turn could work out, spar, or simply sit and do nothing to pass the time. Honey waited in the hallway beside the sim room door until it opened and Four ushered out a slightly pale, but not overly shaken Will.

"You're not allowed to observe the simulations," Four said as the boy crossed the hall and paused at the door to the gym.

"Should I send Peter out?" Will asked, looking between his instructor and the ancillary. Honey was the one who answered.

"No, I need to talk to Four," she told the boy. "Should only take a minute."

The boy hesitated until Four gave him a nod, then he went into the gym, shutting the door behind himself, and Honey's lips pinched in slight irritation. She was the ranking officer present, not the broody former-Abnegation. It was only a minor annoyance, however and she moved on quickly to
the matter at hand, motioning for Four to go back into the simulation room. He didn't look happy about it, but he went and she shut the door firmly behind them.

The stark medical feel of the room didn't comfort or calm the girl as it once had. Instead, the reminder of her birth faction set her even further on edge, sharpening her anxiety by somehow making Erudite and Jeanine Matthews seem impossibly close.

"So, I got inside something," Honey began, sounding tense and slightly regretful.

"Dammit, Honey," Four huffed, one hand on his hip, the other rubbing against his forehead in agitation. His shoulders were instantly bunched tightly, his face pinched and angry. "Do you ever stop to think about the danger before you rush into something?"

She let out a single, soundless laugh and shook her head. Apparently not, since Eric had pointed out that fact to her on the rooftop less than two weeks before. "You think you're mad at me now, just wait until I tell you."

He scoffed irritably and leveled his dark eyes on her. "So tell me."

"After I saw my brother about the serum, Jeanine Matthews requested a meeting." The girl emphasized 'requested' with heavy sarcasm. Four's hand cupped the back of his neck now and he leaned slightly forward, puffing out an angry breath as he looked at the floor and tried to keep his composure. "But it wasn't about the serum or the computers or anything else I've actually been worrying about. She pulled me into a whole new mess."

He looked at her again, questioning, but reluctant to hear anymore. Whether he was reluctant or not, Honey was going to tell him anyway, because she was nearly certain he was a part of it. She told him as much, expecting him to maybe balk or scoff, but instead he just glowered at her.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, I think you do," the girl drawled with narrowed eyes. "But I also think we're on the same side. And if we're not, then I'm going to be in a lot of trouble for trusting you. I guess maybe you're right and I don't think about the danger before rushing into things."

"What are we on the same side of?" Four asked, his voice low and deep, dangerous, deadly.

Honey suppressed a shiver at the coldness of his tone and licked her suddenly dry lips. Looking and sounding the way he did, the little Dauntless could believe he might be part of the whole thing, but not in the way she'd thought. If Four was working with Eric and Jeanine, this conversation could very well get her killed. She hesitated, all at once unsure of herself, of the man before her. Training or no, sober or not, Four was no Ryland and if he attacked her, she wouldn't stand a chance.

Four was no Ryland.

Four was Tobias Eaton, whose father beat him, who escaped to the faction where he could learn to protect himself. And others who were helpless, like he had been.

"I think we both want to help people who need to be protected," Honey said, softly, almost a whisper, as if speaking the words louder might announce them to the world. He tensed still further and the girl didn't think his bones could handle such stress for long without cracking under the strain. "People who haven't done anything wrong. People who are different."

"What people?" he asked, his voice soft, like hers, but coarse and thin, as if the words had to be pulled from his vocal cords.
Four was Four. Four was someone she could trust. Someone Honey did trust.

"Divergents," she hissed the word, realizing her own smaller body was just as tense as his; so tight, her joints ached. He stared at her, eyes all but black, furious and terrified. He wasn't breathing, neither was she. A long minute, an eternity passed in silence so loud it was deafening.

"They're special. They need to be protected." Those were Honey's thoughts being voiced aloud. It took the girl a moment to recognize her own voice, to realize she was the one speaking. "We need to protect them, Four. I think they… I think they're the future."

"The future?" he whispered the question, still furious, still terrified, but with a sliver of something else. A tentative, fragile tendril of something… something that wanted her to say more, to explain what she meant. Something that was heartbreakingly like hope.

"A Dauntless who is selfless enough to protect others at all costs," the girl spoke her secret wishes to the man whose hand, now at his side, had begun to shake. "An Erudite who is honest enough to share their knowledge to better the city. An Abnegation who is fearless enough to push the limits at the Hub. Someone… someone who is intelligent and honest and kind and brave and selfless. Someone like that could change the world, Four."

The fury faded until only terror remained, Four's eyes were wide and bright. His lips parted as he finally started breathing, but his breaths were shallow and fast. This was more than just a reaction to her knowing he was helping Divergents. Something she'd said had resonated with Four in a very intense way that Honey hadn't expected. She'd shaken the man deeply. He was looking at the girl as if he couldn't decide whether she was an angel or a demon, as if he was afraid to find out.

She thought what he thought. She hoped what he hoped. His secrets and tight control had kept him separate for so long, so alone. Being this close to another person - not physically, but emotionally - had to be terrifying. Honey could see the cracks, could almost feel his walls breaking apart.

She knew the Abnegation weren't huge on touching, but she also knew how much a touch could mean to Four, so the girl reached out and took hold of his shaking hand. He gripped her fingers tightly, drawing in a trembling breath. She drew him closer, stepping into the man, and curled her hand around his neck, pulling him down. His forehead touched hers and she shushed softly.

"You know who I am," he breathed. It was enough of a question that she answered it.

"I know who you are," Honey said, quiet, but firm. "I know who you were and I know who you are now."

He nodded and swallowed hard. It felt like there was more that needed to be said, words that needed to fill the space between them, something he needed to hear. Honey didn't know what that was, so she remained silent. She just squeezed his hand tightly and brushed her thumb against the side of his neck, unknowingly tracing the dark line of his tattoo there. Better a space waiting to be filled than one crammed with forced words that didn't fit and caused more harm than good.
Honey had been correct, Tris was Divergent and Four was protecting his fellow former-Abnegation. Maybe more than that, if the way his shoulders tensed and his expression became ever more guarded when he spoke about the plucky initiate were any indication. Honey wanted to help, though neither of them was sure at what more she could do the moment. If Tris could keep her composure during her Fear Landscape, it would do much to get her clear of Jeanine and Eric's watchful eyes. Four and Honey didn't have much time to talk; he had more sims to run that day and Peter wasn't known for his patience or ability stay quiet.

She didn't know when they'd be able to speak again, since Eric was so attentive - which was wonderful, of course, but not conducive for clandestine meetings. It would have to wait until after initiation ended, when Eric wouldn't be so on edge and vigilant. For now, it was all on Tris.

The spunky former-Abnegation's Landscape went off without a hitch, though Honey would have preferred for the girl to have taken more time during her run. The little Dauntless cringed, thinking back to her meeting with Jeanine and the one thing the woman said that rang true. She made her way to the antechamber attached to the Observation Theatre, ostensibly to congratulate the initiates who had already made it through their Landscape.

"Tris, can I steal you for a minute?" The initiate blinked in surprise, but nodded, following Honey out of the room and into the tunnels. She led the other girl to the transfer barracks, where she now knew for a fact no one would disturb or overhear them.

"Uh, what's going on?" Tris asked, pulling nervously at her fingers.

"Did Four tell you about the conversation we had?" Honey asked, getting right to the point. Tris's anxiety seemed to kick up several levels. She started to speak, faltered, and ended up just nodding silently. "So, you know that I know."

"Yeah, I guess so. That I'm…"

Honey nodded when the taller girl trailed off. "Right. So, I know that your Landscape was all an act; it doesn't effect you the way it does the rest of the class."
"N-no," Tris stuttered, concerned and confused and maybe a little scared. The little Dauntless tried not to think about how that caused a feeling that was almost pleasant to wind its way up her spine. No one had ever been afraid of her before. She shoved the feeling and the thought aside. She didn't want Tris to be afraid of her!

"Listen, I know it's not your fault, that you can't control whatever it is that makes you different," Honey assured the anxious transfer. "But you went through the trial too fast. Your score isn't real and it's not fair to the rest of the initiates. If you rank first, you can't choose the leadership position."

"I'm not- I wasn't going to!" the initiate insisted. "It's too dangerous, working with Eric."

"This isn't about Eric or how dangerous it is," the white-haired girl said sharply. "That position needs to go to someone who's earned it."

Tris's mouth dropped open in shocked insult. Her fidgeting hands curled into fists of outrage. "I've earned my rank!"

"No, Tris," Honey told the girl coolly, as calm as the marsh. "You didn't. You only made it through stage one because Edward lost an eye and you cheated your way through stage two. I like you. I do. You're smart and you've got guts, but you're also impulsive and kind of thoughtless. You've got some growing to do. Ultimately, I think you're going to be a great asset to Dauntless; I really do."

The Divergent girl paused, brows furrowed, her small mouth drawn up in a pouty mew of indecision. Admittedly, Honey's line of thought had gone a bit back and forth there. "Thanks?"

The ancillary chuckled and shook her head. "Just giving you a little Candor."

"I've never been a fan of Candor," Tris admitted, slightly sardonic. Then she quickly added, "Don't tell Christina I said that."

Honey snorted. "I've got two loudmouths of my own; I doubt she'd mind if she heard it." She shook her head again. "Take Patrol. I know security is tempting, because of Four-"

The former-Abnegation's marshy eyes grew wide and she tried to stutter a denial, but the young ancillary just laughed. It had only been a hunch, but that was a pretty definitive confirmation. Good. It was good the broody man had found someone to connect with. Maybe Tris's words could fill in that space where Honey had been lacking.

"Yeah," the former-Erudite held back most of her smirk. "Spread your wings, learn some discipline. It'll do you good."

"Do you really think I'll be good enough? I'm still not great at fighting."

She let the smirk free from its restraint. "That's up to you, Tris. Either you'll give it your all, be balls out and Dauntless, or you won't."

The other girl frowned at Honey in consternation. "You sound like Eric."

The little Dauntless laughed. "Actually, I sound like Daisy. If you're lucky, you might end up working with her. She's one of the best squad leaders in the faction."

Tris's tone turned a little bitter as she asked, "If she's the best, shouldn't that position go to someone who earned it?"

"Trust me, if you end up a Mudhumper, you'll have earned it," Honey assured her. "Initiation just
sets you on your way, Tris. Yeah, it's hard to change professions, but not impossible. Dauntless fight for what they want. I'll help you if I can, but you're not ready yet."

"How will you know when I'm ready?"

The white-haired girl shook her head. "Hopefully, you'll know."

The banquet hall was just as surreal as the first day of initiation for Honey, with the firelight glow from the braziers and the air of celebration. She didn't feel like celebrating. There had been twenty initiates on Choosing Day and only ten remained. Two transfers and two Dauntless-born had been cut and made Factionless just hours before now. They had fought and bled their way through ten weeks of training, through fights and fears, and all for nothing. Four more lives ruined. Four more names on Honey's list.

Shay, Tobin, Max, Cyrus. Clint, Isis, Daphne, Edward, Myra. Tank, Drew, Brie, Gregory. Gone, all gone. How long before the little Dauntless started losing names? How long before she started wanting to? She feared it wouldn't be long at all.

Honey tried to focus on the new members, those who had made it through, those who would be part of the future of Dauntless. She wanted to show them the respect they'd earned, to welcome them into the faction as she had been welcomed the year before. But when Eric stood on the table and started to speak about what the Dauntless believed in, she just couldn't do it, and fled the room. She made her way back through the tunnels. The path from great hall led straight to the Pit, which was fine, since her goal was the Chasm, where the endless rush of water might offer some catharsis.

The faction was eerily quiet, nearly everyone was at the celebration, and Honey's footfalls echoed on the stone as she moved. She was relieved to hear voices ahead, breaking the spooky hush that had fallen over the faction. That relief evaporated when she stepped out into the open and saw who the voices belonged to. Two dozen or so people milled about the unnaturally empty expanse of the Pit floor, several wearing white coats with black and blue striping. Medical personnel. They were unloading crates and opening waterproof cases. Honey's heart stopped. She froze, staring in disbelief. That moment of shock was her undoing.

"Hey, hang on a second," an unfamiliar Dauntless man in a Patrol uniform called, coming towards her. The girl wheeled around to run back the way she'd come, but there was another approaching her from that direction as well. The first one spoke again, drawing her attention back, "You're early. Banquet's not even half over."

"Right, I was just getting some air," she quickly lied, eyeing him suspiciously. "What's going on?"

"Tracking devices," he explained, motioning towards the crates. "Everyone's getting one. Don't worry, it just takes a second."

"No, I'm an ancillary," Honey insisted.

"Yeah, everyone means everyone," the Patrol officer said firmly.

"No, I know. I mean I already got mine," the girl told him.

"Oh? Then you'll be on the list." He reached into his jacket and pulled out a scroll tab, flicking his finger to bring up a list of names. "Name?"
Honey blinked. "You don't know who I am?"

The officer smirked, unimpressed. "Someone who doesn't like injections?"

Honey squared her small shoulders and leveled a hard look on the man. "I'm the one everyone calls Kid. I'm Honey; I live with Eric."

"And?" At first she was just surprised that the man didn't know who she was; it seemed like everyone in Dauntless knew her by her white curls and flames or at least who the kid was. But the fact that he hadn't connected her hair to her nickname or even the significance of her relationship with Eric set the girl's heart to slamming against her ribs. Wait, where did he get a scroll tablet? Something was very wrong here.

"He made sure I got my tracker before anyone else," she explained, masking her fear with irritation. He scanned the scroll and clicked his teeth.

"Sorry, you're not on the list," the officer said. "Could be a mistake, but it won't hurt you to get two."

"You're not injecting me with that," Honey told him, her voice steely and sharp. The man only continued to smirk.

"Oh, I think I am," he chuckled, unintimidated.

"I am an ancillary leader of Dauntless and I'm telling you to stand down," the girl stated further, trying desperately to keep the panic from her tone.

"Well, our orders come from above, so you'll have to take it up with Max," the Patrol man told her with false diplomacy. He nodded to the man behind her. "After you get your tracker."

The second officer grabbed her arms and Honey jolted into action. She pulled forward, so that he would grip her tighter. As expected, he pulled her back, lifting the short girl off her feet. Honey used his hold to allow her to kick out at the first man. Her boots caught the man in the face, crushing his nose and knocking him to the ground.

"Shit!" the officer at her back gasped in shock. Since he was gripping her upper arms, Honey's hands were free. She reached back and grabbed his crotch, giving him a brutal squeeze that instantly dropped the man to his knees. "Fuck!"

She caught his head, pulling it down as she launched her knee upwards. Another broken nose, another fallen officer. But there were more and the shouts had drawn their attention. Honey bolted, but her short legs were no match for their long strides. Five of them caught her in the tunnel. It was harder to fight in the confined space, but between her small size and her willingness to do anything to inflict harm and get away, she managed to incapacitate two straight off. The other three took more time and by then, more had come to join the fray.

Eric's training was paying off, but in the back of her mind Honey knew this was too easy. Six men had been able to subdue Eric, it was impossible that it should take so many to bring down one small seventeen year-old girl, no matter how well trained and desperate she was. These weren't Patrol officers. Still, in the end, they managed to take her to the ground and carried her bodily back into the Pit, struggling and screeching the whole way.

"Fucking calm down!" That was shouted by the man at her back, who held one of her arms behind her and had a hold of her hair so she couldn't bite him again. "It's just a quick shot; shit."

One of the medical staff quickly came over, carrying a jet injector. Honey screamed and thrashed but
it did no good. A press of cold metal and a sharp pain in her neck and it was over. She'd been injected with LRCSS2248, the mind control serum.

Then, Honey was carried down to detention and thrown in a cell.

"I'm your ranking officer and I'm ordering you to let me out of here!" the girl shrieked, kicking the door of her cell over and over. The guards ignored her, which only infuriated the incensed crow more and she flew at the door again and again. This must have been how Eric felt: trapped and helpless and enraged. Eric.

Honey reached into her pocket and pulled out her new mini-tablet. The phony Patrol officers and real guards had been so eager to cage the wild Dauntless girl that they hadn't bothered to take it. The fake officers probably didn't even know she had it in the first place. She quickly sent Eric an emessage. In lockup. Get me the fuck out of this cell. Honey didn't even know if Eric would hear the alert with all the noise in the banquet hall. All she could do was wait.

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Hours went by. It felt like a lifetime had passed. Like Honey would grow old and die in that six by eight foot box they'd tossed her into. Finally, she heard a soft ping from her pocket.

ON MY WAY.

She might have expected to feel relieved, but she wasn't. Instead a fresh surge of anger flooded her small body and the girl began pacing anew. Ten long minutes passed before she heard footfalls that weren't her own.

"Open it up," Eric ordered, brusque and angry himself. Not two seconds later, her cell door swung wide and his familiar and normally comforting shape filled the space. Honey was in no mood to be comforted and moved to shove passed him. He caught her, gripping both arms to hold the girl out and look her over, making sure she wasn't injured in any way. "What happened?"

"What do you think happened?" the sub snapped, loud and sharp. She tilted her head aside, showing him the injection site - a small, perfectly round bruise. The man's face went ghostly white, though Honey couldn't be sure if it was from fear or rage; she supposed, given the circumstances, it might be both. His fingers tightened, digging into her arms.

Eric growled between his teeth. So rage, then. He tugged her down the hall between the cells, back towards the intake area. "We need to talk to Max."

"You need to talk to me," Honey declared commandingly. He glanced down at her tone, but kept walking.

"There's more going on than what you know," he said, enigmatically as they stepped into the hall.

"I know more than you think I do," she told him, defiant and confident. "I know what's really in those vials Erudite secretly shipped here."

Eric stopped then, pushing her into the wall and bending so his eyes were level with hers. He demanded in an almost desperate hiss, "What? How do you know about that? What do you know, Honey?"

"I know you don't want me to say it out in the open," she said ominously. The man swallowed hard, then started moving again, walking fast enough that the short girl had to half jog to keep from just
being dragged behind him.

The young leader stopped at a thick, steel door and punched a code into the keypad so hard his finger turned white on every number. He propelled Honey inside and she saw that they were in the armory. Eric slammed the door shut behind them and pinned her against it.

"Talk!" he barked.

"Get your hands off me and I will," she ground out in reply to his command. His fingers tightened further on her arms in defiance of her order, as if he were struggling for control of the situation, of her. The girl stared up at him stonily, silently until Eric finally gave in and released her. Honey shoved him away, stalking further into the room, needing to put some space between them before she did something they'd both regret. "What the fuck are you thinking?"

"Tell me what you know!" he shouted, ignoring her angry question. She whirled back to face him, a tight, tiny bundle of rage and fear.

"I know you're letting Jeanine inject a fucking mind control serum into every member of our faction!" she shouted right back.

"How do you know that?" Eric demanded, advancing on her, reaching out to grab her again. Honey sprang back from his grasp, putting a table of ammunition between them.

"Did you really think I went to Erudite to talk to Jeanine Matthews?" she scowled at him. "You really thought I was that stupid?"

"For fuck's sake, Honey," he growled, rubbing his hands against his scalp. "No, I don't think you're stupid. That's why I was so angry! How long have you know about the serum?"

"A while. I didn't know what it did until that day," the girl admitted. "I still don't know what it's for. And you're going to tell me right now."

He glared at her with such an intensity, Honey was surprised he didn't burn a hole right through her. She didn't back down, however. She couldn't. Not now.

"You weren't supposed to be involved," Eric told her instead. "I made that clear to Max and Jeanine. You were never supposed to get an injection. You weren't."

"But I am involved!" the incensed Dauntless shrieked, cutting him off. "I don't care what you intended to happen, this is what did happen! Now tell me why!"

"We're hitting Abnegation in the morning," the young leader said, stark and flat.

"Hitting Abnegation?! We're attacking Abnegation?!" The room tilted and for a moment, Honey couldn't focus. Attacking another faction was definitely the kind of thing you'd need a mind control serum to force people to into. It was insanity; pure, unadulterated madness. But it was happening. Tomorrow. Dear God. "Why? Why Abnegation? That doesn't make sense!"

"They're hiding something," Eric said, still unnaturally calm. "The founders created some kind of tech artifact. There's information on it that we need to keep the city alive."

"Keep the city- What does that even mean, Eric?"

He huffed, his hands in fists at his sides. She could see the muscles in the man's arms flexing. He ground his teeth before admitting, "I don't know. I don't even know. Jeanine says it has something to
do with Divergents. The founders knew about them and left the artifact behind so that when there were too many, we'd be able to fix it. But we don't know what the fuck is on it, because Abnegation won't give it up!"

"That's insane!" Honey insisted, slapping her hands flat on the table before her. "The Divergents aren't going to destroy the city. They're the ones who will save it!"

"What the hell does that mean?"

"You can't believe Jeanine's bullshit about how Divergents are going to bring down the System, because they don't fit. You're smarter than that," she declared, not doubting the truth of the statement for an instant. Eric shook his head.

"It doesn't matter what I believe." His words weren't a denial, because he couldn't deny it. He never lied to her.

"You know she's wrong," Honey pushed, desperate to get the full truth from him. "You know it, Eric. Why are you going along with her? Why are you letting this happen?!"

"I don't have a choice!" He finally broke, throwing his hands out in furious, helpless surrender. "I wasn't born Dauntless like you were; I wasn't brave, I didn't care about helping anyone. I went through initiation doing my best to crush every other person in my class and I still failed. I only got the leadership position because Four didn't want it. I hated that, because I knew it was supposed to be me in that first slot. I would have done anything to prove I deserved it more than he did.

"Jeanine offered me that chance, to use her influence on Max to make me the youngest ancillary in Dauntless history, to show everyone that I was better. I was stupid and ambitious and so fucking full of myself that I didn't even think of what she'd want from me in return." He shook his head, scowling in disgust at the floor, like he was looking down at his younger self. "I let myself believe that Divergents didn't have a place in the System, that they really were a threat. I was so sure that what I could do in leadership was worth a few defective lives. Then Art was dead and Max made me a leader. I was eighteen; what the fuck did I know about leading a faction?!!"

Eric scrubbed his palms over his face, then back to lace them behind his neck. He looked so much older, so tired and weighted down.

"By the time I realized… everything - how stupid I was, how wrong I was - it was too late. With the blood on my hands… If I go against Jeanine, I'm dead." When he lifted his eyes to hers, they were glittering under the fluorescent lights. "But I couldn't let her get her claws in you, too. I thought I could keep you safe. If I could keep you you, all the good you'll do, it would be worth it. It would be worth everything."

Honey shook her head, ignoring his tears, ignoring her own, ignoring the sudden rush of understanding and the pain that followed in its wake, ignoring the endless, unshakable love she felt for the man before her and how she wanted to ease the anguish and self-loathing she knew he was feeling. It could wait. All of it had to wait.

"I'm not worth it," she told him firmly. "The lives of an entire faction, Eric? You and I and anything we could ever do aren't worth that. This will destroy the city; don't you understand? There won't be a System to save. This will bring everything down."

"I can't stop it," he said, so lost and broken in that moment. "It's gone too far. All I can do is protect you. That's all I can do."
Honey opened her mouth to protest, to contradict, to tell him he needed to try, he needed to do something, but she didn't. He was right. It was too late for Eric, there was nothing he could do. Fighting back now would only get him killed and getting himself killed would accomplish nothing. Max and Jeanine would still attack Abnegation in the morning.

"Is there some way to render the serum inert?" she asked instead. Eric shrugged helplessly.

"I don't know. We need to talk to Max." His voice was so listless it made her ache. Oh, Honey had never hated Jeanine Matthews more than at that moment, looking at what the woman had done to her beautiful monster.

The girl stepped around the table, moving to stand before the fractured man. She was just as selfish and foolish as Eric and hoped the city could spare the moment she stole to wipe the wetness from his lashes. His hands dropped, skimming over her shoulders before falling to his sides; as if he'd been about to pull her close, but decided at the last instant that he didn't deserve to hold her. Honey curled her hands around the base of his skull, pulling his forehead down to hers.

"We're going to talk to Max," she told him softly. "And you're going to be the strong Dauntless man I know you are. And no matter what happens, I'm still going to love you when it's all over. Understand?"

He nodded, letting out a tremulous breath that fell on her lips like a kiss. She hoarded a few precious seconds more to let Eric pull himself together, waiting until his shoulders were strong again and his eyes steel once more and he took her hand and pulled her out into the hall. First Max, then Jeanine. Eric could only protect Honey, so Honey would have to protect her monster in return.

Her monster and everyone else, or die trying. Dauntless or death.

Chapter End Notes

The shit hath hit the fan.

So, everyone wondering why Eric works with Jeanine; what do you think?
As determined and keen on taking action as she was, Honey still felt a thrill of trepidation rush up her spine when Eric hurried them passed the security office and she realized where they were going. The mystery room was open and people were milling about, coming and going, ants both black and blue and that just increased her anxiety. Max was standing near the large view screen, talking to some nose holding a scroll. He didn't even look up until Eric grabbed his arm and shoved the head of Dauntless into the bank of computers.

"We had a fucking understanding, Max!" he barked. The older man not only didn't seem the least bit intimidated, he didn't even appear surprised. He just looked at Eric blandly, far more assured of the younger leader's sense of self preservation than Honey was at the moment.

"You said you didn't want her to know. If everyone else was getting an injection, but her, she'd have asked questions," Max intoned almost lazily. Eric growled with menace, which had zero effect on the other man. The head of Dauntless glanced down at the younger man's hand that was gripping the front of his jacket, pinning him in place. "You want to take a step back, Eric. Calm down a little bit. Before you do something you'll regret."

Honey could almost hear her lover's teeth grinding; she could hear one of the vertebrae in his spine pop from the tension in his muscles. He ultimately followed his superior's advice and released him, taking a step back.

"They attacked her," he informed Max in a low, dangerous tone. The older man shrugged, straightening his jacket with an air of ambivalence.

"No, she attacked them," he corrected. "She took out six of Jeanine's people. I guess our little crow really doesn't like injections."

Eric didn't disillusion him as to the real reason Honey fought against the fake Patrol officers, so she didn't either. If Max knew that their secret wasn't as secret as they'd believed, it would only set him to wondering who else might know and cause them trouble on the eve of their big mobilization.

"You should have just left her down in detention," Max went on, as if that were a reasonable course of action. "She'd have been safe and completely unaware."

Eric frowned, looking back at Honey, and she couldn't tell if he was actually considering that as an option or just making a show of considering it for Max's sake. She frowned right back at him, because that was the correct response in either case.

"It's too late now," he said, still angry, but no longer murderous. He turned back to the elder man. "Is there a way to disable her injection?"
Max shrugged, shaking his head. "How the hell should I know? Ask Jeanine when she gets here."

Honey's stomach felt suddenly hollow. There was no reason for her to think the woman wouldn't be coming and there was really nothing left to fear from her, since the secrets had been revealed and everyone knew that Honey knew. Still, the thought of Matthews in Dauntless made her skin crawl.

"ETA?" Eric asked shortly.

"Twenty minutes," Max replied. He nodded towards the small crow. "Do something with her and get started on your prep."

Eric nodded, head up, shoulders back, very military. He turned away as Max went back to his conversation with the Erudite tech and ushered Honey out into the hallway. It didn't take a minute for her to recognize where he was taking her - the leadership offices; his office to be exact. Once inside, he shut the door and locked it, then led her to his desk and sat her in the chair. As Eric rummaged in his desk drawer, realization hit the girl.

"You're going to just lock me in here?" she asked, incredulous. He didn't even look up.

"It's the safest place for you," the man said. She wasn't even surprised when he pulled out a pair of handcuffs. How many of those things does he have? "If Jeanine can't or won't give me a way to disable your transmitters, you'll end up under the control of the simulation, just like everyone else. This will make sure you stay put."

Honey didn't fight as he cuffed her wrist, then looped the chain through the arm of the chair, attaching the other cuff to the desk, itself. It was metal and heavy and probably weighed more than Honey did. Eric looked down at her for a long moment, the silence between them heavy and oppressive. He licked his lips, mouth opening to speak, but nothing coming out. Those beautiful slate gray eyes were filled with regret and more than a little shame; for his actions, for his weakness.

"I... I'm sorry, Honey," he said. The words seemed to creak, like a door swinging on an old, rusty hinge and she wondered just how long it had been since he'd used them and meant it. Years. A lifetime. There were many emotions evident in Honey's own eyes, face, and tone, but disappointment and condemnation were not among them. She took hold of his hand with her free one and squeezed his fingers.

"Remember what I said. No matter what happens." He nodded at her words, but she pushed further, giving his hand a little tug for emphasis. "Promise me you'll remember."

Eric nodded again, squeezing her hand in return. "I promise, I'll remember. You love me. No matter what happens."

Honey nodded herself, sitting back into the chair as if his words allowed her to relax. They hadn't, of course; nothing would allow that tonight. Reluctantly, the man released her hand, his fingers slipping from her grasp as he moved back around the desk. He paused in the doorway to look back at her, then left, shutting it behind him and locking it again. The girl waited until his footfalls faded away before springing into action.

The first thing Honey did was yank open the drawer where she knew Eric kept his office supplies. She snatched up a paperclip with shaking fingers and quickly bent one end into a small hook. After their first sexual encounter, the girl couldn't get the thought of being trapped in a pair of cuffs out of her mind, so she'd played around with various methods of escaping them. A paperclip was the easiest. It took less than thirty seconds of fiddling with the bit of metal inside the cuff that caught the teeth to free her wrist. Who knew her idle curiosity would ever pay off?
Next, she had to free herself from the room. The little Dauntless couldn't stop the smirk from curling her lips as she took in Eric's office door. The hinges were on the inside. Too easy. Where to go after she escaped, less so. Honey had no idea how sim tech worked beyond the basics and not the faintest clue how to disable an injected transmitter like LRCSS2248. Even if she did, anything she might accomplish would only be putting a butterfly on a gash. The technology would still exist, the serum would still be waiting. Even if the girl tried to go public, it would do no good. If she could even make it out of the compound and get to Candor, there would be people there working with Erudite and she wouldn't know who to trust.

There was only one person who could stop the events that had been set into motion and Honey had to go straight to her. She booted up Eric's computer station and quickly logged in, bringing up his electronic communications. It wasn't hard to find Jeanine Matthews's ID. The girl quickly typed out a message to the leader of Erudite, knowing the woman would receive the alert on her personal tablet. *I know everything. Meet me... Where? Should she just stay in Eric's office? No, the path to the offices led right passed the mystery room and she had to intercept Jeanine before she reached the young leader. It had to be someplace Matthews would know how to find, also. There were only three places Honey knew for a fact Jeanine would know how to reach.*

*Meet me in the Observation Theatre.* Even if Matthews had never been there herself, all the simulation techs would know the way. *Don't bring Eric or Max.* She didn't care who else came, but if Jeanine went to Max, Eric would know. Honey couldn't have her lover there; he'd try to stop her. She signed her name and sent the emessage. The next minutes ticked by slower than any in the girl's life.

*WHY SHOULD I DO THAT?*

Shit. Honey chewed her bottom lip. She had no leverage. She could threaten the woman, make up something, but somehow the girl didn't think that would work. She wracked her brain, trying to pick through everything she knew about Jeanine Matthews. Arrogant, narcissistic, cold, calculating, brilliant. Erudite. Just like Honey. *Because you're curious.*

*IF NOTHING ELSE, YOU ARE PERCEPTIVE. I'LL MEET YOU THERE IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.*

Honey let out a single, self-satisfied chuckle and shut the computer down. *Noses; so easily manipulated.* She grabbed a letter opener from Eric's desk and used it to pry the pins out of the hinges and pulled the door out of place enough to open. Quickly sliding the pins back in place, the girl shut the door behind her, so no one would notice anything amiss, then crept swiftly out of the governmental offices and down the hall. It took ten minutes to reach the Observation Theatre, but thankfully no one seemed to notice the little Dauntless as she made her way through the compound.

Honey had no idea what she would say to Jeanine when the woman arrived, but this was her best and only chance to bring the madness to an end. In the back of her mind lurked the very real possibility that there might only be one way to assure the safety of Abnegation. The consequences would be dire and far reaching, touching the lives of everyone Honey held dear. She might have to kill the leader of Erudite, condemning herself to execution for that act. To save the city, it was a sacrifice the little Dauntless was willing to make.

Jeanine didn't come alone. She was flanked by two of those probable androids that made up the Erudite security force. Unlike the man at the gate two weeks prior, Honey didn't think she could easily take these two out. Not the least reason for which being they were both wearing gun holsters.
under their blue jackets. Eric had taught her much about fighting, but never anything that would help her defend against a bullet.

"So, Eric let you in on our little secret," Jeanine said in lieu of greeting. It wasn't a question, but there was curiosity there. Honey shook her head. She was standing in the center of the room, leaning against the leather chair, trying not to appear intimidated.

"He just told me your target. I knew about the serum weeks ago," the girl told her. "You really shouldn't have kept the shipments off the logs. It was a dead giveaway something wasn't right."

The woman's perfect pink lips turn down in a mew of displeasure. "You're right. That was a mistake. I'm sure you're not the only one who noticed."

Honey shrugged. "I'm probably the only one who can get into Erudite to check the computers there without it being suspicious, though," she said, hoping to keep Jeanine from thinking too hard about who else might know about her plans. The woman smiled.

"I did think it was odd you knew about my conversation with your father when you hadn't seen your family in weeks," she said as if pleased by Honey's deception. The girl suddenly realized that Matthews was enjoying this, had probably been enjoying it since the first time Honey had stepped into her office. The cat and mouse game; she liked when people tried to outwit her, no doubt because it gave her a chance to prove how much more intelligent and clever she was than everyone around her.

"Thank you for the convenient excuse, anyway," the snowy crow said back, acting like she, too, enjoyed the back and forth between them. The truth was anything but; she was sick inside, wondering how much Jeanine had known all along, how much danger that knowledge put her and those she loved into.

"Now that you know the purpose of the serum, do you understand why this needs to be done?" Jeanine asked, her tone more serious.

"I don't," Honey told her, truthfully. "Eric tried to explain, but I don't think he understands completely, either."

"And he wants you to stay in the dark," Matthews expounded knowingly. The girl fought to keep from grinding her teeth at the insinuation that Eric's protection was simply a way to keep her ignorant, because he liked having knowledge she didn't. Only and Erudite would think that way. Regardless of his origins, Eric was Dauntless and someone like Jeanine could never understand anything beyond their own nose.

"I thought you might be willing to enlighten me."

The woman's smile returned and Honey knew that had been the exactly right thing to say. "The founders knew that the Divergents would multiply and eventually their numbers would grow large enough to destroy the Faction System. We haven't reached that point yet, but it's not far off. There are more every year. We must stop them now, before it's too late."

"And this artifact, whatever it is, can do that?" Honey asked, genuinely curious. Not because she wanted to somehow wipe out Divergence; totally the opposite, in fact.

"That is its purpose," Jeanine nodded. "But Abnegation, despite being the selfless faction, is foolish and small minded. They are waiting for a sign, something only Marcus Eaton knows and won't share. Apparently, the founder of Abnegation instructed that the artifact be passed down from head
to head and only that person was to have that information."

Of course, someone having information she didn't would kill Matthews, drive her mad. Mad enough
to destroy an entire faction to get it? Possibly; especially if it fed into her paranoia about Divergents.

"If only Marcus knows and he's not sharing, how do you even know about it?" The question had a
twofold purpose: first, Honey really did want to know and second, it would give Jeanine a further
chance to gloat and show off her superior mind.

"I've spent my life studying the founders. The best chance for the future lies in knowledge of the
past," the woman stated. The young sub couldn't argue with that, so she nodded in agreement. That
pleased the Erudite leader and she went on. "The other factions don't have as sophisticated a data
system as we at Erudite do, so it wasn't particularly difficult to crack their security. I managed it
when I was seventeen. The hard files at the Hub were even easier, once I knew what I was looking
for. There are so many documents there that no one thinks twice about.

"When I confronted Marcus about the artifact, he refused to give it to me or to even tell me what
magical sign he was waiting for. You know, Marcus was once Erudite as well."

"I didn't know that," Honey admitted. It made a great deal of sense to her, though. "Was he very
ambitious?"

The woman grinned and it put the girl in mind of a shark, all teeth and cold viciousness. "That's why
I like you. You catch things. Yes, he was very ambitious and very smart, craving power more than
knowledge. He might very well be holding out, just to keep hold of that power."

"I believe it," the crow stated, completely honest. She'd believe alot of things about Marcus Eaton.

"So, now you understand," Jeanine said. "To save the city, sacrifices must be made."

"No, Jeanine, I don't understand," Honey contradicted. "That's a good reason to attack Marcus
Eaton, not the whole of Abnegation."

"Ah, yes," the woman acknowledged the point, but in an almost dismissive manner. "Abnegation is
our greatest adversary in the fight against Divergence. They have the highest number of Divergents,
both by birth and Choosing. Their selfless nature makes them weak in the face of what needs to be
done. They'd rally around Marcus and fight us every step of the way. This is the quickest, cleanest
option."

"What if you had the artifact?" Honey asked. "If Marcus just gave it over to you, would that stop the
attack on Abnegation?"

Jeanine's eyes narrowed speculatively at the girl before her. After a pregnant pause, she conceded,
"For now. There would be no need for it."

The girl licked her lips as her heart began to pound. "But you won't delay the mobilization."

It wasn't a question, but the woman answered anyway, "No. We've been planning this for over a
year. The day after the conclusion of initiation is the perfect time to launch an offensive. Every
faction will have pulled into itself tonight to welcome their new members, so tomorrow no one will
be out to interfere or get caught up where they don't belong."

"What time are we moving out?"

"Six am." That gave Honey a little over seven hours. She nodded.
"Eric is going to ask you if there's a way to disable my injection," the girl said. Jeanine smirked.

"Technically, no, but we can simply not activate it with the others," the woman told her. Honey shook her head.

"Don't tell him that. Let him think I need to stay locked up for my own safety," she instructed. The leader's head tilted to the side just slightly and again the girl cringed inside that they had that mannerism in common. "He thinks I'm locked in his office. He needs to keep thinking that or else he'll come after me."

"And where will you be?" Jeanine asked with a hint of condescension. Honey answered, though they were both fully aware that the woman already knew.

"Having a chat with Marcus Eaton."

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter, I know. Sorry. Migraine last night and today, so I dunno if I'm gonna have another one for you guys before tomorrow. Sorry!
Honey heads for Abnegation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Honey's first stop was the armory. She easily punched in the same code Eric had used less than half an hour before and let herself into the weapons cache. The girl looked over the offerings, trying to decide how she was going to go about getting Marcus to give her the artifact. A rifle was out of the question, too big and conspicuous; she'd never get it out of the compound unnoticed. She didn't want to kill him, anyway. Honey wasn't a murderer. Even brushing up against it by contributing to Al's suicide had been too much.

She made a quick choice and grabbed what she would need, hiding it easily under her jacket. Next, the girl hurried to the Pit and the closest clothier she could find. Yes, the Dauntless traditionally wear black, but there were clothes in other shades to provide contrast. Honey dropped a few points getting herself some attire that would help mask her identity. She thought about going to a salon and getting some temporary color, but that would get noticed. The kid suddenly changing her white locks? No, even if it completely washed out the next day, people would wonder why she'd done it at all.

Honey quickly made her way to the nearest exit. By some miracle, she'd managed to avoid anyone who would have stopped her to ask where she was hurrying off to. Probably because most of the faction was either still celebrating or going to sleep off said celebration. The air outside was heavy and warm, moisture clung to her skin as the girl rushed towards the train tracks. Thunder rumbled above her, promising a storm. Seemed fitting, she thought.

Jeanine was correct. No one was out tonight and Honey had the train to herself. She stripped off her Dauntless black and pulled on a pair of gray slacks that were too long, rolling up the cuffs so they didn't drag. Above that, she now wore a pink tee beneath a hunter green sleeveless hoodie. It was too hot for long sleeves, but she'd needed something to cover her hair and hide what she'd taken from the armory. A few blocks before the train reached the Abnegation sector, the girl hopped off. It had begun to rain; just a few fat drops at first.

Her clothes were wrapped in a tight bundle, which she stashed beneath a shrub. Honey knelt and scooped up a handful of dirt that was just starting to become mud and smeared it onto her arm, obscuring the white flames. More was rubbed into her new clothes and she managed to tear off one of the hoodie's pockets and rip the knees of her slacks. She brushed dirt across her forehead, then tried to wipe it off so that it smeared. Once the girl was satisfied she looked properly pathetic, she made her way towards Abnegation.

The little gray bricks that were Abnegation housing all looked the same and Honey had a moment of trouble figuring out which one belonged to Marcus Eaton. All the lights were off, in every house, and the street was dark. The roads here were in just as poor condition as those in the Factionless sector, broken and crumbling, just bare dirt in some places. The rain had increased by this point, pouring down in heavy sheets that made it even harder to see. The little Dauntless tripped over a chunk of asphalt and fell, scraping her palms on the ground. So much the better.
By the time she reached the Eaton household, Honey was soaked and shivering from an unseasonably chill wind that blew through the rain. A cold front must be following the storm. Her Erudite schooling told her that meant lots of thunder and lighting before the night was through. Good. She knocked on the door before her and waited. A dim glow shown through the window above and to the right. That must be Marcus's bedroom. Soon after, another light from the window just beside her and the door opened and the soaked crow was looking up and up and up at Marcus Eaton.

Honey had never realized how very tall the man was. Tall and broad, big for an Erudite, huge for an Abnegation. She should have anticipated he'd be atleast large, given how much time she'd spent with his son, but Marcus was taller even than Four and thicker by some margin. Despite his size, he was the picture of a non-threatening stiff, from his floppy gray hair in need of a trim, to the two days worth of stubble on his jaw and chin that bespoke of his faction's lack of vanity, to his ill-fitting gray clothes. The only thing that gave him away was his eyes. Sky blue and piercing, looking down at the small, ragged girl on his doorstep like a wolf gazing upon a lamb.

"I'm sorry!" Honey rushed to speak before he could. She lifted her hands, palms up, showing off the bleeding scrapes she'd gotten moments before. "I got caught in the storm and I fell and I… I'm sorry I bothered you!"

She turned, as if to hurry off into the rain, but a large hand clapped onto her shoulder. It was warm and gentle, but the grip was as strong as Eric's. He wasn't going to let her go anywhere.

"Nonsense. Come inside," Marcus insisted, in a friendly tone. Honey didn't bother to suppress the shiver that ran through her, knowing he'd assume it was the wet and cold that caused it and not the feeling that she was a mouse beneath an owl's talons. He pulled her into the house and the girl didn't fight it, letting the man lead her into his kitchen.

Honey had never been inside an Abnegation residence and her eyes darted around the place, taking in everything. It wasn't her usual Erudite curiosity that precipitated the action, however, but her Dauntless vigilance. She was marking each piece of furniture, every window and door, everything that could be used as a weapon or to defend against one.

Marcus pulled out one of the chairs at the kitchen table and sat her down. "I'll be right back. Don't you move." His tone was gentle, kind even, but there was something beneath it that warned her not to disobey. He probably used the same tone with Four when they were in public. She curled her lip at his broad back as the man left the room. Honey's heel tapped the floor and her fingers picked at the tears at her knees. She hated not having a plan, not being prepared, and what she was doing now was the most impulsive act of her life. It might very well be the last one, too.

The girl looked around the room, trying to focus on her task, but still her mind kept forcing reminders that this was where Four had grown up. He'd sat in the chair where she was now. He'd eaten at this table and washed dishes in that sink. His blood and tears had soaked into the floorboards beneath her feet. That ignited a flame of rage inside Honey's belly and she stopped fighting the thoughts, letting the anger steel her to her purpose. Marcus Eaton had brutalized and terrorized the man who pushed her through initiation, who pulled her off Ellis when she'd lost herself to fury, who risked himself to cover up Tris's Divergence, a good man who was her friend.

Eaton returned shortly with a bottle of clear liquid - alcohol no doubt - and a small first aid kit. He pulled out a chair for himself and sat about opening the kit, removing what he needed to treat her palms.

"Hands up," he ordered softly. Honey complied, resting her arms on the table, palms up. "What were you doing out at this hour?"
The girl shrugged. He eyed her, clearly expecting more of an answer than that. She looked away, chewing her lip as if embarrassed, then admitted reluctantly, "I was s'posed to be meeting somebody."

"A boy?" Marcus pressed, taking a cotton ball and tipping the bottle of alcohol into it. She nodded, looking forlorn. "Is that how you 'fell'?"

She looked up quickly, shaking her head in denial and noted how much sharper and hungrier his eyes were. "He... wasn't there. And I waited a really long time. That's how I got caught in the rain," Honey explained, sad and embarrassed.

He took hold of one of her hands and pressed the alcohol soaked cotton into her wound. The girl hissed at the sting and tried to tug out of his grasp, but he just held on tighter; almost too tight. She felt sick to her stomach, knowing he was enjoying her pain as he squeezed the burning liquid into her injury.

"Didn't you think your parents would be worried?" Marcus inquired, his tone heavy with soft reproach. Again, there was something sharp and dangerous beneath his words, like a broken bottle hiding beneath fresh snow. She shook her head.

"I haven't got any," the girl sniffed and wiped her cheek with the hand he wasn't holding, smearing more dirt on her face.

"Well, the people who care for you then," he insisted. "Someone must be wondering where you are on a night like this."

That sick feeling in the pit of her stomach intensified. Someone who didn't know better would think he was just showing empathy and concern, reminding her that her actions affected those who loved her. Honey did know better and she recognized that the man was subtly determining if anyone would miss her tonight; maybe miss her ever. She let her cringe show, letting him thing she was playing into his hands. His huge, strong hands that could cause her serious damage if she wasn't very careful.

"Nobody gives a shit about me," the girl bemoaned softly, frowning at the table. Marcus squeezed her hand, pressing the cotton harder into her raw, bleeding flesh.

"That sort of language is unacceptable in this house," he warned. It was a warning, deep and hard and razor-edged. Honey forced a gasp, as if the pain or his tone frightened her. Neither of those things were what had her blood running cold - it was the eager shine in his eyes as he watched the clear fluid mix with her blood and drip onto his kitchen table.

"I-I'm sorry," she whispered, tight and trembling. His lashes fluttered once and Honey thought she might vomit.

"If you don't treat others with respect, they will not respect you," Marcus told her sagely as he set the cotton ball aside and lay a pad of gauze on her palm, taping it quickly in place so that he could move on to her other hand. The girl nodded in quick acknowledgement, as if wanting to placate his anger. "You may believe no one cares, but surely there is someone who is waiting for you to come home."

"I don't have anyone. I don't even have a home, really," she insisted, sadly.

"That's a shame," he said, his tone flat and without any feeling and that was scarier than any of the sharp-edged words he'd spoken before. Marcus picked up the bottle of alcohol and poured it over her bleeding palm. Honey jolted at the sudden burn, trying to yank her hand from his grasp, but he held on with a vice-like grip. "Calm down. Pain is part of healing. It's for your own good."
"Is that what you told Tobias?" The words left the little Dauntless's mouth before she realized they were on her tongue. His eyes jerked up to hers, wide and shocked.

"What did you say?" Marcus demanded. Honey put every ounce of contempt she felt for the man into her voice, let it shine through her eyes and show on the curl of her lip.

"Did you tell Tobias it was for his own good? Is that what you said to your son when you beat him?"

His reaction was instantaneous and violent. He gripped her hand with crushing force and jerked the girl forward across the table, grabbing her by her hoodie as if taking a pup by the scruff of its neck. His blue eyes burned with rage as they bored into hers from bare inches away. Eaton's nostrils flared as his breathing turned heavy and when he spoke his spittle flecked onto her own lips and chin.

"How dare you come into my house spouting these lies?!" he snarled. "Who are you?!

He couldn't have given her a better opportunity if she'd asked for it outright. Instead of answering him, Honey pulled the thin, metal cylinder from her pocket and jabbed the pronged end directly into Marcus's throat. He flung her away, staggering back into the kitchen archway frame, clutching his neck. As the girl fell back into her chair, toppling it over with the force of his throw, the man crumbled to the ground with a hoarse gurgle of pain.

Honey quickly scrambled to her feet, rushing to the fallen leader and jabbing another neuro-stim dart into his thigh. Marcus tried to shout, but only another wet choking sound came from his mouth. He tried to grab her, but the girl was ready with another dart, this one into his bicep. She had over a dozen more waiting in her pockets. Two more to fully incapacitate the massive man and the little Dauntless was left with the task of moving his worthless bulk herself. By the time she'd managed to sit him up against the wooden framework, the stim-fluid in his throat had started to wear off.

"Why are you doing this?" Marcus rasped, goggling at her in anguished disbelief and confusion. Honey sneered.

"It's for your own good," she couldn't help but say. The man groaned in dismay, trying in vain to stand. She jabbed another dart into his leg and this time, Eaton managed a soft keen of agony as the chemical solution did its work. "You keep moving. I've got plenty more of these."

Honey held up one of the darts for him to see. He shook his head, motioning it away, his eyes pleading now.

"If you shout, I'm going to put one of these someplace it'll really hurt you," the girl warned. She flicked her eyes downward, then back to his, lifting her eyebrows meaningfully. Marcus swallowed hard and nodded quickly. She smirked. "Good boy. Now, you have something that I need very badly and you're going to give it to me or I'm going to hurt you very badly."

"I don't have anything," Eaton insisted in a desperate croak. "Abnegation live a life of deprivation."

"Yeah, I know. But you've got an artifact the founders left behind," Honey said. The man's eyes grew impossibly wide and, remarkably, some of that fury returned. Can't have that. She jabbed the dart into his arm without warning.

"Why?!" Marcus demanded in a long, whining croon as the fresh pain hit him.

"You're thinking of not giving it to me," the girl explained. "And I'm pretty sure you're thinking about making me bleed. Where is it?"

He shook his head. "I can't give it to you."
"Well, at least you're not denying you have it," Honey said reasonably, pulling another dart from her pocket.

"You can torture me all you want," Marcus insisted, puffing heavily, like an angry bull. His face was red and he was sweating from the pain. "It's too important."

"It's even more important than you think. If I don't get that artifact in the next four hours, everyone in Abnegation is dead."

"What are you talking about?" the leader demanded.

"Jeanine Matthews is sending an army to level Abnegation because she wants that artifact and you won't give it up," Honey told him.

"You're insane!"

"I wish I was. She's insane," the girl said, shaking her head. "Remember not to shout."

Honey stuck another dart into his other leg and Marcus clapped a hand over his mouth to keep from crying out. She had to keep him incapacitated and couldn't risk tying the man up and leaving ligature marks behind. She couldn't leave any real evidence that she'd attacked him at all, throwing any report he would make into question. Candor could use their serum to prove he was telling the truth, but people truly believe their own delusions all the time.

"Tell me where it is and I'll leave," the girl implored, wanting this to end as swiftly as he did. Not that she minded inflicting a little pain on the man who tortured her friend.

"If you give it to Jeanine, she'll destroy it!" Marcus ground out through his anguish. Honey scoffed.

"She thinks she needs the information in it to save the city. She's not going to destroy it."

The man let out a barking laugh, giving her such an Erudite look of condescension and derision, the little Dauntless had no doubt of her earlier belief that he'd chosen Abnegation purely for the chance to take a governmental position and have that power.

"Idiot child," Marcus huffed, so very amused by the ignorance of the girl before him. "She already knows what's in it!"

"What?" Honey demanded in shocked disbelief. Eaton chuckled at her, his lips curled into a cruel smirk now.

"You stupid girl," he sneered. "She's known for years. Her research into the founders led her to me and together we found a way to use Divergents to access the artifact. The message inside terrified her and she insisted we destroy it or it would destroy the city. She's always been a frightened, selfish cretin."

"What's on it?" He only gave her a self-indulgent smirk as reply. Honey shook her head. "I don't even care. She's going to kill everyone. Do you understand that? Your entire faction."

The man didn't even bat an eye; his expression did not falter in the slightest. "She won't kill me."

The girl tried not to look surprised at such an egregious display of apathetic egoism, she really did, but she was legitimately taken aback. There were hundreds of people in Abnegation and he truly didn't care about a single life but his own.
"No?" Honey challenged with heavy disgust. "You sure about that? I'd think you're first on her list."

"Because you're stupid," Marcus reiterated superiorly. "If she kills me, she'll never find the artifact. But someone else will and the information will be made public."

"What do you mean, someone else will? If you've hidden it so well-"

"There are people with instructions on what to do in the event of my untimely death," the man explained, smug and self-satisfied. "Jeanine knows they exist but not who has them and there's no way for her to know. If she kills me, the thing she fears most will happen. She won't allow that."

"You're both crazy, you know that?" Eaton only laughed again. The sound grated on the girl's already frayed nerves. She stuck him with another dart just to shut him up. He pressed his fist to his mouth to hold in his shout of pain, but didn't stop smiling at her as if he held all the cards. "I believe you. Jeanine won't kill you. But I'm not Jeanine."

Honey reached into her hoodie and pulled out the other thing she'd taken from the armory - a pistol. Marcus sneered at her in challenge.

"I know you're bluffing. Jeanine would have given you strict orders. That's why you're using those little vials instead of actually harming me," the man declared pompously. Now it was the little Dauntless's turn to smirk.

"Oh, you mean these vials?" She hit him with another, in almost the same spot as the last one. This time he had to bite into his hand to keep quiet. Her smirk dropped and her voice turned cold, deathly serious as she said, "Jeanine didn't send me. I came here to get the artifact because it's the only way to stop her. Beyond that, I couldn't care less. My only concern is stopping a genocide. If I have to kill you and her to see that done, then so be it."

Honey clicked the safety off her gun. Marcus eyed her warily, clearly trying to decide how serious she was. She was very serious. He swallowed hard, topaz eyes flicking between her and the barrel of her weapon, back and forth and back again.

"If you kill me you won't find it," he said, but his voice was anything but confident.

"If I kill you, I won't need it. I'll leave here and go back to Dauntless and kill Jeanine. Whatever happens after that, Abnegation will still be safe in the morning and that's all I care about." Her voice was steady and solid, calm as the marsh was wet - and it was a rainy night. Honey didn't give him a time limit - she had four hours after all - just waited for him to realize she was most certainly not bluffing.

"You don't have to kill me to kill her," he pointed out the flaw in her logic. Just like an Erudite. The girl only shrugged.

"There's a chance Jeanine has atleast one or two true believers working with her. Killing her but leaving you alive will just postpone the inevitable. Abnegation wouldn't be safe. Taking both of you out is the only way to ensure the attack never happens."

"If I give it to you, she'll have me killed anyway; just to silence me," Marcus said, his voice taking on a hint of desperation and made Honey's lips want to curl. She kept her expression in check, stony and determined.

"You'll have a chance to run, hide, seek asylum." The girl shrugged. "Or I can kill you right now. It's your choice."
The leader let out a sound of frustration, low and guttural like a cornered dog. "The back stoop is a solid concrete slab. It's underneath that. You'll never be able to lift it on your own."

"And I suppose I should let the darts wear off so that you can help me with all your big muscles, Marcus?" Honey posited in an unimpressed manner. "I was Erudite, too. Where is it really? And if you lie to me again…"

She let the threat trail off, wiggling the cylinder she held in her non-gun hand. He glared at her, looking so much like that cornered dog, rage and desperation coming off him in waves. The man opened his mouth to speak and the girl knew, she just knew he was going to try to get around her again. She brought the dart down towards his groin hard and fast.

"DON'T!" Eaton yelped, trying to cringe away, hands out in supplication. "It's in the wall!"

"Where?" Honey demanded. "The walls are solid concrete."

He grunted in anger and disgust at his own surrender. "Behind the mirror. There's a separate code that opens the panel."

"It's like pulling teeth with you," she huffed, shaking her head. "What's the code?"

He held up three fingers vertically, then ticked them off in a sequence. Honey counted it off in her mind and stood. As she moved passed the furious man, she clapped a hand over his mouth and stuck the dart down into the back of his neck, right at the base of his skull. He let out a weak groan and slumped over, twitching on the floor.

"Yeah, that one really hurts. I know," she said without pity, then moved into the common room. The mirror cabinet was easily distinguished and, true to his word, when she entered the sequence, the whole panel swung outward. There was a four inch thick slab of concrete behind the mirror and three steel bars running through that which must serve as the locking mechanism. If someone were to tear the panel off the wall, they'd probably never notice anything behind it and even if they did, it would take a jackhammer from the outside to get to it.

The artifact was wrapped in linen and when Honey pulled it free, she saw that it was some kind of long, pentagonal cylinder. There were symbols for each of the five factions formed by what appeared to be fiber optic circuitry, one on each side of the device. There were ports so that the artifact could be hooked into a computer system, but they were a different shape and style than any the girl had ever seen. That made sense, though, considering how old the thing was. She wrapped it back up and made her way back into the kitchen.

Marcus moaned from the floor as Honey stepped over him. She quickly found a waterproof bag and slipped the artifact inside to shield it from the rain. Then she crouched down, gun in hand, and waited for Eaton to regain his senses.

Chapter End Notes

Man, Marcus is a piece of garbage.
As Honey gazed down at Marcus Eaton's limp, twitching form with an impassive expression, she was a mass of conflicting emotions inside. She'd just spent the last twenty minutes torturing the man, she'd even threatened to kill him - and meant it - and it made her sick. Her actions made her nauseous, even though they'd been so very necessary. Surging up against that feeling of sick self-flagellation was a dark sort of satisfaction. Every groan and shout, every pitiful whine she'd dragged from the despicable man's vocal cords had been music to her ears. He deserved it, all of it and more besides. Four had been right; her capacity to do harm was something she should fear. It was something she did fear, something that made her blood run colder than even Marcus's intentions when he'd thought her just some poor, unfortunate Factionless girl.

Aside from how Honey was roiling with emotion over her own violent nature and the need to suppress it, she was also now weighted down with uncertainty over how to proceed with Jeanine. The woman already knew what was contained within the artifact - had apparently always known. While the fact that Matthews had lied to her didn't particularly surprise the young crow, it was a massive hit to her outlook. Would Jeanine stop the assault on Abnegation or would she use it as a cover for killing Marcus Eaton?

There was no love loss between Abnegation and Erudite, the woman might still go through with her plan thinking it was a sure way for Erudite to finally take over the city government. She was crazy enough to believe that, ignoring the fact that obliterating an entire faction would bring the entire System crashing down. The city would be torn apart. It would be all out war.

But Honey now had a bargaining chip. She had the device and now knew Jeanine's true purpose in obtaining it - to see the thing destroyed. What message could possibly be contained with in the circuits that frightened the woman so badly she would turn to genocide as a viable alternative to having the information made public? The girl didn't think she wanted to know. She certainly didn't need to know. The actual information was irrelevant, only the leverage it provided was of use to her.

Marcus's eyes fluttered open and he grunted harshly, drawing Honey from her reverie. He pushed himself upright once more, rolling his head on his shoulders and reaching up to cup the back of his skull. He glared at the girl before him, grunting again and baring his teeth for a moment.

"Found your toy," she intoned, jostling the bag where it hung at her side. Eaton's scowl only deepened.
"Why are you still here?"

"I figure Amity is the best place for you to go. It's outside the city, there's plenty of spaces for you to hole up in while you and Jeanine hash out your differences." He scoffed, disgustedly. "Not a fan of banjos? Candor's your only other option, but if you want to keep any of this under wraps and maybe hang onto your role at the Hub, you should probably go to Amity. Make up your mind, because I haven't got all night."

"You're going to escort me?" the man asked dubiously.

"See, Marcus, I don't really trust you," Honey admitted with a shrug. "You might do something stupid like run and wake up all your Abnegation brethren, kick up a big fuss, and get everyone upset over an invasion that I'm trying very hard to keep anyone from finding out about and cause me alot of problems. All over this hunk of metal that you really don't want to give up."

"You truly think you can keep this a secret?"

"Ultimately, no. But for a while, yes. Long enough; that's all I need." She shrugged. The girl motioned her pistol at his legs. "Can you stand?"

Marcus shifted his legs experimentally, then used the doorframe for an anchor as he pushed to his feet with a huff of exhaustion. Honey waved him ahead of her, keeping several feet between them.

"If you yell, I'll shoot you. If you try to run, I'll shoot you. If you try to attack me, I'll shoot you."

The man opened his front door and that chill wind blew the rain into his home, soaking the floor and his shoes. He looked back at her with a mighty frown, but the girl just urged him onward. The rain fell in thick torrents. Fat, warm raindrops soaked the pair in seconds only to have the cold wind turn the water frigid an instant later. Eaton remained silent until the last of the Abnegation brick-like houses fell away into the inky night back behind them.

"You don't really think you'll walk away from this, do you?" he called over his shoulder as they moved through the empty city streets.

"It's funny that the head of Abnegation doesn't understand the concept of self-sacrifice," she called back with a sneer in her voice. Honey thought she could see him shake his head.

"It's not something I associate with Dauntless," Marcus told her. He looked back at her and even with the dark and the rain, she knew he was smirking smugly. "Or did you think I wouldn't recognize you? I'm the head of the City Council; you think I wouldn't know the youngest ancillary in Dauntless history? You should have chosen a better disguise."

The girl licked her lips and tasted dirt and the salt of her own sweat diluted in the rain. She shivered and not just from the cold. "It was good enough to get me in your door. I knew you wouldn't be able to resist a vulnerable little thing like me."

He made a sound of scoffing disgust. "You shouldn't believe everything you read in the news."

"You shouldn't believe you have anyone with two good eyes fooled," Honey insisted, refusing to tell him that she knew the truth as fact, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of knowing that he made up a quarter of his son's greatest fears. "You trail foulness behind you like a wretched comet."

"Oh, that's very poetic," he snarked. "Regardless of your personal opinion of me, the fact remains that I know who you are and you assaulted me in my own home. You might be able to hold that artifact over Jeanine Matthews's head tonight, but tomorrow, you'll be arrested by your own people."
He stopped and turned to face her. The girl stopped as well. A heavy shudder rolled through her at the broad smile the man was wearing.

"When you're tried at Candor, I'll petition the court for leniency, because Abnegation do not believe in capital punishment. You'll be exiled from Dauntless. Take a look around you." He gestured broadly at the dilapidated buildings that surrounded them. "This will be your new home. And as Factionless, you'll fall under my jurisdiction. No one will protect you, not if it means risking losing their rations. You think me a monster? Remember, you'll be mine by this time tomorrow."

Water, water everywhere, yet somehow Honey's mouth was bone dry. The hand that held her pistol was shaking and it had nothing to do with the wind or the rain and everything to do with that silver grin Marcus Eaton was aiming at her and the way it made her feel outgunned.

"We both know you're not going to shoot me," he all but cooed. "Give me back the artifact and I'll forget I ever saw you tonight."

"You know I can't do that," she told him through teeth that clacked together with the shivers that wracked her tiny frame.

"You're willing to die to stop a slaughter, but are you willing to live with what you think I might do to you? I certainly won't kill you, if that's what you're hoping for."

God, he was an abhorrent creature. She couldn't imagine how many Factionless had suffered at his hands once Tobias was gone and safe at Dauntless. Worst of all, Marcus was right. She had assaulted him and tortured him and the sentence for that could be death, but he had the right to beg for a lesser punishment. Lesser? Honey had once thought that being Factionless was the worst fate that could befall her. Foolish child; she'd had no idea what kind of beasties were lurking in the shadows.

"You have a choice to make, my dear." Eaton's tone was triumphant. He'd already claimed victory, secure in his superior intellect and viciousness and desire to reclaim the power he thought rightfully his. "Either you leave Jeanine Matthews and her insurgent force to me and let a few lives be lost before the dust settles or you sacrifice yourself for them every day for the rest of your life - and I will make certain you live a long, full life indeed."

The girl's breath came in short pants, her knees feeling like rubber. Were those really her only two options? Their lives or her body? The gun was a heavy, heavy weight in her hand, pulling her arm inescapably towards the ground. Marcus saw the weapon slowly dropping away and began to walk towards her. His long, long legs should have made short work of the gap between them, but he seemed to savor every step, drawing the distance out like a blade. When he finally stood directly before her, his gargantuan frame dwarfing hers, Honey couldn't look him in the face, knowing those clear, blue eyes would he sharper and hungrier than ever.

"Give me your gun," he commanded in a deep rumble that seemed to echo the thunder that rolled above them. She did as ordered, letting the pistol slide limply through her grasp until it hung from her fingertips, then handed it over. As Marcus claimed the weapon, his hand closed around hers, warm and strong despite the frigid wind. Honey's free hand was a fist in her pocket, her shoulders tense, her body thrumming with adrenaline and fear and hate.

Eaton tucked the top knuckle of his free hand under her chin, lifting her gaze to his. "You made the right choice."

He actually managed to sound genuinely approving and that sent another hard shudder through the little Dauntless's freezing, tightly wound body.
"You made it easy for me," Honey declared. She released her gun, slipping her small, wet hand easily from his and grabbed his upraised wrist. Before the man could react to the sudden move, the girl had yanked him forward and jabbed her one remaining neuro-stim dart into his throat to silence him.

Marcus had been right all along. The young sub couldn't shoot him; she knew better. If the head of the City Council was found shot, the bullet would be easily traced back to a Dauntless weapon. There would be an inquiry, security footage would show her as the last person to visit the armory before his murder, and Honey's fate would be sealed. She was willing to die to save her city, but not for Marcus Eaton. And she couldn't let him live, even before he'd started taunting her with promises of a lifetime of torment at his hands. The only way to solidify the leverage the artifact provided would be if the secrets it held remained secrets.

Only two people knew what was recorded in its circuits. The one Honey needed to kill had just tried to back her into a corner, threatening to make her life a brutal, endless nightmare from which she'd never wake. She didn't want to be a murderer, but the act was now no longer murderous. Now, killing the man was an act of self-preservation. He'd also been right that they were, in fact, inside the boundaries of the Factionless sector, where violence was commonplace and people caught unawares died every day. Yes, Marcus had made it very easy for her.

Turning her body aside, Honey kicked down hard, her boot crashing into the side of Eaton's knee with a popping crunch. The tall man dropped to the pavement, a gurgling hiss the only sound he could make in response to the pain. The two were now almost even height and Marcus's eyes, silver rings around pupils dilated wide by fear and pain and rage, locked onto Honey's own as he raised the gun between them.

The girl tilted her head to the side and waited for him to pull the trigger. Click. His mouth worked fruitlessly, his expression turning to desperate pleading. Mercy, it begged; please, don't do this. Her heart lurched like a physical strike, Four's voice shouting at her to stop, stop, stop, but the monster hissed in her ear and it was louder.

I will not hesitate. Set one; go. Orbital bone, nose, clavicle, sternum, jaw. The flesh and bone were solid, but gave under the force Honey put behind her blows. Set three; go. Ribs, stomach, kidney, catch the head and bring the face down into your knee. The already broken nose squelched against the hard knob at the end of her femur. Marcus tried to grab for her frantically, but the girl caught his wrist and slipped behind him, planting a foot just below his shoulder. I will not be squeamish. She yanked the arm back, kicking forward at the same time and the man let out a rasping attempt at a shout as the joint popped violently out of place.

Eaton tipped sideways, falling to the soaking asphalt, shaking with wet, choking sobs as Honey stood over him. She kicked him hard in the ribs, again and again and again - You thought you could touch me?! - until he coughed blood that spattered his face only to be washed away by the downpour.

The little Dauntless straddled his chest, taking hold of the man's head. He was beaten and broken and all the fight had left his body. He shook beneath her, wheezing with his punctured lung, choking on the blood he coughed up. She was shaking, too, her arms like noodles. Her heart was slamming, threatening to crack her own ribs as the gorge rose in her throat. This pathetic wretch didn't deserve her pity, didn't deserve the tears the girl couldn't deny were pouring from her eyes like rain. He devoured lives and spat them out; Four, Honey, the whole of Abnegation.

I will not hold back. She wished she'd had one more dart; just one more for her own throat so she wouldn't have to fight so hard to hold in the screams that threatened to tear loose as she bashed
Marcus Eaton's head into the pavement over and over and over until the light fled his one remaining good eye. It stared up at her, brilliant and shining and cold and dead, dead, dead as any specimen in Erudite.

Honey groaned and fell to the side, laying beside what had seconds before been a living, breathing man, and sobbed forever into the rain.

But she couldn't stay forever. Lives hung in the balance. So many lives; any one of them worth a thousand Marcus Eatons by default. Honey rolled to her hands and knees, fighting back the urge to vomit, promising her roiling stomach, Later. She snatched up the gun still clenched in the dead man's hand. His skin was still warm and her stomach insisted, Now! Pitching to the side, the girl spilled slick bile onto the rain drenched roadway. Gagging and coughing, she fought through the retching to find the dart that had gone astray during the violence.

Both gun and dart went into the bag with the artifact, dropping to the bottom to join the other darts from the Eaton household along with the bloody cotton ball and the cloth Honey had used to clean up her blood from the kitchen table. Slinging the bag over her shoulder, the girl staggered off into the storm without a single backward glance. She didn't need to look back; the image of Marcus Eaton lying dead in the road would be burned into her brain until the day she died. Until she was dead and gone and even then, she wasn't so sure.

It took an hour to get back to where she'd left her clothes and find the right fucking bush they were stashed beneath. As Honey pulled herself onto the train, all she wanted to do was collapse; just curl up in a ball of shivers and mental anguish and never open her eyes again. She couldn't do any of that, so instead, she changed back into her black Dauntless garb and stuffed her disguise into the bag along with everything else.

The girl couldn't take the artifact to Jeanine. She couldn't take it to Dauntless at all. She had to hide it somewhere; take a page of Marcus Eaton's book and stash the device someplace no one would find it. Unfortunately, Honey didn't have any handy secret compartments hanging around. She had considered simply putting it back into the wall at the Eaton household, but decided against it. The thing had to be someplace she had unrestricted access to. Herself and everyone else, just in case she had to give up the ghost and send someone after it in her place.

Above all else, it had to be someplace safe. Frustratingly, the only place Honey had ever felt truly safe was with Eric. She couldn't very well hide the artifact within her lover. An option skimmed across her mind and held fast; the moment it was a thought, she seized upon it. The Hancock. That black spike set into the sky all her life. The place where Eric had set her free to soar amongst the starlings and she'd flown straight back into his arms. Everyone had access to it and there were floors upon floors of rooms filled with debris; more hiding places than a little Dauntless girl could ever need.

It was just before five am when Honey pulled out her mini-tab and sent Jeanine Matthews an emessage. I have the artifact. Not half a minute passed and there was a reply.

COME TO MY OFFICE.

The girl contemplated refusing and insisting they meet on neutral ground, but what was the point?
Anywhere they'd meet, Jeanine would bring her androids with her and they would bring their guns. There was no such thing as neutral ground, nothing would even the playing field. See you soon.

The courtyard at Erudite was empty. The rain was slacking off, but the cold wind still blew and Honey was soaked through and through, chilled to her bones, deep into her marrow. Even the warmth inside the crystal spire did nothing to ease her shivers.

There was no receptionist tonight. The lights weren't even on in the lobby, the only illumination coming through the open door leading to Jeanine's office. When Honey entered, the head of Erudite was pacing before her desk, back and forth beneath the only light in the room that was on, so uncharacteristically animated the girl had to pause and stare for a moment. Shaking off the surprise, the shivering crow continued across the spotless, white tiles, leaving a trail of rainwater and mud in her wake.

Jeanine finally noticed her approach and whirled on Honey, quickly scanning her and scowling at how very empty-handed the girl was. "You said you had it," Matthews declared in an accusatory tone. Honey nodded.

"I did," she confirmed. Then, with tired derision, "I'm not stupid enough to bring it to you."

"Do you think I'm stupid enough to take you at your word?" the woman asked, her own derision far harsher and possessing more vigor.

"I don't think you're stupid, Jeanine," Honey said, wearily, sinking into one of the white chairs and probably ruining it. "I think you lied to me. I know you lied to me. I spoke to Marcus Eaton."

"Oh?" the leader intoned inquiringly, moving briskly around her desk to take a seat on her own chair. "And what did dear Marcus tell you, hmm?"

"That you only wanted the artifact so you could destroy it." No point in holding anything back. Now was the time to lay all the cards on the table. "Because whatever is on it, you don't want anyone to know."

"So, he didn't tell you everything." Jeanine seemed pleased by that fact, maybe even relieved.

"No," Honey shook her head. "He won't be telling anyone now."

Matthews's expression fell away to nothing, a complete blank as the girl's words sunk in. Her eyes narrowed, head tilting slightly to the side.

"Marcus is dead." It wasn't a question, but it was asking for confirmation. Honey nodded. "Why?"

"Because I needed to be holding all the bones," the girl stated her position. "Now I'm the one who has what you want, what you need. I'm the one with the power."

Jeanine leaned back in her chair, weaving her fingers together before her. "Are you? And what do you plan to do with that power?"

"Stop you. Call off the strike on Abnegation. No more hunting Divergents. Everything stops tonight."

"You know I can't do that, Honey," the woman declared with cold certainty.
"No, you can't not do it. Because you're more scared of what's in that device than any vague Divergent threat."

Jeanine sighed and stood, smoothing her navy blue jacket and brushing a perfect blonde hair back into place. "I suppose you'll tell me that you've hidden the artifact so well, I'll never find it. And then when I threaten to simply eliminate you, you'll insist that you have a contingency in place. Correct?"

"Something like that," Honey nodded side to side noncommittally.

"A decent strategy," the leader conceded, but the way her lips were pursed and the fine, pale brow she raised told the girl it wouldn't be that easy. "Only, you haven't been back to Dauntless tonight and I'm the only person you've communicated with since even before you left. You haven't had time to put any contingencies into place. You're bluffing and you're doing it badly."

"Well, I'm kind of exhausted," the girl admitted with a shrug. "So you can kill me if you want, I guess. But that doesn't mean I didn't think ahead."

"Oh, I'm not going to kill you, Honey," Matthews pursed mouth melted into a smirk. She nodded towards the deep shadows that enveloped the rest of her office, save where she and Honey were now. "He will."

He stepped out from the dark, his footfalls heavy, and the shine from the single light reflected off the studs set above his right eyebrow. Honey popped to her feet, rushing towards her lover, but reeled to a halt when Eric leveled the gun he held at the girl he loved. "Tell her where it is," the man said. His tone was flat, but his voice broke before he'd finished the short command.

"Eric, you don't have to do this," Honey insisted, stepping towards him. He stepped back and stabbed the gun at her.

"I can't," the girl told him. He huffed out an angry, frustrated breath and advanced. Honey didn't retreat as he came for her, didn't struggle or resist when he grabbed her arm and pressed the barrel of his gun to her temple. It was the second time Eric had aimed a loaded weapon at her head and for the second time she didn't even blink. "God, Honey, don't make me do this," her lover begged. The hand that held the gun was shaking and his beautiful gray eyes were glittering again. "If she has the fucking thing, she won't attack Abnegation. There's nothing you can do about the Divergents, just let them go. They aren't worth your life!"

"I think they might be," Honey said, hot tears slipping down her own cheeks at how defeated and brutalized her monster looked. "But you don't have to do what she says, don't you understand? If she turns you in, the truth serum will make you tell them everything. All her secrets will be out."

"They won't give me truth serum," he scoffed, shaking his head, his tears falling as well. "They'll have a mock trial in a closed court and execute me on the spot. The only way I live is if you give her the artifact. That's the only way we both live. Please, don't make me choose, Honey. I-I'm not… I can't…"

Eric was trying to tell her that he would kill her before he let himself be executed; that he would choose his life over hers. The girl couldn't say she wasn't surprised. She couldn't say that didn't hurt;
it cut so deep he might not even need the gun at all if he actually said the words aloud. But it wasn't a
deterrent. Given the choice between Eric and herself, Honey would choose the beautiful monster
every time.

"You're going to make him kill you?" Jeanine asked, her tone hollow with disbelief and disapproval.

"You're going to make him kill me," the silently weeping girl corrected. She lifted her hand to touch
her lover's cheek one last time. Her voice was solid as the stone that made up their home when she
said, "You promised. No matter what happens. Don't you ever forget."

The tremor in Eric's hand increased as he pressed the cold metal of the barrel into her temple harder.
His jaw worked and he swallowed hard. It would be easier on him if Honey shut her eyes, she knew,
but she couldn't make herself give up one precious second of the time she had left to look at him.

It was alright, Eric had been her contingency anyway. After he killed her and his grief turned to rage
- because that would be easier for him - the brutal man would go to every place that ever meant
anything to them and destroy it. He'd find the artifact, tucked away in that top floor office in the
Hancock and either take control of his life back from Jeanine or turn it over to the public to bring her
down. Either way, her madness would end and Honey could live with that. For what little time she
had left, anyway.

Eric's arm flexed, his brow furrowed as he warred with himself, trying to forced his body to do what
needed to be done. With an enraged snarling shout of pain and frustration, he succumbed to the
victorious side of his internal struggle. The gun clattered to the tiles, skidding away into the darkness
where he flung it, and he yanked Honey to him, crushing her small, soaking wet body to his own.
He was shaking all over, nearly hyperventilating as he buried his face in her wet hair and gasped
against her neck.

Honey clung to the man, weak with relief and pride and love. She kissed his throat and shoulder over
and over, brokenly telling him how much she loved him and assuring him everything would be
alright. She was wrong.

"How sweet," Jeanine announced cuttingly. Her words were easily ignored, not so the unmistakable
sound of a safety being clicked off. Honey and Eric looked up to find the head of Erudite holding her
own pistol and aiming it right at them. "You'll sacrifice yourself, but will you sacrifice him?"

"Are you crazy? I'm a leader of Dauntless; you can't just shoot me," Eric told the woman, shoving
his smaller lover behind his bulk to shield her from harm.

"Why not? Too much evidence?" Matthews laughed superiorly. "I control the evidence. The
surveillance, the forensics it's all Erudite. I can make you disappear and no one would ever know. It's
not like you'll be missed."

"Honey, get out of here," the man ordered, shoving the girl towards the door as he launched himself
at the crazed woman.

"No!" she cried, but it was too late. Jeanine fired her weapon and Eric dropped to the floor. Honey
screamed herself raw, screamed until she tasted copper on her own breath. She flew to her fallen
lover, her hands fluttering uselessly over his body as he convulsed in pain. "Oh god, Eric!"

The girl tore open his jacket, revealing the single gunshot to his broad chest, just below his right
pectoral. She pressed her hands to the wound, trying desperately to stop the bleeding. Matthews
staggered back against her desk, horrified by her own action. Eric grasped Honey's shoulders,
shoving her away towards the door.
"Go." When the man spoke, his lungs rattled. He coughed and red gurgled up from his throat to leave twin trails from the corners of his mouth and drip in garish contrast onto the white tiles beneath his head.

"No, no, no," the girl sobbed the word more times than could be counted, begging, pleading with anyone, anything listening. Suddenly, as if her prayers were answered, several voices called out from beyond the open door. The sound of boots striking tile echoed in the vast room as people flooded inside. Honey looked up to find Four and a mass of real Dauntless Patrol officers rushing into Jeanine's office, armed and ready for war. "Help me! He's dying!"

Four looked down at Eric and shook his head, then turned his attention to Matthews. The girl couldn't believe it. They'd always hated each other, but Four couldn't just let Eric lay there and die right in front of him! He was speaking to Jeanine, shouting at her angrily, but Honey couldn't understand what he was saying. She couldn't understand any of them. All she knew was that no one was helping the man she loved.

"Somebody help me!" she screamed at them, but no one would. They were all focused on Jeanine. The desperate girl lunged at her friend, snatching his gun away and aiming it at him. "You can't just let him die!"

Four shook his head, his pouty lips pinched tight, his heavy brows furrowed. "It's over, Honey," he told her. She screeched at him that he was wrong and begged him to help, please help, someone help. "It's over."

The gun dropped from her hands and she fell back, turning to Eric's motionless body. Not entirely motionless, his eyes found hers and his mouth worked, trying in vain to speak, to tell her something important. So important. Honey tried to lean in to hear it, but Four had hold of her and was pulling the girl away. She yowled like a feral cat and clawed at her lover's jacket, holding on with everything she had.

But Four was stronger, so strong, and he hauled her up and away from Eric. He spun her around and caught her face in his hands, speaking to her urgently, but the girl couldn't understand him. She didn't want to understand him. All she wanted was to lay down with her lover and never get up, because he would never get up and she belonged with him.

"Honey!" Four barked her name, shaking her. It did no good. It was too much for one small, broken girl to handle, even a Dauntless one. Honey's eyes rolled up and her world turned to black.

As quickly as the veil fell across her consciousness, it lifted again with startling, brutal clarity. Everything was too bright, colors too vivid, sounds too sharp. Her skin was oversensitive and the feel of cold wet fabric against her nerves was painful, moreso when the strong arms that held her shook the girl hard.

"Honey!" The voice was too loud in her ears, like thunder, like the rush of the Chasm inside her skull. "Look at me, goddammit!"

She looked, anything, anything to stop the shouting. Perfect, crystalline gray eyes looked back and the dark threatened to claim her again.

"No, you don't," Eric barked, shaking her once more. "You stay with me. That's an order!"

Jolting into herself, Honey let out a shocked cry, gripping Eric's face between her hands and
gawking at him with impossibly wide eyes. She couldn't speak, not yet, only let out animalistic sounds of confusion and raw, indefinable emotion. He was alive. So alive. Holding her and yelling at her and beautiful and alive! He looked over her head and snarled at someone the girl couldn't see.

"What the fuck did you do to her?" he demanded.

"I put her into a simulation that would motivate her to tell me where she hid the artifact," Jeanine explained blandly.

Simulation? She'd been in- the injection. Of course. Matthews had activated Honey's transmitters and plunged her into her own personal hell to try and ferret out the location when the girl wouldn't cooperate. None of it was real. God, but it had felt so real. She'd been watching Eric die and it was so fucking real.

She sobbed and wrapped her arms around the man who held her, clinging to him more tightly than she ever had before because now she knew what it was to lose him. The stupid, foolish girl had been wrong, so wrong. Abnegation be damned; she'd kill them all herself. The whole city could burn to ash, but that Eric stayed with her. That might be the shock talking, but it just as easily could be true. Only time would tell and time seemed to be on their side thus far. If Eric hadn't pulled her out of the sim when he had, she would have gladly given up the location of the artifact, along with anything else that was asked of her, just to have someone help him.

And here he was, alive and whole and raging at Jeanine Matthews.

"We'd have had it, if you hadn't pulled the plug," the woman scowled at him.

"She actually found the fucking thing?" Eric asked in disbelief.

"And apparently killed Marcus Eaton in the process."

The man looked down at the girl in his arms with wide eyes and brows raised in question. Honey nodded, still not trusting her ability to speak. Eric shifted her, pulling her head into his chest and squeezing her tightly.

"Eaton's dead and Honey hid the artifact?"

"Yes," Jeanine confirmed, then added with an irritated huff, "She's very determined. Now it will be even harder to get the location out of her."

"You're not going to," Eric stated firmly.

"Fine. Do whatever you think will work. We need the artifact, Eric," the woman said with an air of reproach. "I don't care how we get it."

"You're not following me, Jeanine," he told her. Honey recognized that tone, smug and superior and hard as stone. "It's over. You're over. Shut down the program."

"What are you talking about?" The head of Erudite didn't give him a chance to answer, before blurtting out her realization. "You think you can blackmail me?!

"If that's what you want to call it."

"You arrogant little shit!" Matthews hissed, icy and furious. Honey had to look up to make sure the woman was really speaking; she'd never heard her so angry or even a rumor about her using vulgarity. "Need I remind you of the blood on your hands, Eric? One message is all it will take and
you'll be kneeling in a Candor courtroom."

"But you won't send that message," the man said and Honey didn't have to look to know a familiar smirk had curled his lips. "She could have hidden that artifact anywhere in the city in the time she had. You'll never find it. If you want that information, you'll shut down the program."

"She doesn't," Honey finally managed to get words passed the constriction in her throat. Her voice was a grating croak of a sound, but it was something at least. "She already knows what's on it. She's afraid of it."

Eric glanced down at the girl, then back to the leader, his smirk growing into something that dripped of self-satisfied dominance. "Is that true, Jeanine. Are you afraid?"

"That's ridiculous!" the woman trilled in outrage. The denial only gave her way completely. "I need that artifact to keep the System alive! The Divergents-

"Save it," the young Dauntless leader cut her off, his tone unwaveringly commanding and confident in his superiority. "I thought you were done before. Now you haven't got a leg to stand on."

"Max will-

"Max hates working with you just as much as I do," Eric declared, victorious, yet almost bored, and what an odd combination that was. "He'll see this as leverage for Dauntless to hold over Erudite. You'll give him all the tech he wants and he won't have to do a damn thing in return. You're out of allies, Jeanine."

"At Dauntless perhaps," Matthews conceded, her words clipped and furious. "But the two of you won't make it out of Erudite alive. You've actually done me a great favor, Honey. With Marcus dead, I'm the only person in the city who knows how to access the data on the artifact. If anyone stumbles upon the device, it will come straight back to me. No, Eric. I believe you're the one who is finished."

The man only laughed. "As if I would come here alone? While we've been having this pleasant chat, my people have been neutralizing all your security and erasing any evidence that we were even here tonight."

Eric released Honey then, briefly pausing to make sure the girl could stand on her own, then striding purposefully across the room towards the person who had controlled and manipulated him for so many years. Matthews tried to flee, but her stylish heels made any chance of outpacing the massive Dauntless man impossible. He caught her from behind, wrapping his thick arm around her throat.

"Oh, Jeanine, you have no idea how long I've been wanting to do this," he hissed into her perfect blonde hair. She clawed at his bulky bicep as the muscle flexed just slightly, ruining her impeccable manicure in the process. Seconds later, the woman's lovely eyes rolled in their sockets and fluttered shut, her body hanging limply in Eric's grasp. With a derisive snort, he let her go and she crumpled into an awkwardly positioned heap on the floor. Lifting gray eyes that sparked with humor to his lover's, the man grinned. "She's going to be really pissed off when she wakes up."

Honey felt her knees start to go, but Eric was faster, quickly rejoining the girl and looping his oh so strong arms around her. Her mind was a swirling maelstrom of relief and fear and pride and more relief and she slumped against the comforting bulk the young leader's body provided.

Everything in her rational, Erudite brain was telling her that they'd won. Jeanine was defeated, Abnegation was safe, the artifact was tucked away in the Hancock, Marcus Eaton was dead, and all evidence of their involvement was wiped away. Yet Honey couldn't bring herself to trust it, there
was too much stress in her bones, too much adrenaline in her blood. She just shook her head, lost and on edge, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"Come on. We need to get out of here." Eric told her, half carrying the girl from the office and towards the elevator. That was one thing Honey could believe, at least. The rest was yet to be seen.

Chapter End Notes

PHEW! You all still with me, there?
Moving On

Chapter Summary

Eric and Honey head home and have a few words about what happened that night.

Once they were in the elevator, dropping back down to earth, Eric pushed Honey back a step and started running his hands firmly over her body, checking for injuries.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, not nearly as calm and self-assured as mere moments before in the head of Erudite's office. She lifted her hands to show him the scrapes (she'd torn off Marcus's bandage and left it with all the other evidence at the Hancock). "Is that all?"

Honey nodded and Eric finished his inspection by taking her face in his hands and checking her eyes. Exhausted and definitely experiencing some mild shock, but not dull or glassy. He let out a puffing breath of relief and thanks, pressing his lips to her forehead and pulling her against him once more.

"The fucking heart attacks you give me are gonna kill me someday," he growled into her hair. The girl gripped his vest so tightly her fingers cramped.

"Don't say that!" she yelped too sharply.

"Honey?" he tried to lean back, looking down to see her face, but she wouldn't allow it. Honey yanked his vest open and pressed her ear to the man's chest; the need to hear his heart beating, strong and sure, a very real, physical ache inside her. "What the fuck happened in that sim?"

"What do you think happened?" she snapped, but the wateriness of her voice dulled any edge the words might have had.

"It literally could have been anything," Eric protested, then kissed her hair. He seemed at a loss, which some part of the girl understood. Normally, when he needed to push her into action, a harsh, authoritative manner was the way to do it, but now she was too exhausted, too mentally compromised for such treatment and he wasn't sure how to proceed. Honey just shook her head, unable to bring herself to say the words. You died. I watched you die.

The elevator reached the ground floor and Eric hauled her out of the car and through the lobby. He lifted a small transceiver to his mouth.

"Copy that. West entrance in five," he said to whoever was listening. His "people", whoever they were. Honey didn't hear a reply, probably because they were using earwigs so as to not be overheard. Outside, the rain had stopped, but the wind had kicked up and was howling loudly between the buildings. Eric's head swung back and forth, scanning the area as they moved as quickly as the girl's short, tired legs could allow.

The place was so deserted and silent that when she finally did catch sight of someone out of the corner of her eye, Honey jumped and gasped. Thankfully she was too fatigued to squeal the way she normally would have. Eric had the gall to chuckled at her, but the girl couldn't be angry. She didn't think she'd ever be angry when he laughed at her again. She might be wrong about that, but tonight it
was what she believed.

The other person wore Dauntless black, one of Eric's allies. It wasn't until that person, along with three more, converged on the west entrance to Erudite, pausing under the light that hung over the gate, that Honey saw who the young leader had brought to back him up. She was stunned to say the least. The very least. Zeke and his little brother Uriah wore matching grins as the lovers approached, clearly relieved to see that the little Dauntless was relatively alright. Beside Uriah stood Tris, spunky Tris from Abnegation, and beside her stood none other than Eric's own longtime rival, Four.

"What…" the white-haired girl began, but couldn't finish. She would have expected the young leader to bring Xander and Brent, his own friends, or someone from Patrol. Four would have been literally the last person Honey ever thought her lover would turn to for help. Maybe, Tris would have been the last. Four and Tris together was completely mind-boggling.

Eric looked down at her and smirked, but it was Four who answered her non-question. "The serum doesn't work on Divergents," he stated.

Four was Divergent?! The girl's mind reeled for a moment. She'd been wrong about him only being a sympathizer and her brain buzzed with a million questions. How he had gotten a proper aptitude test result, being the most prominent. Immediately rising above the confusion was a sudden rush of understanding. The way Four had reacted to Honey's private beliefs about Divergents made sense now. When he'd said, "You know who I am," the girl had thought he meant who he was, Tobias Eaton, and the abuse he'd suffered and escaped, why he was the way he was, but Honey only had half the picture and thus, no idea why he was or even really who he was. She knew now. He was the kind of person who could change the world. And Tris, Divergent also; no wonder they connected so well.

Eric added, still looking down at his smaller lover, "I needed people I could trust, who Jeanine couldn't control."

More questions. How long had the man known about Four's Divergence? Tris's had been so obvious, why had the leader let it go when he was still working with Jeanine? Honey's step faltered. She was too tired for all this thinking. Four's brow furrowed at the other man's words, his pouty lips turning down just a touch. Evidently, he didn't quite know how to react to Eric's sudden apparent change of heart, either. He might also be suffering from the shock of realizing Eric had a heart to change in the first place.

"Lucky for me, you're very popular," the leader told her, his smirk shifting into a bit of a grin.

The group hurried off into the night, making for the nearest set of tracks. As they waited for the train, Eric tapped away on his mini-tab, communicating to Max what had transpired that evening. The raid on Abnegation was officially scrubbed, the computers would be shut down and eventually LRCSS2248 would simply metabolize its way out of everyone's systems like any other simulation serum. Honey wished that made her feel better. She'd have given much to be able to relax, to feel relieved, but she didn't. The girl was still wound too tightly, anxious to the point of anguish.

When the screech of steel wheels could be heard in the distance, Eric said to the girl at his side, "Your legs are a little shaky."

"My everything is a little shaky," Honey responded with weary sarcasm. He frowned.

"That's my point. C'mere," the man ordered, putting his back to her and crouching down.

"I'm not a child," the girl protested. Ignoring her, Eric tugged her arms around his neck and reached
back to catch her thighs, hefting the little Dauntless up onto his back effortlessly. Despite her protestation, Honey held on tightly, burying her face in the crook of the man's neck, breathing his scent deeply. Eric had never smelled so good. And that was saying something.

When the train came rushing by, Four and Zeke jumped on first. Eric wrapped her legs around his waist and hauled them both into the car, the other two men offering assistance to ensure they got on board safely. The two fresh members quickly followed suit. Eric immediately shrugged Honey off his back, setting her on her feet, and started to remove her soaking wet jacket. With the chill wind blowing through the city, the air whipping around the train car was downright wintry, and her exhaustion shakes immediately turned into freezing shivers.

"Four, give me your jacket," the leader ordered without looking up.

"Why?" It was Tris who asked the question in a demanding tone.

"Because I like his cologne," Eric snarked, shoving Honey's jacket off and letting it fall to the floor in a sopping heap. The man would, of course, have given her his own jacket, but he was wearing his favorite vest and that would do little good against the cold. Four had no problem giving up his coat for the shivering crow - it wouldn't be the first time, after all. He handed the garment off to Eric who wrapped it around her tiny frame and Honey's eyes slipped shut for a moment with the first feeling of relief she'd experienced all evening. Four's jacket was blissfully dry and warm from his body.

Then, Eric scooped Honey into his arms and carried her to the back corner of the car and sat, keeping her safely on his lap. He shrugged off his vest and draped it over her legs, then wrapped her in his strong, protective embrace and hugged her close like a child. The others stood at the door and looked on in what could reasonably be described as awe.

The fact that Eric had attached himself to the youngest ancillary was as well known in the faction as anything, but the idea that he actually loved her - that Eric could even feel something as human as love - seemed inconceivable to most. Yet there he was, the most dangerous man in Dauntless, the cold, deadly monster, tenderly cradling his diminutive lover, his forehead resting against hers; the hands that inflicted nothing but pain, stroking her arm and brushing back her damp hair; the mouth that barked orders and sneered cruelty, murmured soft reassurances to soothe her ragged nerves. The four Divergents didn't seem quite able to process the shift in their reality, the fact that Eric was just as human, with the same emotions and capacity for caring, as everyone else.

Not that it mattered; the other four people had ceased to exist to the two huddled together in the corner. Eric was softly telling the girl how proud he was of her, how she'd save the whole of Abnegation, how very lucky they all were that she had come into the world. Honey was trying desperately to believe that everything would be alright, silent tears trailing down her cheeks unnoticed because she had cried so much that night it seemed like there had never been a time when she wasn't.

"Stop," she ordered, shaking her head. "I killed someone tonight. Don't tell me how great I am."

"You did what needed to be done," the man insisted firmly. His tone refused any further argument, but she ignored it.

"I beat a man to death," the girl hissed, miserable and cold both physically and emotionally. Eric huffed, his breath so warm against her icy skin. She wished she could lean into him more, but they were already as close as two people could be without merging into one. Thankfully, the puff of air was his only response and he didn't announce how pleased he was by her actions; and Honey knew very well that he was pleased. His training had allowed her to do it and her own determination had driven her to use the skills they'd worked so hard to build. But he didn't say it and she was grateful.
"I know you and I aren't the same and you feel bad about things I never would, but I also know you're forcing yourself to feel guilty now, because you think you're supposed to," Eric said instead and she wasn't sure that was any better. "I know who Marcus Eaton really was. I've seen Four's Landscape. You know what no one remembers about that fight I conceded? The way the stiff's eyes glazed over and he stopped seeing me. I can take a beating, but I quit because, when I saw that look, I was afraid he was going to kill me."

Even without looking up, Honey could tell the man was scowling, could hear it in his voice and feel it in the way his hold went from tight to crushing. He was remembering his own fear and weakness and the hate he felt for himself and his opponent. As absurd as it was, the girl found herself reaching up to stroke his jaw, to comfort him on the most awful night of her life. The touch seemed to snap Eric's focus back onto the point he was making and his arms relaxed their too constricting grip.

"Marcus Eaton did that. He made Four that way. He beat his wife until the day she died. Who knows how many others he got ahold of? And no one could touch him. Leader of a faction, head of the City Council, and Jeanine protecting him. He controlled the Factionless's rations, so none of them tried to stop him. Could be dozens, could be hundreds. You put a stop to that.

"You stopped a genocide," he went on with hard certainty. These were facts that could not be disputed. "Every person in Abnegation is going to wake up tomorrow and have no idea how close they came. They're going to put on their gray clothes and eat their boring breakfasts and go out into the city, picking up litter and do-gooding like the stiffs they are, because of you.

"It's dangerous in the Factionless sector, but not a single one of them will ever have to worry about Marcus Eaton taking an interest in them again. He'll never hurt another person. All because of you. There is nothing you should feel bad about. No one would feel bad about ending that piece of shit. Even a stiff would tell you that. So stop making yourself sick over it."

Honey so wanted to believe what he was saying; with every fiber of her being she wanted to believe it. It was true, Marcus was a predator and his selfishness went above and beyond what the girl could ever imagine. Even without Jeanine and her insanity, killing Eaton would have saved countless lives. She didn't know if he was a killer, but he did devour lives. As awful was it was to think it, Four had been lucky - he'd gotten out. There were so many who had no escape from Marcus, nowhere to run, no place safe. He was a man and she'd taken his life, but had given back untold numbers more their own - people who didn't even yet know they would break and bleed under his cold, ravenous blue gaze.

No, Honey decided, she didn't need to feel bad about Marcus Eaton. She let out a soft sigh against Eric's jaw and felt the man release one of his own in response. Some of the weight that crushed her small body lifted, some of the tightness that bound her ribs and heart eased. Some, but not all. The girl licked her lips and shifted, turning in his hold and pressing her face to his neck. She could feel his pulse against the bridge of her nose and every breath filled her with that amazing scent that meant love and comfort and safety and home.

"You were the simulation," Honey whispered, half hoping the words would be lost to the rhythmic clackity clack of the train and the wind that rushed through the car around them. Eric stiffened slightly and she knew that hope was in vain.

"Tell me," he murmured, rubbing her arm soothingly, pressing his jaw more firmly against the side of her face. The girl drew a shaky breath and swallowed before focusing on forcing the words out.

"It tried to make me tell where the artifact was by having you threaten to kill me." Again the thick arms surrounding her tightened and she knew he was going to protest, so she went on before he could speak. "If you didn't kill me, Jeanine was going to turn you in. For the Divergents. So it was
you or me. I was surprised you chose you."

At her admission, the man let out a single short expulsion of air that could have been a laugh, but could just as easily not. "Good. You should have been," he grumbled low in his throat, indignant over the notion.

"When I was just going to let you kill me, the sim had you throw your gun away and tried a different approach." Her throat closed up on the words and her shivers turned back into shakes as the memory flooded her mind. She could smell the gunpowder, taste the copper on her scream. Eric's body suddenly jolted beneath hers as if he'd been given a great shock.

"Was it- it was me, wasn't it?" he breathed, horrified, but also almost like he couldn't believe it. "You wouldn't give up the artifact to save your own life, so it tried mine instead."

She nodded. "Jeanine… shot you." Honey didn't know that her hand had flattened over the place on her Eric's chest where the simulation Eric had been hit by the other leader's bullet. "More people came in; Dauntless, but… they wouldn't do anything. You were bleeding out. There was so much blood. And no one would help. And you were dying and I couldn't stop it and no one would help!"

The girl had started off the recounting of her sim experience in a choked whisper, but as the memory filled her mind, it was like she was right back there with her lover lying on the floor. Her nails were digging into Eric's chest; her body had gone stiff and rigid and her teeth were clenched; her breaths came in short, gasping pants and her voice had risen to a raw jumble of sobbing shouts that had every eye in the car locked onto her.

When shaking and calling her name didn't stop her ranting, Eric made a fist in her hair and yanked her head back, covering Honey's mouth with his and swallowing her anguished words. The taste of him cut through the torturous memory that had overcome her and her sob turned into a broken whimper. Her nails dug in deeper as he broke away again, pushing her face back against his throat and rocking her shuddering body in his arms. The girl wailed piteously, the sound breaking every heart within earshot, but none more than her own. The man shushed her, pressing his lips to her hair because he was impotent to do much else.

"It's alright," Eric assured her, the low timbre of his voice rumbling in Honey's ear and rolling through her body where she was pressed to his chest. She could feel it vibrate against her cheek. "I know it felt real, but I'm here. I'm right here with you, Honey."

He moved her hand up to his throat, pressing her fingers against the artery there, letting her measure the vibrant pulsing that testified he was very much alive. Then down to his chest again, over his heart where it thudded in endless rhythm against his ribs, each beat promising the next and the next.

"I'm alive. I'm safe." Tonight he was safe. But tomorrow? The day after? As if he could read her mind, Eric spoke in a fervent hiss, "I promise you'll never have to go through that again. You'll never have to watch me die. I'm promising you, Honey, and you know I never lie to you."

The girl nodded, accepting his inexplicable vow as gospel. If Eric made her a promise, he would keep it; he'd move heaven and earth to see it done. Still, her faith in the man aside, it still took long, physically painful moments for her choked, wracking sobs to cease and her harsh shuddering to ease. At some point, Four made his way up to the control room and instructed the operator to stop when they reached Dauntless. Honey was in no state to be jumping off a moving train and Eric didn't want to risk dropping her; as minute as that risk was, he rejected it outright.

The girl stood by the door as her lover jumped down, Four on one side and Tris on the other to help her drop into Eric's waiting arms. As the others hopped out of the car, the young leader paused.
"Thank you," he said. His voice was coarse and tight, the words rusty from disuse, but solid and heavy with feeling. The quartet of Divergents nodded, but none held his intense slate gaze as Four did. Honey didn't know if this meant anything would change between them in the future. Eric was still Eric and he'd still killed numerous Divergents and he was still cold and cruel and vicious and brutal; Four was still Four, the stiff who took first rank, who challenged the young leader's authority and judged his actions, and was one of only two people in Dauntless who didn't fear him. They'd never be friends, but maybe they'd stop being enemies. And wouldn't that be something?

Eric carried Honey straight to their quarters, right into the bathroom and sat her on the toilet while he turned on the shower. Her teeth were chattering from the cold and her lovely pink lips were tinged with blue. He stripped himself first, then peeled off her wet clothes, leaving everything where it fell. Lifting her into his arms once more, he stepped into the stall and sank down to the shower floor, settling her in his lap. Under other circumstances, it might have been comical to see the massive bulk of the Dauntless leader sitting cross-legged on the tiles of his shower, but not when his vulnerable lover was suffering from mild hypothermia in his grasp.

The heat of the water raining down on her naked skin was too much. The sudden influx of warmth burned her icy flesh as much as it soothed, but was so fucking gloriously searing she never wanted it to end. Honey groaned and melted against Eric's chest, her eyes rolling up behind their lids at the aching relief flooding her cells.

"Don't even think about it," he growled, pushing the wet hair back from her face. He took hold of her hand, rubbing her fingers firmly between his to help increase her circulation. The girl snorted exhaustedly, resting her tired head against his shoulder.

"I couldn't even if I wanted to," she insisted, her words slurred by fatigue. She could feel the smirk curve his lips where they pressed against her forehead.

"I was talking to my dick," Eric clarified. Honey's shoulders shook slightly with silent laughter, the most her body was capable of at the moment. Her own lips stretched into a fatigued smile in spite of everything that had gone on in the last twelve or so hours.

"God, I love you," she told him. The words were so insufficient to express the depth of feeling behind them, but that was alright. She knew that he knew.

"I love it when you call me that." More silent laughter, more beautifully warm thudding of her heart. The wonderful man tipped the girl's head up and smiled adoringly down at her. "And I love you."

His lips pressed to Honey's, soft and gentle, and the sweet, loving kiss did more to chase away the chill in her bones than the hot water ever could. The shower could only heat her from the skin inward, but Eric warmed her from her soul out; her own little sun, shining brightly from within.
New Day

Chapter Summary

Honey finds out something new

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Honey felt a strange sense of bewilderment when Eric carried her into the bedroom and placed her on their bed. How could anyone sleep after everything that had happened? It seemed wrong, regardless of how exhausted her body insisted she was. She curled into his massive bulk and he wound his strong arms securely around her, hands splayed wide over her form. He was even warmer than usual after the prolonged hot shower they'd shared; the man's skin soft and flushed, his embrace downright heavenly.

Eric didn't insist the girl try to sleep, didn't shush her when she spoke. Honey didn't want to talk about Jeanine or Marcus or the simulation; she needed to be reminded that the rest of the world was still real, that there was far more to her existence than this one awful night. First they talked about work, his investigations into Factionless violence and the questionable "herbal remedies" that sometimes came out of Amity, the progress of her canine unit and how one of the other crows had asked for her input on a proposal regarding obtaining vehicles for Patrol to aid in emergency response calls.

In spite of her endlessly whirring mind, Honey had drifted off at some point, but awoke with a shrill shout, jerking almost violently in Eric's arms. Her mind was filled with cold rain and the sound of screams - her own or Marcus Eaton's, she couldn't tell. He'd stroked her spine and calmed her fear, reminding her that they were safe and home. The girl began to ask him questions, all the things she'd been waiting to find out organically, because she suddenly couldn't bear not knowing any longer. His favorite color - royal purple; she might have guessed. His favorite food - crawfish scampi. His first words, aside from "mama" and "baba" like everyone else - a baby version of "aphid", because his mother's specialty had been pesticides. His first kiss - a girl named Miranda, sloppy and too exciting for a thirteen year old boy wearing loose slacks.

It went on like that through the small hours of morning: Honey slipping unknowingly into fitful slumber between questions, only to awaken in a state of panic. Each time, Eric was already running his hands up and down her spine, gently massaging her shoulders as he hummed assurances into her ear. The last time the girl woke, it was because her lover was gently shaking her and calling her name. Her eyes flashed opened to find his gray ones looking back at her and her heart unclenched.

"They found Marcus Eaton's body," he told her softly. Honey stiffened and paled, blood running cold. Eric shushed her tenderly, brushing the side of his nose against hers. "It's alright. Everyone thinks it was a Factionless attack. There's a meeting at the Hub in an hour; all leaders are required. I have to go."

"No!" she insisted, clinging to him, her nails digging in.

"I have to, Honey," Eric insisted. "It's going to be alright. Jeanine won't try anything at the Hub and she's not going to say anything about last night."
"Then I'm going with you," the little Dauntless declared. Her lover drew back and smiled at her. The expression was open and pleased, not mocking as might have been expected at the small crow's intention to protect the much larger, more dangerous leader. Eric seemed proud of her vehement determination to keep him safe - proud of her for possessing it or himself for having earned it, she couldn't be sure. However, he was just as determined to do the same in regards to her.

"No, you're staying here," he told her. "It's a closed meeting, so you can't be inside and there's no way in hell I'm leaving you out in the open. Max shut down the control computers, so Jeanine can't activate anyone's transmitters remotely, but she's got her moles here in Dauntless and I don't know yet if any of them are stupid enough to stay loyal to her. I already sent a message to Zeke. He's going to stay with you. If you want to have your friends come, too, do it. The more people around you, the better I'll feel."

"I won't feel better until you're back here. Right here." Honey scowled at him before pressing her cheek to Eric's chest. He kissed her temple.

"I know. Look at me," he ordered and she complied, face still pinched in displeasure, paranoid it was all somehow a trap, "When I get back, I promise we'll stay here until you feel safe again. Max can deal with Jeanine. I'll bring a portable computer station so no one will bother us over missing work. We'll have some food delivered. Then it'll just be you and me, right here in this bed for as long as you want."

"I'll want for a very long time," she warned, but that only made the man smile.

"I was hoping you'd feel that way," he announced before brushing his lips against hers. The kiss started out lightly, just his soft, pale pink lips skimming over her own deeper blush ones. Then he sighed as though the touch was a great relief, something he'd been waiting a lifetime for, and pressed forward more firmly. There wasn't heat, not yet, but the promise of it. The sweet, inviting warmth filled Honey, momentarily forcing every cold, negative thought from her mind until only Eric and what they would do in this bed when he returned remained. "Don't start without me."

The murmured command curled around her heart and lifted it, pushing a soft laugh from her still tingling lips. "Don't keep me waiting."

Both Zeke and Uriah came to stand guard over Honey while Eric was away taking care of his leaderly responsibilities. The moment the intimidating man was gone, they started plying the girl with questions. First, she demanded to know what had happened on their end, so she could find out how much they knew already and, thus, how much to hold back herself.

Eric had gone to Four first, subsequently recruiting Tris and Zeke, who had offered Uriah's help as well. The young leader hadn't explained much, supplying only the vaguest description of the purpose of the injections everyone had received and that Honey had gotten herself into trouble trying to stop it. He'd tracked her mini-tablet to Erudite and knew that meant she was in danger. Whether she'd been taken by Jeanine or was there to try and stop the woman on her own was irrelevant - Honey was in trouble.

While Eric made his way up the spire to deal with Jeanine, the rest had been moving through the Erudite compound. He'd dealt with whatever security had been present in the building, waiting for orders from their leader. Uriah and Zeke neutralized the guards stationed at each exit and the unfortunate duo patrolling the main courtyard in the rain. Four and Tris had gone to the communications building and used the terminal there to access Erudite's closed circuit cameras, erasing footage of Honey's arrival and their own presence on the grounds. Four then put the security system into hibernation and shut down the wireless broadcasters, so no one would be able to contact
anybody outside of the compound until it was rebooted.

"I know Erudite hates Abnegation, but there has to be more to it than that," Zeke declared. "Max and the other leaders wouldn't just go along with that kind of crazy without a reason."

"I don't know why Max went along with Jeanine," Honey told him truthfully.

"But you do know why Eric did." That was Uriah and the girl didn't bother to deny it.

"Jeanine was blackmailing him," she explained. "She got ahold of him when he was an apprentice and convinced him to do some bad things; she's been holding that over his head for years."

"Bad things, huh?" Zeke intoned in sarcastic accusation. "Like hunting down Divergents."

"If you want to know what Jeanine had on him, you can ask Eric," Honey told him, cold and sharp. The security officer's eyes fell from hers and his posture clearly showed he was backing down.

"You're right that Jeanine hates Divergents, though. She told me Abnegation is the biggest obstacle to her trying to eradicate them - you - whatever. Abnegation has the highest concentration of Divergents of all the factions."

"Why does she hate us so much?" Uriah demanded, looking very much his age, confused and afraid, naïve.

"Because she's afraid," the girl told him. "Serums don't work on you and you're unpredictable, which makes you hard to control, which automatically makes you a threat. She doesn't see that what makes you different could be wonderful. She only sees the possible danger, which scares her. And she's powerless against her fear and if there's one thing her kind of Erudite hates, it's being powerless."

Zeke's previously cowed expression lifted and he smiled, looking at Honey as if seeing her in a new light. Of course, he couldn't stop himself from prodding at her. "Wonderful, huh?"

She shrugged, unashamed of her belief. "Well, you were brave enough to come after me and selfless enough to ignore that it was Eric who was asking for your help. Kind enough to come stay with me while he's gone. I think that's pretty wonderful, yeah."

"Also, my stellar looks and winning smile," the hopeless flirt added with a wink. His brother rolled his eyes, but was grinning as well.

"Well, I have always been a sucker for a matched set," Honey teased with a responding grin and wink of her own. Zeke laughed, but Uriah blushed adorably.

"If you were my girl, I wouldn't-"

"Don't go there, Pedrad," the girl warned. The elder shrugged and didn't finish his sentence, but did keep speaking.

"Where did he go anyway? To follow up at Erudite?"

Honey shook her head. "There's a city leaders' meeting about Marcus Eaton."

"What about Marcus Eaton?" Uriah asked. It was then Honey realize that neither of them knew about the man's death. If the head of security didn't know, then probably almost no one at Dauntless did yet. The city government must be keeping it under wraps until they've decided what to do; that must have been what the meeting was about.
"His body was found in the Factionless sector this morning," she informed the brothers. They gawked at her.

"He's dead?" Uriah blurted in shock. Zeke spoke almost over him.

"Do they know what happened? Was it Jeanine?"

The little crow shrugged, holding up her empty hands to indicate she had no answers. "Could be someone was just unhappy with their rations. It's pretty violent in the Factionless sector."

"Yeah, but he's the head of the Council!" Zeke insisted, blown away by the news. Honey could only shrug again.

So, no one knew. When they did know, it would be huge. News stories, gossip, investigations. At least she knew she'd left no evidence behind at the Eaton residence and the rain would have washed away anything useful at the scene. Furthermore, with Dauntless leading the investigation and Erudite processing any evidence, the girl didn't think she had to worry about being discovered - not with Eric and Max at her back and the artifact held over Jeanine's head.

But it would be big and people would want to know everything. Every old news story about Marcus would resurface, every aspect of his life would be scrutinized - his job, his friends, his family. Four. It was possible Four might be seen as a suspect, though it would be easy enough to alibi him for the evening. Still, the last thing the broody man needed was a deluge of questions about his poor excuse for a father.

"I need to go to my office," Honey declared, getting up off the couch. Zeke cut her off, leaning his lanky self against the front door. He shook his head.

"Whatever you need to do is gonna have to wait until Eric gets back."

"Did he specifically say I had to stay in here?" she asked. Zeke nodded, but Uriah spoke up to contradict him.

"He didn't actually say you needed to stay here," the boy clarified. "Just that you needed to stay safe and we couldn't leave you alone."

"You couldn't just shut up for a second, could you?" the older Pedrad scowled at his little brother. Uriah just shrugged. Zeke shook his head again. "Doesn't matter. I'm not risking pissing him off when he's all wound up about your safety already."

Honey narrowed her eyes thoughtfully and the man's frown deepened, not liking the way she was eyeing him. "I found the serum, because the master code let me into Jeanine's control room here at Dauntless. If I hadn't, I never would have found out what her plan was and I wouldn't have gone to stop her last night. Do you think it would piss Eric off if he knew that I got the code from you?"

"You're really not cute anymore," Zeke declared flatly, then stepped back and yanked the door open.

As she moved to go passed the scowling man, Honey leaned up and kissed his cheek.

"But you love me anyway," she announced with a smile. Behind her, she heard Uriah let out a low "woo" at his brother, who swore back at him irritably.

"That would piss him off, too," the boy said, with wicked delight. "Kissin' on his girl."

"If you don't shut up, I'll throw you in the Chasm. Mom can make another one just like you."
Honey tried to convince the Pedrad brothers that what she needed to do was sensitive, so they'd have to wait outside. They told her it was bad enough she'd left her quarters and they wouldn't further risk Eric's wrath by leaving her in a room alone, even if that room was her own office. In the end, they compromised - Uriah sat in the chair in the corner that Eric had used while keeping vigil over the little Dauntless after Ryland's attack and Zeke stood guard outside the closed door, flirting with Marta and trying to convince her to drop Kappa, at least for a night.

Honey booted up her computer terminal and signed in with Eric's passcode. She quickly opened Four's file, sifting through his records. Her intent was to alter them and remove any reference to Marcus Eaton. The girl brought up his Choosing Day result, the first document that linked Four to the name Eaton, and stopped. She blinked at the screen, head tilting unconsciously to the side as she gazed at the information before her.

Four

Faction of Origin: Abnegation

Faction of Choosing: Dauntless

Birth Name: REDACTED

Now, she knew for a fact the last time she'd looked at this document, Four's birth name had clearly been listed as Tobias Eaton. It was how she found out who his father was in the first place. Yet, there it was now, in black and white, altered already. She closed out of the record and opened another. Then another, and another and another and all the same. Every mention of the name Tobias Eaton had been erased or redacted.

Honey closed Four's file and signed off Eric's profile. She opened a connection to the city servers and brought up Marcus Eaton's information. As a member of the City Council, all his files were open to the public as a matter of transparency in government. There was a son listed, but the only information that link provided were some school transcripts and a birth certificate; there was no aptitude test result, nor a Choosing Day record. It wasn't that the files were beyond her security clearance, they simply were not there. After his final year of schooling, Tobias Eaton ceased to exist.

All this would make it difficult for someone to connect Four to the name Eaton, but not impossible. A clever, intrepid sort would bring up the Dauntless initiate roster for the year Marcus's son had defected from Abnegation and look through the list of transfers for whoever didn't match up. Honey brought up that file herself - or tried to anyway. Unlike every other initiate roster, that year was restricted to highest security clearance only. The girl sat back in her chair, staring at her computer, completely at a loss.

She knew Four was good with computers, maybe good enough to hack into the sensitive files and alter them, but maybe not. Either way, the man hadn't done so before now. He didn't yet know about his father's murder, anyway. The only people who seemed to know were herself and the leaders (and, for the last twenty minutes, the Pedrad brothers). So, someone in that very small group would have had to go through and erase the connection between Four and Tobias Eaton. Someone with access to the Dauntless leaders' files.

Honey let out a little astonished puff of breath that drew Uriah's attention. When he saw the amazed look on her face, he asked what was wrong, but she shook her head.

"Nothing," the girl told him, her lips stretching into a dopey kind of smile. "Just a really, really nice surprise."
"Hey, something good for a change," the boy piped, smiling in return. She nodded. Something very good.

Even after all they'd been through together, all she knew about him, Eric had still managed to take her completely by surprise. If she mentioned it to him, her lover would no doubt insist it was because he didn't want anyone linking Four to anything that had gone on last night. The snowy-flamed girl would know better, however. This wasn't pragmatism or merely protecting her, this was kindness. The motivation behind it could be that Eric felt he owed the other man a debt for his aid in saving Honey (and all of Abnegation and the city as a whole) the night before, but that didn't make it any less rare and wonderful.

Just when Honey thought she couldn't possibly love her monster any more, that such a feat was unattainable, this. This inexplicable act from the man who foolishly thought himself heartless. Kindness. Shown to his enemy. The little Dauntless's heart felt so full it might burst. One thing she'd been right about - Honey was not going to let Eric leave their bed for a very long time.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry guys. Another hot day, another migraine, but I refuse to just skip a day altogether. I know this is really short, but I can only hope the good feels help make up for it.
Honey decided to take the initiative to have food delivered to their quarters herself, partially so that it
would be waiting when Eric returned and partially because Zeke and Uriah were missing lunch by
staying with her. The brothers were sitting on the couch, enjoying their hamburgers, while Honey
curled up in the recliner. She wasn't hungry yet; her stomach was still a tight knot of worry over her
lover being so far from her and exposed. The Pedrads kept up a steady stream of conversation and
joking, both between themselves and with Honey, and she wasn't certain if it was because they were
trying to keep her distracted or if they simply lacked the ability to remain quiet. Well, no, she knew
very well that the second part was true; it was the first she wasn't so sure of.

It was well after two o'clock when a soft ping sounded from somewhere in the bedroom. Honey flew
off the chair and through the doorway, snatching her tab from the dresser.

MEETING OVER. HOME SOON.

Not the most eloquent of messages, but the girl had never felt so strongly about an electronic missive
in her life. She slumped against the dresser, yet, even still, she didn't feel completely relieved. Eric
was still too far away. Another ping she wasn't expecting made her jump and she looked at the
device again.

TOLD JEANINE YOU SAID 'HELLO'. SHE WAS KIND OF RUDE.

Honey shook her head down at the tablet. She could see Eric in her mind's eye, smirking down at his
own as he typed out the message. Incorrigible. The little Dauntless wrote out her own missive back.
Well, she had a rough night. Maybe we should send her a slice of cake? She carried the tablet back
into the main room with her, curling up on the chair once more. Zeke and Uriah were talking about
one of the female initiates, a Dauntless-born named Marlene, who the younger Pedrad had taken a
shine to.

CAKE DOESN'T SOUND HALF BAD. WE SHOULD GET SOME.

Honey grinned, glancing over at the electric cooler of food sitting on her countertop. Their quarters
didn't have a true kitchen area; there was no refrigeration unit or a cook top, but there was a table
with two chairs and a row of cupboards with a counter that held odds and ends and a few glasses for
when her friends came over and brought their own booze. Good idea. For later.
MUCH LATER.

It was still almost an hour before Eric messaged her that he had arrived at the compound. By this point, Zeke was reading one of Eric's books and seemed particularly engrossed in whatever lay beneath the candy apple red cover. Uriah had nodded off after finishing his meal and was snoring softly. When the front door of the apartment opened, the boy snorted himself awake and quickly, self-consciously wiped his hand over his mouth and jaw, as if worried he had drooled in his sleep. Zeke snickered at him.

Eric's eyes immediately went to Honey, curled up in the recliner like a kitten, and her lover visibly relaxed. The girl could see his shoulders drop slightly, his arms easing to hang more loosely at his sides. His mouth had been a hard, straight line when he entered, but now it softened and started to curve upwards. That curving halted when he noticed his two guards were still there, as if he'd somehow forgotten their existence in the last five seconds. Maybe he had.

The man stepped further into the room and pointedly held the door handle, all but glaring at the two Pedrads on his couch. They stood as one and headed out into the hall, turning back to wave goodbye to Honey. She noted that Zeke kept hold of Eric's book and tried not to grin over that. This time, the young leader did not thank them, but shut the door almost on their heels. She'd have to convey his gratitude (and get the book back) at a later date.

Eric flicked the door lock and strode quickly towards Honey, his long legs eating up the distance between them in bare seconds. She unfolded herself from the little ball she'd formed waiting for him, as Eric dropped to kneel before her chair. It was timed so perfectly - her legs moving to hang over the front of the chair, feet just barely touching the ground at the same moment the man's knees hit the floor between them - it was practically choreographed. He grabbed her hips, pulling her to the edge of the seat, splitting her thighs wide and drawing a faint sting from the fading bite he'd given her thigh. It almost never hurt anymore; soon he'd have to give her another.

Honey slid her arms around his neck, where they belonged, and pressed her body to his as they claimed each other's mouth in a hungry kiss. As the taste and feel of her love flooded her senses, she finally felt the relief she'd been yearning for all day, was finally able to believe Eric was safe again. With that worry and stress gone, a bolt of lust struck her that the little Dauntless wasn't entirely prepared for; intense and hot, burning, aching, zero to sixty in half a second. She grunted into his mouth, sucking his tongue into her own and curling hers around it possessively. Her hand pushed into the back of his jacket, under his shirt, and her nails dug into the flesh between his shoulders.

Eric groaned into her, pulling her core against him, already hard and straining against the confines of his pants. Honey planted her feet, using the base of the chair as leverage to arch forward and grind against him with as much force as she could; he pressed back just as hard. She whined in the back of her throat and forced her hand between them, yanking his fly open hard enough that the little plastic button popped right off. The man growled in approval, the sound rolling across her tongue wickedly. Instead of reaching in to pull his erection free, the girl undid her own fly.

Drawing back from the kiss just enough - barely enough - to speak, she whispered, breathless and ragged, "I need you to fuck me."

Eric groaned heavily, pushing his hands into the back of her pants. When his palms slid over only the bare skin of her cheeks, he shuddered and squeezed the waiting flesh hard. The man's hips thrust forward, driving his frustratingly still contained cock against Honey, her hand trapped between them as an unwelcome barrier. She bit his bottom lip hard and was rewarded with another groan, but that
was not the prize she sought.

"Now, Eric," the girl demanded, shoving at his pants in desperation. His dick sprang free and left a stripe of precum against the inside of her wrist. "I need you inside me right. Now."

He nodded and shifted to get his feet under him. As the man stood, he hunched forward awkwardly, pulling her pants down only far enough they were no loner in his way, without ever removing his hands from her skin. He rotated his grip, shoving her thighs up against her chest, opening and exposing her pussy in one swift motion. Honey curled her fingers around his shaft, hard and throbbing for her wonderfully, and guided Eric to her entrance. The instant her lover felt the slick heat of her pussy against the tip of his cock, he drove forward.

The girl choked on whatever sound her lungs had tried to forced out as the thick length of him stretched and filled her too fast. She was incredibly wet, so he slid in easily, but the lack of any sort of preamble made the sudden penetration burn - and she absolutely fucking reveled in it. Even moreso when the perfect, ravenous man immediately drew back until he was in danger of slipping right out of her and slammed forward again, even harder.

"Fuck!" Eric barked, pushing her small body down into the plush cushion beneath her, all but folding his lovely girl in half. He ground out a vow between his teeth, "I'm never taking my cock out of you again."

Honey moaned his name, eyes rolling behind their lids as he thrust deep into her again, so deep he hit her cervix and made her body jerk at the intense jolt of sensation that caused. Her nails cut into his back and clawed at the thick, sturdy fabric of his jacket where she held him behind his ribs. His rhythm was sloppy and frantic, raw with bare carnal wanting. They were both still fully clothed, pants, shirts, the jacket. The only places flesh touched flesh were where Honey drew blood from the thick muscle of Eric's back, his hands pressing bruises into her thighs that would last well into the week, and his rigid cock fucking into her begging pussy. The fabric muting her senses elsewhere caused a tunnel vision-like effect, forcing her to focus only on those places, intensifying the stimuli until it bordered on unbearable.

"My pretty little thing; you love when I fuck you this hard." It wasn't a question. Eric snarled the words at her and they penetrated her mind with the same glorious viciousness as his body did hers. "When you can feel every fucking inch of my cock, so deep it almost feels too big. But it's not, because your pussy was made for me. You were made for me. Weren't you, Honey?"

The girl nodded, crying out in pleasure at his words almost as much as his actions. She was made for him, just for him; body and soul. He bent forward that little bit more, taking her mouth in a viciously voracious kiss that felt like he was devouring her and Honey offered herself eagerly to sate his hunger.

"Say it. I want to hear you say it," he told her and his voice held a little tinge of base need that had nothing to do with lust. It pulled at something so deep inside her, the girl couldn't deny him. She forced her lips, tongue, throat, and lungs into compliance, giving him what he asked for because his need was her need.

"I was made for you." The words came out as a desperate whimper, shaky and pleading, but they'd been said and that was the important thing. Eric kissed her again, moaning into her mouth.

"Mine. You're mine," he decreed. She nodded again. Then he commanded in a deep, but breathless timbre, "Look at me."

Honey's eyes snapped open in immediate obedience, finding his gorgeous gray orbs molten silver
staring back into hers.

"Who was I made for?" the man asked and there was no hiding the hitch in his chest or the emotion in his gaze. She pried her nails free of his flesh and gripped the back of his neck, pulling his head close enough that her breath billowed upwards into his open mouth.

"You were made for me, Eric," Honey declared and there was nothing shaky or weak in the statement. "Everything you are is mine."

He shuddered and closed the space between them, crushing his mouth to hers with a broken whimper of need. His pace became erratic and brutal and a moment later, he slammed his hips into hers and lost himself inside her. The tip of Eric's cock twitched against Honey's womb, his cum splashing against the nerves there that were beyond sensitive and she clamped down around him with a scream that flowed directly down his throat. The pair clung to each other, shaking, breaking apart, yet undeniably whole. For a brief, endless, beautiful moment, they were the only two people in the universe, so close they may as well have been one.

Eric collapsed, sliding one knee onto the chair to keep himself from crumbling to the ground altogether. Honey keened softly as his hands slipped from her thighs to grab at the chair upholstery and keep himself against her.

"Fuck, I love you," he panted against her cheek. Their faces were pressed together in an awkward, uncomfortable way that somehow seemed to highlight the intimacy of the moment. "You fucking ruin me, you know that?"

She smiled, not quite a Cheshire grin, but something close. "I do my best," she admitted proudly, sliding her hand up the back of his skull to comb her fingers through his hair. He purred, shifting so his face moved off of hers and down to nuzzle her throat. "It's only fair, since you do it to me, too."

He smiled against her skin and leaned up. "I'm going to do it to you again in just a minute," the man promised.

She believed him. He drew back, breaking his promise to never take his cock out of her again, and pulled her hand from his hair so he could stand. Eric kept hold of her thigh as he leaned back, gazing down at her. Honey felt the telltale warm slide of his cum on her skin and flushed brightly when she realized that was what he was looking at. With a positively devilish smile, he swiped a finger through the mess and pushed the digit between her lips. The girl was more than willing to take it in, stroking her tongue over the sensitive pad of his finger and moaning at the unpleasant, yet welcome taste of his ejaculate.

"Good?" he asked, gazing down at her with hooded eyes. Honey only nodded, so she wouldn't have to break the gentle suction around his digit, but Eric pulled his hand away anyway. He tugged her pants off so her legs could splay wide for him, then dropped back to his knees. She gasped when he leaned in and licked from the bottom of her entrance up to her clit and moaned against her.

There was something beyond lewd about this - Eric licking the remains of their coupling from her still twitching slit. The girl shuddered, inner walls spasming, giving him more to lap up. His soft, insistent tongue stroked her so sensitive nerves wickedly, drawing high, wanton moans from her throat. Between his considerable skill, her considerable sensitivity, and the considerable spike of arousal the extreme debauchery of the act sent through her, it didn't take long for Honey's small frame to shake beneath her lover's mouth.

"Don't stop," she gasped, either a plea or a command; she didn't know and didn't care as long as it made him keep swirling his tongue around her clit the way he was, teasing it just right. He did and a
heartbeat later, she exploded with pleasure. Eric moaned in pleased encouragement as her clitoris throbbed and twitched under his ministrations, sending wave after wave of euphoria rolling through her. He worked her through her climax and beyond, because, of course, one wasn't enough for the demanding leader.

Honey whined plaintively when he slid his fingers into her, squirming at the intrusion as they abraded her over stimulated nerves. In a rare show of pity, the man drew them back out and limited himself to one digit for the moment. He suckled her clitoris gently, plying it with light caresses of the tip of his tongue that soothed and stoked simultaneously. His free hand massaged her thigh, pressing firmly against the faded bruise there until she gasped again and arched up into his careful onslaught on her pussy.

When the girl tightened around his finger, Eric added the second back into his penetrating caress only to immediately draw it back out again. Honey's head arched back against the recliner as he toyed with her, varying the angle and depth of his thrusts as well as the number of fingers he used - one, two, one again, three and she cried out sharply, begging him not to stop.

He didn't, but he also didn't push her that little bit further that she needed; not yet. Eric seemed truly determined to make good on this promise - to ruin her. He was doing a fantastic job of it. Honey's fingers wove into his hair, combing through his soft locks and mussing them beautifully. She made a fist and tugged, earning a guttural groan and cherished it like gold. Her other hand stroked down her own torso, blindly seeking his where it squeezed her thigh.

"Eric," she called his name softly, needily, and he lifted his hand to lace his fingers with hers. Her heart thumped extra hard against her ribcage, where it had been pounding in vain to break free. She breathed out a grateful, "Thank you."

With an insistent growl, he sucked hard at the sensitive bundle of nerves he'd been playing with and curled his fingers to press firmly against that spot only he could reach inside her. With a sudden rush of heat, Honey came again, spasming around his fingers again and again, crying his name brokenly, loud enough to echo down the hall outside their door. Eric kissed his way up her body, working her through her climax with his marvelously skilled fingers. He kissed his sweet lover deeply, letting her taste just how sweet she was on his tongue as he swallowed her moans greedily.

Honey was left boneless and tingling, humming little whines into the leader's mouth as her orgasm faded into luscious afterglow. She knew her lover well and let her hand slip from his hair to fall between them, curling around his cock; which was, indeed, hard and throbbing once more. Eric let out a groaning chuckle, breaking away from her mouth and smiling down at her.

"More already?" he cooed, teasingly. Honey huffed up at him, more than a little incredulous. "I can stop if you want," she said. It was less of an offer and more of a threat. The man only grinned wider, pulling his fingers from her slit and pressing his hand to her thigh. He left a smear of her slickness there as he pushed her leg almost painfully far to the side.

"I could fuck you anyway," he purred. "You'd whine so pretty and cry that it was too much, but we both know you wouldn't ask me to stop."

The girl's eyes slipped shut and she did let out a little whine in spite of herself, proving his claim as truth. Eric's responding chuckle was dark and wanton, but he only kissed her softly and stroked his thumb firmly against her tender flesh before letting up the pressure on her thigh, which had begun to ache. He wrapped his hand around hers, forcing her into a much faster rhythm.

"You want me to come?" the man asked, then nipped at her bottom lip. Honey nodded and tried to
kiss him properly, but Eric kept his mouth just beyond her reach. He dipped his tongue between her lips and the girl chased it with her own, making him laugh softly. "Of course you do. Because you want me to feel good."

"So good," the little Dauntless readily agreed. He rewarded her with a quick brush of his lips against hers, but she wanted so much more.

"You know what will make me feel so good?" Eric asked, his forehead falling to rest against hers as his breathing started to grow ragged.

"Tell me," Honey pleaded, twisting her wrist as she stroked him just the way she knew he liked. The man groaned heavily, pushing his hips forward, fucking into her gripping hand.

"To watch you swallow my cum like you love it," he gasped hoarsely. She nodded eagerly, releasing his hand to push at his shoulder in encouragement. Eric all but scrambled to his feet, his newly freed hand making a fist in her snowy curls and yanking her head back. Honey opened her mouth and gripped his ass, trying to pull him forward so she could swallow his length, but the man stood firm.

He only allowed her close enough that the tip of his dick brushed against her bottom lip. The girl moaned, imagining how he saw her right then - hungry and lust filled, gazing up at him adoringly, pleading for him to come into her open mouth. It might have been the yearning moan that pushed Eric over the edge, as a bare moment later, he barked her name and shuddered, squeezing her hand around his dick. His eyes stayed locked on her face as pulse after pulse of hot, slick fluid erupted from his cock into her waiting mouth.

Honey kept her eyes on his face in turn, watching the pleasure overtake the lust. The shaking man's own mouth hung open in unconscious mimicry of hers as he panted and grinned with each throbbing twitch of his shaft. The last three made his upper lip curl and the girl might have giggled or smiled if not for the puddle of cum on her tongue. She milked the last bit from him and delivered an insolent little kiss to the tip of his dick. Only then did she smile; smug and self-satisfied as she swallowed dramatically. Eric's eyes slipped shut and he huffed, like he couldn't believe she enjoyed pleasing him so much.

He grabbed her up from the recliner, staggering back the three feet to the couch and flopped back onto it crookedly. Her lover didn't seem to care so long as she was in his arms and she certainly didn't mind in the slightest. She wasn't thrilled that he was still dressed, however. Too much fabric lay between them when all she wanted to feel was his skin and those soft curls on his torso tickling her comfortably. But she could wait. Honey could feel the pounding beat of his heart and the warmth of his body, smell his wonderful scent mixed with that of sex that hung cloyingly in the air as if the pair needed a reminder of how they'd thoroughly been enjoying each other.

She pushed her hand under his shirt and contented herself with stroking the hairs on his belly for the moment, nuzzling under his jaw and placing soft kisses there because she could and knew he liked it. Soon enough he would recover his senses and - temporarily sated - demand to know if she'd eaten anything yet. When the girl admitted she hadn't, he would get up and bring her food. If he didn't eat with her, Eric would sit too close, stroking his fingers against Honey's skin; keeping his touches light so as not to encourage her into tempting him to cut her meal short.

Then the rest of their clothes would come off and she'd have free reign over all that perfect, gorgeous flesh of his. She would touch and taste and bite until he couldn't take it anymore and fucked her again; either having her ride him right there on the couch or laying her down into the cushions on her back or carrying her into the bedroom to push her face into the pillows or pound her into the mattress. Over the next days, Eric would do all of the above and more. If Honey was very lucky, she would be able to talk him into that shower she so longed for. She'd even bring a slice of cake in to set
on the sink, if that's what it took.

Eric would give her anything she ask for, because Honey offered no less. They were made for each other, after all. And they had nothing but the future ahead of them. Together. All that and more.

Chapter End Notes

Now, I know many of you are thinking, BUT NO! THERE'S MORE STORY! Yes, there is. But, because I changed so much, I have to make up my own framework if I want to go further. I am working on a storyline that's worthy of Honey and Eric and all they've been through, but it's not there yet, so I don't have any more chapters written. There's alot of unresolved stuff: Max, Jeanine, Divergents, Marcus's murder and the fallout from that, Honey's dreams for Dauntless. It's hilarious to me that I intended this story to be 30k words max and look at the monstrosity it turned into! lol I can't promise I'll get there soon (maybe not at all, which would suck), but I AM working on it, I swear.

While I'm working on a sequel to this, Jai Courtney seems determined to make me write fics about all his characters. So, I've got a Suicide Squad story up and running and a rehash of Die Hard 5 coming up that's a pretty blatant excuse to just inject a female presence into all that testosterone. Feel free to PM me or find me on AIM (Temptation iyz) if you want updates on how I'm coming along with Honey's next adventure.

You guys have been great. Seriously, so great! Thank you for all the awesome reviews - they make all the work so worth it. <3

End Notes

Feedback is BEGGED for. Please and thank you!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!