



# THE ONES

DANIEL SWEREN-BECKER

**{Imprint}**  
MAKE YOUR MARK  
New York

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If this book shall be took by hook or by crook, then a thousand-year  
curse shall never be shook.

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**DEDICATED TO  
LA-U AND VOLCANO MAN**  
FOR THE GENES, AND THEN  
EVERYTHING ELSE—THANK YOU.

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# THE ONES

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# PROLOGUE

YOU BLINK AWAKE, already terrified. Maybe it was a distant footstep or the sound of keys clicking against each other. You crawl quickly to the corner of your cell and hide in the darkness, hide from whoever is coming down that hallway. It never works, not once in all the weeks you've been here, but you do it anyway. You hope that maybe this time they will leave you alone.

You press yourself into that corner, embracing it, begging the walls to help you, literally whispering into the cinder blocks. You love your cell because it is not the interrogation room. It is cold and hard and dark and teeming with roaches, but nothing bad has ever happened here. If only you never had to leave this cell; that is a compromise you'd be willing to make. Especially right now, with a key pushing into the lock on the door.

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A woman stands in the doorway and looks down at you. All it takes is a point from her long, bony finger and you know what to do: Stand up, scurry past her down the hallway, and step into the other room. If you resist, she'll drag you anyway. And you don't even have to look, you can already hear them, smell them, taste them—the two empty bags looped through her belt.

The clear bag is for suffocation. They hold it over your head, and you can see through it as you begin to asphyxiate. Watching them look on passively as you struggle to breathe always makes it worse.

The black bag is for water. You are totally blind as they strap your torso down and pour water over your face—buckets of it, freezing and unending. Eventually, you have no choice but to gasp and inhale the water and drown yourself.

Most days they stop just short of killing you. On other days you pass out and wake up in your cell, your torso bruised from the chest compressions they performed to bring you back to life. And somehow you are thankful as you blink awake on that filthy floor. They could have killed you, but they didn't. They tortured you to the brink of the death, but no further. Back in your cell, you are safe again.

Until tomorrow.

Before you know it, a day passes and it is time to do it all over again. Or maybe it isn't even a day, just an hour,

or maybe even a minute, for all you can tell. There is no time here, no dawns, no dusks, no clocks, no light. No parents, no friends, no school, no hope. There is just your cell and the room with the bag lady. And every time, before she chooses a bag, she smiles and reminds you of the facts of your new life.

*You are a terrorist.*

*We can do whatever we want to you.*

*You will die in here.*

*Unless . . .*

Unless you answer their questions. It could all be over if you cooperated. You could sleep in your own bed tonight, if you would just answer these few basic questions.

*When is the next attack?*

*Where is Kai hiding?*

*Who is helping him?*

*What is the Ark?*

*What is the Ark?*

*What is the Ark?*

You barely even know what they are talking about, but you can sense their panic, their fear, their determination. You explain that you don't have any answers. They don't believe you. It doesn't make sense to them.

*Why would you help these people?*

*They are ruining America.*

*Don't you want to protect your country?*

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They insist you tell them something. But what little you *do* know—any single scrap that might somehow be useful to them—you protect with every fiber of your being. You store it away, hide it, forget it, deny its existence, and make it impossible to retrieve. That is the only contribution you can make now. And giving up on that would feel worse than the bags.

Today the clear bag comes first. The taut plastic is yanked over your head, and by now you know not to shake too much—that only makes things tighter. You know not to jerk your arms—that cuts your wrists against the handcuffs. You know not to panic—that wastes the air too quickly. So you sit calmly as the bag gets tighter and tighter against your face, your throat starting to burn now, your head beginning to feel light, your heart racing. All you can do is stare through the clear plastic at the bag lady and her colleagues. You know they will take off the bag eventually, but each time they seem to wait longer and longer, as if to set a record. You start to gasp now, and you gasp and you gasp and you gasp, but there is no air left to breathe. Still, you know it's too soon for them to stop; you aren't close to the end.

And right here you take a second to consider the absurdity of the situation, as you sit there dying slowly and painfully while public servants from your own government look on, not lifting a finger or even breaking a law. You try to hold your gaze on these people, to judge them, to

implore them, to connect in any way possible, but your vision is gone. And then you reach the end and you gasp at nothing now, realizing there is no point, but your brain makes you do it anyway. You are just a dying body, incapable of any more thoughts or decisions. You are nothing. It's over, and they will either let you die or remove the bag. You fade away before you can find out. This is your life now.

*You are a terrorist.*

*We can do whatever we want to you.*

*You will die in here.*

*Unless . . .*

Unless nothing. There are some things worth dying for.

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# CHAPTER 1

*Four weeks earlier*

THE BREATHING HELPED Cody relax. She ran right down the middle of the street and took huge gulps of air, each breath serving to calm her down. The town was silent, the streets empty, but the quiet actually scared her even more. It reminded her of those eerie moments before an earthquake, when all the birds and insects and animals disappear to somewhere safer. Where do they all go? And how do they even know?

Maybe they all had a mother like Cody's—the type of mom who would, without any warning, sometimes give you a look that sent shivers down your spine. Cody always wondered what was in that look, that weird combination of love and hope mixed with something much darker. She had come to sense that it was guilt. Guilt over the choice her mom had made for her. A choice that, in hindsight,

was putting Cody in danger now. Cody didn't see it that way, but it still made her uncomfortable. As they sat together watching their old, boxy television, waiting like everyone else to hear the news, she felt her mom staring at her with that look. So Cody grabbed her tattered sneakers, threw on a faded T-shirt, and slipped out the door. Running was always easier than talking. When she ran, she could breathe.

Outside, Cody loped across her patchy front yard and down her gravel street and opened up her stride as she left her crumbling neighborhood behind. She sliced through barren intersections, ignoring the glow of televisions coming out of every home, her dark green eyes staring straight ahead, her thick burgundy hair streaming behind her. Inside those homes, the whole country was watching now, waiting for the decision. But Cody knew what was coming, could smell it in the wind like the birds did. She knew how the Supreme Court would rule and what that would mean for her. Before it happened, she wanted to find James.

Her legs beat a winding path two miles across town, her usual route now too dangerous to traverse. There were houses she didn't want to run past, people in town she'd rather not see. Flags and signs and graffiti everywhere that she wanted to avoid. If she zigged and zagged at all the right places, she could forget about what the rest of the world thought of her.

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When she made it to the stately brick house at the end of Argyle Street, Cody cut across the perfectly manicured lawn and went around to a side window to peer over the square hedges. Sure enough, James and his whole family were huddled in front of the TV in their living room. James sat with his perfect posture, his expression calm under his mop of brown curls, even in the face of what he was watching. Cody knew that if she waited a moment, he would catch her gaze eventually. James was oblivious to a lot of things, but never to her. Not the worst trait for your seventeen-year-old boyfriend.

When James finally looked over, she gave him a flick of the eyes, and a minute later he joined her in the street. Before they could speak, Cody was running, James was rushing to catch up, and they were off, the only things moving as dusk settled on Shasta, California.

To see these two run together was like watching a pair of hawks carve through the air or two dolphins crest a wave. The motion suited them, as if they were born for this exact activity. Their bodies were perfectly proportioned, legs and arms churning in mathematically ideal ratios, their powerful inhales timed with exact symmetry to their powerful exhales. They were both beautiful, and the ground flew by underneath them.

They ran to the edge of the residential neighborhood, then climbed the scraggly foothills on the outskirts of town and entered the thicker pine groves, the trail growing

rougher, narrower, and steeper. Their gait remained true, each step agile and soft on the dark, rocky earth.

And then, miles above the town, they emerged into a clearing and finally stopped, catching their breath in the clear, piney air. Below them, the town was still, half-lit in the fading sunlight, and a cold autumn wind blew up from the valley.

“What do you think happens next?” Cody asked, finally breaking their silence.

James never lied, so she knew he’d answer honestly, even if he was worried. She looped an arm behind the small of his back and leaned into his body, trying to find shelter from the wind and everything else.

“I don’t know,” he said. “But no matter what, we’re going to be fine.”

She pressed into him tightly and tried to believe it.



On their walk back down the trail, they couldn’t resist playing a favorite game: trying to kick a single pebble all the way down the hill without picking it up. Most days the pebble would eventually skitter off a ledge or get lost in a bush, but if they ever got it down safely, Cody would take it home and save it. Nothing like a pile of rocks to make your bedroom look cool. They complemented the rest of the mess on her floor—the various telescopes and scales and old medical junk that she liked to pick out at flea markets. It was all part of what James called Cody’s “unique”

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aesthetic: science-geek chic filtered through a vintage lens. But a stranger seeing her room would probably make her out to be a witch doctor.

James kicked the stone a few feet ahead, taking care to keep it in the middle of the trail. "You gonna stick around for dinner?" he asked.

"And get trapped in a cross-examination about current events from your parents?"

"My mom saw you loitering outside the window."

"*Loitering?* Yikes, she better hide the good china."

"Her word, not mine. She said that if you won't come in, she's going to put a saucer of milk out for you. I told her a tray of brownies would work a lot better."

"Sounds great."

"Come on, Cody. I know they're kind of intense, but they like you, I promise."

*Please, Cody thought. Do they ask other dinner guests if their coats have bedbugs?*

"It's your brother, too," Cody said. "Every time we're together, he can't help staring daggers at us."

"He does not stare daggers at us."

"Fine, butter knives. But it's still weird."

"It's not easy for him to be the odd man out. When the three of us are together, he's the one who's different."

"No one would even know if he didn't make a big deal about it!" Cody exclaimed. She kicked the stone and took a breath. "And today . . . he's going to be gloating."

“Even more reason why I need you around. Unless, of course, you want me to deal with it all alone,” James said, slumping his shoulders in exaggerated rejection.

Cody couldn’t help but smile, even as she shook her head. “I hate when you do this.”

“Outsmart you to get what I want?” James replied, grinning at her.

“No. I hate when you *think* you’ve outsmarted me, even though you didn’t.”

“You’re staying for dinner, aren’t you?” James gave the stone a powerful kick with his fancy neon running shoe, and it tumbled down into the brush. Cody watched it disappear and then gave him a shove, sending James scurrying down the slope.

“Not cool! I liked that one.”

James let his momentum take him down the hill. “Come on,” he yelled. “We’re late.”

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Without any time to go home, Cody had to shower in James’s bathroom, but she still took as long as possible to delay going downstairs. Plus, she didn’t have any fresh clothes to change into, so her choice was to either look like a slob in James’s pajamas or smell like a gym locker in her sweaty running clothes. This was typical of James—sweet to want her to stay but blind to the reality that his parents were going to judge her. And even though his bathroom was irritatingly neat, his shampoo situation was pathetic.

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They could tell the news wasn't good when they came back from their run and James's family just stared at them in silence. Cody quickly excused herself to shower and hid behind the rush of hot water for at least twenty minutes. When Cody felt like she was starting to be rude, she finally got out of the shower and caught her reflection in the mirror. *Fine*, she conceded with a bit of pride. She could understand why some people were jealous. The high cheekbones, the perfect symmetry, the tasteful constellation of freckles—she knew she was truly beautiful. But Cody reminded herself that it was not as if she or anyone else had asked for this. It was just how they were born. It was who they were.

Cody, James, and hundreds of thousands of other kids across the country were pioneers, the first babies born with the benefits of genetic engineering. All of them were sanctioned by a pilot program run by the National Institutes of Health, which agreed to study this new technology by granting permission to a small segment of the population. One percent, to be exact.

For the past twenty years, one out of every hundred newborn babies had been genetically engineered. A scientist had manipulated their genomes, selecting certain traits from their parents and eliminating others. *Grocery shopping*, it was called. It was no surprise, then, that Cody, James, and their fellow participants were tall, sturdy athletes with perfect facial features.

Actually, it was still a surprise to Cody: She couldn't believe that her meager gene pool had offered any positive traits to choose from. Between her wonderful but entirely average mother and what little she knew about her father, the scientists didn't have a lot to work with. But clearly they'd found something, because here she was, just as perfectly assembled as all the other Ones, as they had come to be known. Sometimes the magnitude of her good fortune took her breath away—literally had her gasping for air. Who was she to deserve such a fate? No one, really, just one baby out of a hundred, chosen by a random government lottery. How would she be able to pay this gift back? And to whom and when and where? Cody thought about this constantly, but she still didn't have an answer.

Being a One was obviously a gift, she knew that much. The benefits bestowed by this new technology were easy to see, and besides the good looks and physical advantages, it could eradicate any negative trait, from asthma to acne. The unforeseen drawbacks, however, were still being understood. Sure, the children in the study were perfectly healthy and wholly human. But as this first generation reached adulthood, the rest of the world was starting to take notice.

The Ones were excelling. Even in preschool, it was easy to guess which toddlers were part of the trial. As Cody towed off her hair one more time and continued

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to stall, she thought back fondly to those early days of playing tag, when no one could catch her, and some of the other kids couldn't even run without toppling over. Now the oldest Ones were having an impact on the world. Several of James and Cody's peers had gone on to remarkable accomplishments for people so young: graduating from college early; winning Olympic medals; starting successful businesses; making an impact in the arts, music, and science. It was clear that these kids had been born with a tremendous advantage.

As Cody stepped into the carpeted hallway, she heard the TV droning from the living room downstairs. She shivered, knowing all too well what the yelling was about.

A grassroots organization called the Equality Movement had taken hold of the country with the stated goal of ensuring fair and equal rights for every citizen. But what they really wanted, Cody knew, was to persecute the Ones. And it seemed that with Amber Reed, a sweet little cheerleader from South Carolina, they had found an ingenious way to do it.

The snowball that turned into an avalanche started with poor Amber getting cut from her freshman cheerleading team. Amber's parents sued the school, alleging that the Ones who were selected to the team had an illegal advantage. Leaders from the Equality Movement seized on this lawsuit, identifying it as a perfect vessel to

challenge the very existence of the Ones. The Cheerleader Case eventually turned into *Reed v. The National Institutes of Health*, and Amber's spot on the team was no longer the central issue—instead, the Supreme Court was about to decide if genetic engineering was actually legal. The Equality Movement had played its hand perfectly. And while Cody and James were out running, the decision had come down.

Genetic engineering had been declared illegal.

Cody, James, and all the others now lived on an island in history, with no one like them having come before and none allowed to come after—an orphaned generation. It was a lonely feeling, and it prompted Cody to finally get dressed and go downstairs.

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Dinner was exactly what Cody had expected. James's mom, Helen, was layered as usual in three different sweaters and a stack of bangle bracelets. She refused to sit for more than two seconds, constantly popping up to bring in food or to clear away plates. And God forbid if a crumb hit the floor. James's father perched at the head of the table and directed the conversation by peering over his narrow spectacles. Arthur was a professor at the state university nearby, and he asked Cody for the tenth time what she planned to study in college.

"Costume design," she answered, running out of random professions that she knew would drive Arthur crazy.

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“Interesting,” he said, trying not to choke on his food. “Sounds colorful.”

“Totally,” Cody replied, glancing at James and suppressing a smile. She felt him flick her knee under the table.

And then there was Michael, James’s brother. He was six years older, tall, handsome, and dark-haired like James and wearing a similarly boring button-down shirt. He had graduated from college and worked as an engineer for a while but recently had to move back home. Michael had been quiet for most of the meal, but Cody saw him put his fork down deliberately and turn to her and James.

“What did you think of the court’s decision today?” he asked.

“Michael, come on—” James started to say.

“Do you agree with it or not?”

Cody saw James look to his father, but Arthur also seemed curious to hear an answer.

“I get that people are nervous about what will happen eventually,” James said, “but that’s the case with all new technology. It doesn’t mean you should ban it.”

“Easy for you to say,” Michael said. He turned to Cody. “What about you?”

“It’s total bullshit,” she said, then looked over at James’s mom, feeling bad about the cursing. Helen wiped her mouth with a napkin, as if she were the one who had said it. Meanwhile, Michael was smiling, clearly pleased that

he'd provoked such a response. Cody felt James touch her leg again, but she knocked his hand away.

"I know you agree with me," Cody said to Michael. "You're just too scared to admit it. Stopping scientific progress just because a bunch of old people are afraid of losing their jobs is ridiculous."

The whole family jerked their eyes toward her, and Cody knew right away that she had put her foot in her mouth. She had forgotten for a second that Michael had just lost his job to a younger, more talented engineer. He suspected that his replacement was a One.

"I'm sorry," Cody said sincerely. "I just don't think banning the science helps anyone. There are always going to be younger people moving into professions, whether they are Ones or not."

"The court disagrees—they ruled nine to zero. And Congress is about to pass more laws that address the Ones' unfair advantages," Michael said.

"Unfair advantages?" Cody repeated. "That's nothing new. What about being born into a rich family? Being delivered by good doctors in a fancy hospital? Having a parent at home who has time to read to you? Pretty nice, I bet. Should the court make laws so that none of that is unfair?"

"There's obviously a line somewhere. The vast majority of the country knows that we've gone too far," Michael said.

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"I wonder why," James chimed in, trying to deflect some attention away from Cody.

"Don't give me that crap about you guys being a poor little minority group," his brother replied.

"What are we, then?" Cody said, jumping back in. "We have no political power, no leadership, no money, no way to defend our rights, and we are outnumbered ninety-nine to one."

"That's exactly what the Equality Movement is all about—making sure everyone has the *same* rights," Michael said.

"The Equality Movement wants to take away our rights," Cody shot back. "They want to get rid of us."

"No, we don't," Michael responded. "We just want—"

"*We*?" Helen said quickly, surprising everyone at the table. She was normally so quiet it was easy to forget that she was there. "Since when are you part of the Equality Movement?"

Michael sat silently for a moment, startled by his mother's intensity. Helen reached out and grabbed each of her sons by the shoulder.

"This is your brother! You don't ever do anything to harm him. Neither of you. Ever!"

Immediately, Cody realized what was behind Helen's uncharacteristic outburst. This wasn't about Michael or James; this was about Helen's other son, the one who had passed away. Cody didn't know much about him, only that

he had died before James was born. Maybe that version of the family had been different, perhaps better, in a way. It was still two parents and two sons, but at least in the original version, the brothers were on equal footing. This current dynamic wasn't James's fault, Cody knew. But maybe the rest of his family didn't.

Back at the table, Michael mumbled an apology. Helen let go of her boys, collected herself, and went into the kitchen. Then Cody watched as James and Michael looked at each other across the table, and the moment almost shattered her. She saw the truth in their eyes—ceaseless adoration on one side, implacable jealousy on the other—and she knew they would never really be brothers. Not while Michael saw James only as a One. Not while he saw him as a replacement.

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Even though Cody wanted to walk by herself, James insisted on driving her home, so they climbed into the beat-up red Jeep that James refused to let die. To his credit, he could work wonders on an engine. Did he just learn that one day? Or was he programmed from birth to fix a leaky carburetor? These were the types of questions that Cody had to ask herself whenever she was good at something. Was she *born* this way, or was she *made* this way? Should the difference even matter?

"I'm sorry," James said as they pulled out of the driveway. "I know that was awkward."

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"It's fine," Cody said. "*You* didn't do anything wrong."

"Michael doesn't really mean that stuff. He's just dealing with a tough break right now."

"He has a One in his own family, and he still can't stand us. Can you imagine what everyone else is thinking right now?"

"No one is thinking anything. Everything is fine."

"When are you going to wake up?" Cody snapped, louder than she'd meant to. James shrank back in his seat, surprised at her eruption. "This court decision is just the beginning. Who knows what law will pass next week, or a month from now? Someone spat on the ground when I walked past the other day. Why would a person do that?" she asked, and then answered, "Because they're making it legal to hate us."

"Calm down. This was the law that the Equality Movement wanted. They're getting it. Now it's over."

Cody shook her head, frustrated by how naive James was being. "Maybe if I put this in terms you can actually understand . . ."

"Go right ahead."

"Remember when we started dating, and I wouldn't let you kiss me?"

"Of course," James said. "It was diabolical." He couldn't help a cute half smile at the thought, but Cody wasn't going to be distracted.

"And then after we kissed, what happened?"

"You saw stars and realized you could never live without me?" He beamed a full smile at her.

"You wish. I mean the next time we hooked up, what happened?" Cody pulled one of his arms from the steering wheel and waved it in front of his face. "With these things."

"My hands? Oh. They, uh, wanted to move around."

"Exactly. And then what? After they had 'moved around' a few times?"

"They wanted to do other things." He said with the beginning of a blush creeping onto his cheeks.

"And so on and so forth, each step meeting less resistance than the one before it," Cody said.

James was finally grasping her point. "Wow. So all the Ones are going to be marched off to their deaths?"

"Pretty much," Cody responded, pleased with her lesson.

"Because you let me kiss you in the stacks of the library that day?"

Cody smacked him hard in the chest, and James laughed, trying to block it. "I am being serious here!" she yelled.

"I know, I know, I'm sorry," he said as he slowed the car down in front of Cody's house. "But honestly, I swear, I don't think we have anything to worry about." He put the car into park and turned it off.

Cody gave him a weird look. "What are you doing?"

"I'm coming in. You can't possibly go through that

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whole analogy and expect me not to hang out for a few minutes.”

“That wasn’t my point.”

James took his hands off the steering wheel and held them harmlessly up in the air. “Hands at ten and two, I promise,” he said, smiling.

Cody tried to stay angry with him, but it was impossible with his hands raised in mock innocence, his dimples deep enough to have dimples of their own. And then there was the dark hair that tumbled over his forehead, the curls thick enough to have curls of their own. James had a way of looking at her that made the hair on the back of her neck stand up and dance.

“Fine,” she finally said, knowing she didn’t have the willpower to resist. “My mom’s already asleep anyway.”

They got out of the Jeep and walked quietly up to the small clapboard house. Cody silently unlocked the door, and they tiptoed through the dark, cramped living room and into Cody’s bedroom. James banged into a chair in her room and had to stifle a groan. They tried not to step on the broken microscopes and old doctor bags that littered the floor. Cody turned on a globe that threw stars across the wall, making it a little easier to see.

“You okay?” she asked.

James sat down on the bed and pulled her down next to him. “Couldn’t be better,” he said.

Cody turned to face him and hovered there for a

moment, savoring that sensation of being close enough to feel someone without actually touching. And then, finally, barely having to move, they pressed their lips together.

After a second or two, James pulled back a few inches. "PQ3318," he said.

Cody smiled. "PQ3318," she answered back.

That was the library catalog code that James had written on a scrap of paper and handed to her before disappearing into the stacks. When she got up the courage to actually go look for him, it had taken forever to find him, the butterflies inside her getting crazier with each step. The random book he had picked was deep in their cavernous library, and when she finally walked down the right aisle, they were totally alone. "I almost gave up on—" he had started to say, but Cody didn't let him finish. PQ3318 was their secret.

It was a wonderful memory, and Cody relished it as she reached up to touch James's face and kissed him again. Their bodies pushed into each other, heating up as articles of clothing began to come off.

And that was when the brick crashed through her window.

Cody gasped as hundreds of glass shards exploded over their heads. Her bed was directly below the window that now had a gaping hole in it.

"Stay down," James yelled, but Cody crawled to the window and shoved her face out between the jagged edges.

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She caught a glimpse of a car, which shot off into night, tires squealing, lights off, a faint shout of triumph drifting back down the empty street.

She turned to James, who was standing in shock. “Are you all right?” he asked.

Cody didn’t answer. She looked down at the glass-strewn comforter and went to pick up the brick off the floor. It was solid, heavy, cold. Then she turned it over in her hands and saw it.

Two parallel lines, painted in white to stand out against the red brick—a perfectly drawn equal sign. As Cody looked at it, she wasn’t fearful or angry or nervous. To her surprise, she felt something entirely different. She felt . . . ready.

Cody held up the brick to show James, her arms steady, eyes clear. “I told you this was just the beginning.”

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# CHAPTER 2

JAMES STOOD DUMBSTRUCK as Cody showed him the brick. He saw the equal sign and knew what it meant. Yet all he could think to say was, “Watch out for the broken glass.”

Broken glass was easy enough to deal with; you watched where you stepped and then swept it up. James was always finding the most efficient way to proceed, and there was a beautiful logic to this problem: Broken glass was dangerous, so you cleaned it up carefully. A brick flying at their heads was another matter. James didn’t have a solution for that. Cody did, though. *Of course she does*, James thought, and from the look on her face, it didn’t involve a broom.

“Let’s go,” she said, eyes aflame. “I saw their car.”

Cody grabbed a sweatshirt and bounded out of her room. James felt his adrenaline pumping, too. He knew it

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was a natural biological reaction, a step in the fight-or-flight process. And he knew just as well that he landed squarely on the *flight* side. But to where? The whole country had heard the Supreme Court ruling by now, and they were all wearing the requisite LET AMBER CHEER! bracelets. If people were blowing off steam by throwing bricks at Ones, then chasing after this car didn't seem like the best idea.

"Come on!" Cody loudly whispered from the hallway, and James knew there was no use in arguing with her. Quite literally, she wasn't even there to argue with, so he had no choice but to follow her outside, moving carefully back through the dark living room and easing the front door shut behind him. Cody was waiting for him next to his Jeep.

"How did your mom not hear that?" he asked.

"Sound machine, sleeping mask, earplugs—that woman would sleep through the apocalypse."

James got in the car and unlocked the doors so Cody could hop into the passenger's seat. She was still holding the brick. "What are you going to do with that?"

"I'm not sure yet," she said, setting it on her lap. "Drive to the quarry, and we'll figure it out."

James had the key in the ignition, ready to start the car, but he paused and gave her a questioning look. *The quarry? How did she know where to go?*

Cody reached over and grabbed his hand. James took

solace in it for a moment . . . until Cody twisted the key and brought the engine to life.

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If there was anything good about being raised in the town of Shasta, the quarry in the abandoned mine—long since filled with water—was at the top, middle, and end of the list. It was a gigantic playground where the local kids grew up swimming in the deep reservoir, climbing the smooth sandstone walls, and daring each other to jump off the cliffs. It made for a glorious way to spend a summer day, and the fact that it was sealed off and you needed to sneak in gave it just the right feeling of danger. More than 150 years had passed since the last gold miners had stripped the mountain bare, but the various tunnels, chutes, and pathways they had carved were still present. Of course, they were hard to see now, and every local campfire legend involved some poor kid falling down an unexpected hole and slowly transforming into a grizzled maniac who terrorized the town. This never really scared James; even as a little kid, he knew that gold mines were not dug down in straight vertical shafts and that you couldn't just fall into one.

But the real reason James had never worried about falling into a tunnel was that he had been to the quarry only once in his life.

That wasn't normal for a Shasta kid, but James's parents made it clear that this was their firmest rule. He had

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defied them once, hiked up with his friends when he was ten or eleven and had the time of his life making perfect dives from the highest perches. When his mother found out, she slapped him across the face. Hard, angrily, violently. It was the only time his parents had ever touched him, and the sheer surprise of it made him sob instantly. He could always recall the exact details of that moment, the warm sensation of blood surging to his temple, the sting on his cheek, the look in his mom's eyes that somehow made him feel like he deserved it.

And maybe he did deserve it, he figured out a few years later. When he was old enough to finally put the full picture together, he realized that his brother had drowned at the quarry. Thomas, the sibling he had never met. The child that James was meant to replace. So he came to understand how it must have been great news to his parents when they were selected for the NIH pilot program and told that their newly conceived embryo was eligible to be genetically engineered. It was a miracle—not only could they replace Thomas, but they could also guarantee that their new child would be just as perfect.

James felt that pressure every day of his life. Long ago, he realized that he could never screw up. Never get in trouble, never disappoint, never drown in some senseless accident. James had internalized these expectations and worked his ass off to meet them every day. It had made him cautious, thoughtful, and reserved. He was the president of

his class at school, the captain of the debate team, a tireless dishwasher at home—doing a damn good job of being perfect, he thought. But for some people, he was starting to realize, it would never be enough.

So maybe it was good that he was here right now, driving through the dark on this winding road to the place where he was never supposed to go. He wasn't scared; he was excited. Curious, too. He loved being in the wilderness, and if he weren't so overwhelmed with chores and activities, he'd happily hike around the woods all day long. But James could barely remember what the quarry was like from that one visit, and he knew it would be different at night. He also knew that people went there to party sometimes, but he had never been. He looked over at Cody.

"Have you been up here at night before?" he asked.

She hesitated for a moment. "Once or twice maybe."

"Like for a party?"

Cody squinted as she saw something ahead of them and then gestured to a spot in the woods. "Over there," she said. "There's an old dirt road behind those bushes."

James slowed down and pulled to the side. He slid through some undergrowth and then started down a bumpy road with branches clawing at their windows. At the end of it, he could make out the faint glow of a bonfire. Cody pointed to a little clearing off the path, and James steered the Jeep into the small area that was hidden from the road.

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He shut the car off and turned to Cody. "What now?" he asked.

"Someone owes us an apology."

Cody hopped out of the car, brick still in hand, and started toward the bonfire. James walked next to her, taking in the heavy darkness and trying to force his eyes to adjust. Sure, he had perfect vision, but he still couldn't see in the dark. There was music playing ahead of them, kids shouting, shadows dancing through the bright orange flames. Looking on from a distance, James immediately felt inclined to give everyone a lecture on fire safety. He had been an ace fire starter in his Boy Scout troop, and that included learning all the dangers that came with camping in a prehistoric, dry pine forest. The sparks rising from the bonfire ahead practically gave him a heart attack. One unlucky change in the wind could burn down half the state.

Cody and James pressed forward, and when they reached the end of the path, James finally got his bearings. Ahead of them—or really below them—was the expansive reservoir, black, shiny, and still in the calm night. They had emerged to stand on top of a giant cliff, carved smooth and flat up to its edge, sixty feet over the water. And they had stepped right into a scene that even James had to admit seemed like an awesome party.

"Yoooooooo!" someone shouted, finally noticing them. "You're hella late!"

James and Cody stepped into the light, closer to the oil-barrel trash can containing the flames. About thirty people from their school were milling around. James recognized most of them but didn't exactly see any friends. And whoever had shouted at them changed his tone when he saw Cody and James.

"Oh," he said. "You guys lost or something?"

James saw who was talking to them: a kid named Marco Spiller, the de facto leader of the Bench Mob. The Bench was a noted landmark at their school, an otherwise boring piece of public infrastructure that happened to be set in concrete just on the other side of the school's property line. It was technically off-campus, and thus a convenient meeting spot for any activity that wasn't allowed on school grounds. There were always kids gathered around the Bench, but only a few actually sat down on it. Marco Spiller perched on it like a throne.

He continued eyeing James and Cody and then began to smile. "Or did you guys come to party?"

All of a sudden, from the corner of his eye, James saw a burst of sparks. He turned just in time to see a kid vault over the garbage can, jumping straight through the fire and landing right in front of them.

"Ain't no party like a quarry party, 'cause a quarry party got *rocks!*" the kid shouted, and then fell over laughing as everyone else whooped and hollered. This was Fitz. If Marco was the king of the Bench Mob, Fitz was the

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jester. The rest of their crew was there, too, all in variations of their uniform—thick jeans, flannel shirts, baseball hats with flat brims tilted at odd angles.

James instinctively took a step closer to Cody, but she wasn't there anymore. She had walked right up to Marco.

"Is that your car?" she asked, pointing at the beat-up Mazda coupe that had been pulled up to the edge of the cliff and was blasting music for the party.

"We found that here," Marco said. "Lucky, huh?"

"That car drove past my house tonight."

"Impossible. We've been up here all night. It hasn't moved an inch."

"Truth," Fitz chimed in. "Although I went to piss a few times, so maybe it moved then."

"What's that?" Marco said, reaching and taking the brick from Cody's hands.

"You tell me," she said.

Marco turned the brick over in his hands, tracing his fingers over the equal sign. "Looks like some kind of message. Like a warning to gennies or something." He paused. "You are a genny, right?"

James bristled at Marco's word choice. For some people, *genny* was the preferred slur to refer to kids who had been genetically engineered. James felt the urge to sucker-punch Marco right there, but he knew the fallout from that momentary satisfaction wouldn't be worth it.

"A One? Yeah, I am," Cody said proudly.

"I thought so," Marco said. "Bad day to be a One, huh?"

"Real bad," Fitz said. "I heard they're gonna stuff all of them in the Grand Canyon and throw away the key." Fitz cackled, and James just felt bad for him. If anyone could have used a genetic boost, it was this degenerate.

Then Fitz stepped closer to Cody, looked her over, and turned to Marco. "But I didn't know they let poor people be Ones."

"It was decided by random lottery, you idiot," Cody said.

"I guess rich people are just better at lotteries, then," Marco replied, and turned to look at James for the first time. Well, for the first time that night. James and Marco had looked each other square in the eye many times before. That's what happened when you were the two best athletes growing up together in a small town. They had always been matched up against each other, both of them so skilled at every sport that the only way to make fair teams was to have them cancel each other out. That's how every school yard football game and driveway basketball game had played out for years, James and Marco going at each other tooth and nail and playing to a standstill. James had actually started to enjoy their battles and relished the rare opportunity to compete against an equal. But then Marco quit playing sports. They hadn't faced off for years now.

As Marco stared at James, Cody snatched the brick

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back from him. “If you’ve got a message for me, you can say it to my face,” she said.

Marco’s slick smile returned. “Take it easy—this wasn’t from me. I’m down with you gennies. I mean, you people. In fact, you should stay and hang out, have some fun.”

James caught Cody’s eye and saw her confusion. Neither of them believed Marco, but what could they say?

Marco continued talking to Cody. “Now you, I know I’ve seen you up here before,” he said with a knowing smirk. Then he turned to James. “But you . . . this is your first time, right?”

“Yeah,” James replied. “So what?”

“Well, if you want to stay at a quarry party, you’ve got to initiate.”

“Initiate?”

Marco gestured to the edge of the cliff. “Leap of faith, bro, and then you’re cool to stay. We all did it.”

James heard several people in the crowd give their assent. He looked over to the darkness beyond the cliff. He knew it was just water below—deep, calm, clear water—but he had no interest in confirming that. And even if the water seemed tranquil, he knew it wasn’t. That water had the power to kill, to hurt not just the people who went in it but also people miles away and years removed. Maybe there was a grain of truth in the campfire legends: A boy could disappear into this quarry and end up tormenting the people he left behind.

James stopped looking at the reservoir and turned to Cody. "Come on, let's go." He started walking toward her, but Marco stepped in his way.

"I'm not jumping. We don't even want to stay," he said to Marco.

James tried to walk around him, but Marco cut him off again. He was blocking James from getting to Cody. Then Fitz and a couple of other guys stepped over. They formed a semicircle around James, with his back to the edge of the cliff now. Slowly, they pressed forward.

"What's wrong, James? Aren't you a One, also?" Marco asked pointedly. "Ones can do all kinds of cool stuff, right? You guys can probably even fly."

Marco and his buddies tightened into a circle. James had no choice but to take a step back. He wasn't on the edge yet, but there wasn't much room left. He considered his options: jump on his own, which didn't sound very appealing, or rush these guys, try to fight them off, and maybe end up falling over regardless. At least he'd bring a few down with him, he thought, grasping for a silver lining. It was hard to think. The music was loud, people around the fire were shouting, and Marco was inching closer. James steadied himself, ready to charge.

And then, out of nowhere, there was the tremendous sound of glass shattering. It was followed by dead silence. The music had stopped abruptly, and no one spoke.

Everyone on the cliff looked over to where Marco's car

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was parked. Cody stood in front of the hood, having quite obviously just thrown the brick through the car's windshield. She stared defiantly at Marco.

"Now we're even."

The mayhem that followed lasted only a few seconds, but James felt as if he watched every event unfold in slow motion. First, the pure anger that came across Marco's face, then the speed at which he charged Cody. Marco yelled something at her, something horrible, then grabbed the burning trash can. James saw that Cody was trying to join him on the edge of the cliff, and if she could make it, he knew that they could get out of there, that the crowd of people penning him in had dispersed enough to let them squeeze through. And finally, as she ran toward him, James saw Marco lift the trash can over his shoulder and hurl it at Cody.

The burning missile landed directly in front of her, the metal screeching on the rock, sparks and half-burned logs bouncing off the ground. James watched the embers shoot up into Cody's face, saw the look of panic and searing pain, and saw her balance start to shift. With two more strides, she would have been next to him, and he could have caught her, but she never made it. The fiery trash can bounced right in her path and sent her tumbling off the cliff.

James watched her fall, watched as Cody disappeared into total darkness. He stood on the edge, trying to see,

straining to hear. There was a splash and then nothing but silence. Silence in the quarry, and silence from everyone behind him. And somehow the silence helped James focus, helped him translate the moment into a straightforward problem-and-solution format with an answer that was obvious, even if it contradicted every physical instinct in his body. The equation was simple: Cody had fallen into the darkness, and he had to help her.

So he jumped.

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# CHAPTER 3

AS CODY TWISTED through the air high over the reservoir, she waited desperately to hit the water. She didn't care if the impact would hurt, if she would drown or freeze to death or get devoured by a giant squid. All she cared about was getting the fire out of her eyes, the burning embers that had bounced up into her face and left her with a searing blindness. The sixty-foot free fall into the water couldn't end soon enough.

Of course, falling in total darkness while completely blind made for a brutal landing. Cody hit the water with a violent thud that immediately knocked the wind out of her. Instead of calmly holding her breath like every other time she'd dived into the quarry, Cody felt the need to breathe right away. But she was sinking, and her baggy sweatshirt was riding up over her shoulders and tangling

her arms. She tried to swim upward, but it was no use; every attempted motion just made the straitjacket even tighter. She had to take a breath—her brain demanded it—so she opened her mouth and gasped for air, but only got water. This made her panic even more, and she continued flailing helplessly in her heavy, twisted clothing, sinking deeper and deeper. At least her eyes had stopped burning.

And then a hand touched her, clawed at her face, and started to pull her—first painfully by the hair, then from under her shoulder—and with great force she was dragged to the surface, and she knew that James had found her.

When they finally exploded out of the water, Cody gasped and coughed and inhaled all at once, which actually served no purpose at all. But her second inhale worked a little better, and she devoured the cold, clear air, drawing huge breaths and finally freeing herself from her anchor of a sweatshirt. She sensed James floating beside her—couldn't see him in the moonless night, but heard him taking the same gigantic breaths. As Cody strained to locate him, she realized why this moment felt so incredibly surreal.

She had never seen James swim before.

"Can you make it to the rocks?" he said, his voice cutting through the darkness.

"Yes," she replied, and they started paddling slowly to the edge of the water. When they reached a low rock shelf,

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they pulled themselves up and lay still for a moment. Unable to talk, Cody took James's hand and held it against her pounding heart. From there they would have to find one of the rocky staircases that led back to the top of the quarry. Traipse through the woods and locate their car. Avoid Marco and the other idiots if possible. And drive back down the mountain, back to where this whole night had started. But for now they lay motionless, staring out over the black water as it rippled almost imperceptibly.

Cody turned toward James, not knowing where to begin.

"Did they push you off, too?" she asked.

James hesitated for a moment, then answered softly. "No. I jumped."

And with that the tears came at once, in an overwhelming rush, and Cody pulled James closer and held on as tight as she could.

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Cody was dragging the next morning as she waited to board the bus to school. She usually sat with her friend Erica, a human jolt of caffeine who lived down the street from her. Of course, Erica had already pounced as they waited on the sidewalk.

"I heard what happened at the quarry last night. Now tell me *everything*," she said.

Cody didn't have the energy for this. "You just said you heard already."

“Not from you! Now, spill it.”

They got on the bus, and Cody slid into a seat alone. She looked up at Erica. “Sorry, E, I think I just need to sleep this morning.” She pulled her hood over her head and tried to get comfortable.

But as the bus rumbled along the pockmarked street, Cody couldn’t help staring out the window at all the new flags that had cropped up, the crisp equal signs flapping proudly in the breeze. And then there was the traffic jam in the center of town, as everyone rubbernecked past the flower shop, with its shattered windows and walls charred with smoke from a fire the week before. An accident, perhaps. Maybe it had nothing to do with the fact that the florist’s son was a One, a quiet, friendly boy named Victor in the grade below her.

So Cody was already on edge in her first-period English class when the announcement came over the PA system. It was odd for a class to be interrupted like this, and as Margie, the ancient school secretary, started talking, Cody noticed her voice wasn’t as sunny as usual.

“Will the following students please report to the office immediately . . .”

Everyone looked up at the speakers expectantly as the names were rattled off slowly and formally. Cody Bell. James Livingston. Then all the rest of the Ones in school, around ten in total. When Margie was done, Cody felt her

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classmates turn their attention from the speakers to her. As she moved toward the door, she desperately wanted someone to lighten the moment, to make a joke about getting to miss class or to ask her to bring back some candy from the giant bowl on Margie's desk. But instead they all silently watched her, and each gaze seemed to say the same thing: *I'm glad I'm not her.*

Cody joined the rest of the Ones in the office and immediately felt weird seeing all of them in one place. It's not like the Ones socialized only with each other; that would hardly be feasible, considering there were just a few of them in each grade. Plus, there was never any official moment when a kid was publicly declared a One. In fact, there was nothing that even required parents to tell their child that he or she had been genetically engineered. And it wasn't like you could simply tell from looking. There were plenty of people at school who were healthy and good-looking and athletic, but that didn't mean they were Ones. Inevitably, though, word got around, and it became common knowledge in their town and school and clearly with the principal about who was a One. Cody and the others had always shared an extra look or smile in the hallways. They were a tiny slice of the population, so of course a bond existed between them. And now that shared bond had landed them all in the school office.

"What do you think this is about?" a hulking senior

named Gregory asked. He was a gentle giant, the star of the football team, and not used to being in trouble.

Cody shrugged, not knowing for sure and not too excited to find out.

They took seats and leaned against walls in the waiting area, staring at the closed door of Principal Bixley. Ms. Bixley kept them waiting, the school day passing by around them, other students walking by and staring at them like animals in a zoo. Cody grew frustrated, knowing she was missing her chemistry lab now, where she had been looking forward to messing around with some liquid nitrogen. At least sweet old Margie shuffled around with her candy bowl at one point and whispered an apology. Cody smiled at her, trying not to make her feel bad. Other than that, they waited silently.

When Ms. Bixley finally emerged, she had the usual fake smile plastered on her face. Cody had always felt that Ms. Bixley was petty and calculating, but apparently her trick worked on other people. She was young for a principal and carried herself with an eager but serious manner, like the daughter of a president, a perfect angel who had never made a mistake.

"I hope you weren't waiting long," she said.

"Why are we here?" Cody asked, not able to take it any longer.

"I'd love to explain, Cody, if you'll let me," Ms. Bixley said cheerfully. "I'm sure some of you are a little anxious

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about the Supreme Court decision yesterday. It seems to have triggered some unintended and ugly consequences across the country, and I'd be nervous, too, if I were in your shoes. I understand, sadly, that even Shasta is feeling the effects of this new atmosphere, and I'm sorry to hear that many of your homes were vandalized last night."

Cody jolted up, surprised. Apparently, she wasn't the only One who had a brick shatter her window. It made her feel better and worse at the same time. She turned to James, who was leaning against the wall next to her. They hadn't talked since he'd taken her home after the quarry. She mouthed a question to him, and he shook his head—his house hadn't been hit.

"In light of these events," Ms. Bixley continued, "we want you to know that we will do everything in our power here at school to preserve a safe, welcoming environment. To ensure that, we have decided to give all of you special school ID cards. Margie?"

Ms. Bixley reached out to Margie, who scurried around her desk with several lanyard necklaces attached to plastic ID tags. Ms. Bixley took them and started to walk around the room, holding each necklace open and placing it over the head of every student as if they were part of some sad Olympic-medal ceremony.

"We've put sensors on the school doors, and these cards will let us know when you enter and exit all the buildings. That way, if there's any trouble, or if your parents

are looking for you or something else comes up, we'll always know exactly where you are. Just make sure to wear them at all times!" she explained.

When Ms. Bixley got to her, Cody didn't bow her head. "I'm not wearing a tracking collar."

"It's for your own protection, Cody, and it's not a choice. You won't be allowed in school without one." She reached up again to fit the lanyard over Cody's head, but Cody grabbed it from her quickly and stuffed it into her fraying jeans.

"Then I'll keep it in my pocket." Cody glared at Ms. Bixley but just got that same wide smile in return.

"All right, then, back to class, everyone." She held her gaze on Cody. "And stay safe."

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Cody sat through her next class in a fog of anger, the ID card burning a hole in her pocket. Sure, every student had a school ID that they used to check out library books and register for classes and things like that. And if the Ones and their families and their property were in danger, Cody understood the need for precautions. But Ms. Bixley's insistence that they wear the IDs around their necks drove her crazy. That wasn't a safety measure; it was a scarlet letter, a piece of plastic that practically screamed out the word *genny*.

When her history class ended, Cody started to file out with everyone else, but her teacher waved her over.

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Mr. Oberlee rarely got up from his desk, which was understandable considering that he was shaped like a penguin and equally unsuited for walking on land. Yet somehow Mr. Oberlee also coached the cross-country team, an irony that had always delighted Cody. She thought he was the best teacher in the school and even enjoyed his passionate reenactments of Winston Churchill speeches, so she let him slide on being clueless about the biomechanics of long-distance running.

“Hi, Cody, I wanted to catch you before practice. I imagine you’re pretty excited for the meet on Friday?” Mr. Oberlee said.

“Of course,” she said. Even more than running on her own, Cody loved the chess match of the actual competition. Her main tactic was to bolt hard right from the start, making the rest of the pack nervous and forcing them to exert themselves too early. But the smarter girls stalked her, assuming that Cody would eventually fade. Cody’s secret was that she always saved a hidden gear for the final stretch and would open her stride when the other runners made their move. She loved seeing the surprise on their faces when she let loose—loved imagining it, rather, because she never actually saw their faces.

“As you know, we can only enter five runners in the race,” Mr. Oberlee continued. “And I thought that this week might be a good chance to give some of the other girls a shot.”

"I don't understand," Cody said, genuinely not following him.

"You're not going to run this week."

"But I'm our fastest runner."

"I know that. And I get that this might seem unfair. To be honest, I don't like it, either," he said, looking down and then out the window, and Cody could tell that this ridiculous idea hadn't originated with Mr. Oberlee.

"Then why can't I run?" she asked.

"Because, well, that's just how it has to be this week," he said, and started fiddling with some papers. "I'm sorry, Cody."

Cody stumbled out of the classroom, crushed about not being able to run, but even angrier about the new reality that she had to acknowledge: *Reed v. NIH* had changed things. Technically speaking, it applied only to banning the technology for future generations, but practically speaking, the whole world was against her now. Maybe they always had been, but now they had permission from the government. And as she walked into the cafeteria for lunch, Cody discovered that she wasn't the only One suffering for it.

A group of Ones was gathered around a single table. *Weird*, Cody thought, to see the Ones from different grades all together like that again—and to her irritation, all of them had their ID draped around their neck. The group huddled around Laura, who was sobbing. Cody

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had never liked Laura and thought she was an entitled brat who worried too much about matching her nail polish to her scarf. But Laura did seem genuinely distraught, so Cody sat down and tried to catch up.

*“Understudy?”* He actually said I could still be the *understudy!*” Laura squealed, with tears and saliva falling onto her magenta silk blouse and skinny jeans. *So much for that outfit,* Cody thought. She made eye contact with James, and he walked around the table and knelt down next to her.

“She lost the lead in the musical. The drama teacher gave the part to somebody else,” James said, filling in the blanks. “And the same thing happened to me. I was supposed to deliver the final rebuttal for our debate team tomorrow. But our faculty adviser just told me I’m out. No explanation at all.”

The rest of the Ones each had a similar story, but Cody barely needed to hear them. She saw all too clearly that a systematic policy had been implemented to take away everything the Ones had earned. Cody stood up and bolted into the hall, heading for Ms. Bixley’s office.

She barged straight through the waiting area, past Margie, and through the principal’s door. “I know this is all your idea,” Cody accused her.

Ms. Bixley smiled, as if she was pleased at Cody’s agitation. “Is something wrong?”

Cody could have flipped over her desk right then, but

she had already used up the benefit of the doubt when it came to suspicious acts of violence against Ms. Bixley. During last year's homecoming weekend, Cody and her teammates had been warming up for their soccer game. Behind the field, Ms. Bixley was at the bake sale, and with a ball at her feet, Cody couldn't resist ripping a shot in Ms. Bixley's direction with the vague intention of startling her or knocking some cookies off the table. To Cody's surprise and secret delight, the soccer ball bounced squarely off Ms. Bixley's face, and the blood that gushed out of her nose ruined every last baked good. Cody had apologized, of course, and the whole thing was written off as an accident, but any reasonable person who saw the location of the soccer goal might have drawn a different conclusion. Regardless, Cody knew she probably couldn't get away with injuring Ms. Bixley a second time. So she tried her best to be civil.

"You are kicking the Ones out of the positions they had earned," Cody said. She assumed Ms. Bixley would deny it or play dumb, but her answer made Cody even angrier.

"Of course we are. It's a new day, Cody, and everyone is focused on equality right now. The Supreme Court, Congress, the Board of Education—they all think it best if we are a little more vigilant about giving everyone equal opportunities. I'm just following their new guidelines. Don't you think it's fair for those other students to get a chance?"

"Not if they don't deserve it. And not if they're worse."

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“*Deserve?* Did the first group of students *deserve* it? Or were they just more fortunate?”

Cody saw where Ms. Bixley was going: She was implying that the Ones hadn’t earned their accomplishments. Cody understood the logic, but in her case it just wasn’t true. Yeah, she was born with long legs and a strong heart, but those abilities were still totally organic to her. In fact, they might have existed no matter how she was born. There was no way to know, and Cody couldn’t stand being punished for that.

“What if you got fired because the school hired someone less qualified?” Cody asked. “Would that seem fair to you?”

“I earned this job. Through hard work and my God-given abilities,” Ms. Bixley said. “It wasn’t bestowed upon me in a petri dish.”

Cody stared back at her, wishing she had a soccer ball. Then Ms. Bixley walked over to stand right in front of her. There was a different look on her face; she had dropped the perfect-principal facade and appeared more relaxed than Cody had ever seen her. This caught Cody off guard, and she stepped back, stumbling and falling onto the office couch. Ms. Bixley kept walking forward until she was standing right over Cody.

“It’s all right to be scared about what’s happening. You should be scared. Every last *one* of you.” Ms. Bixley kept staring at her calmly. “Now get the hell out of my office.”

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"We're in trouble, James," Cody said as they left school together. She had filled him in on her chilling encounter with Ms. Bixley, and since neither felt inclined to participate in their respective extracurricular activities, they were leaving early to hit up their favorite diner. "The green light has been given to mess with us. And people seem pretty happy about it."

"I think they're just testing us," James said. "They're provoking us, and we're failing."

"We should let them do whatever they want? Come on, we have to stand up for ourselves."

"The bricks, the ID cards, the demotions—it sucks, I'm with you. But what good does getting angry do? You almost died last night. And now you've got Bixley gunning for you. Fighting back has only made things worse."

"So we shouldn't even react?"

"That's not what I'm saying. Just . . . react better. If they want to be violent, we can be peaceful. If they act petty, we stay classy. We do that, and this will all blow over soon enough."

"All right, Gandhi," Cody said. She was annoyed by how preachy James sounded, but she saw his point.

"Next time one of these idiots acts out, promise me you won't lose your cool?" he said.

"Fine," she said begrudgingly.

"Well, that doesn't inspire much confidence."

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"I don't have to like it, okay? But you're right. They want us to overreact so they can justify doing something worse. I won't give them a reason, I promise."

James put his arm around her and kissed her temple, and then they walked up the steps to the Starlite, the local diner. It wasn't busy, so they took seats at the empty counter. A waitress trudged over, weary but smiling.

"Hi, Mom," Cody said.

Her mother, Joanne, reached out and squeezed Cody's arm. "Hi, kids," she said. Joanne was a small woman, her straw-colored hair half gray now after thirty years of working at this same counter. She was an eternal optimist, though, and was proud that her daughter wasn't going to be pouring coffee for a living.

"The usual, please," Cody said.

"Not so fast. What the hell happened last night? I saw the window."

"Sorry, I thought James would get mad at me if I told you," Cody said.

"What?" he said, surprised. Cody kicked his leg under the counter.

"Him and his friends were in some stupid water-balloon fight all day, you know, like a prank war. They followed us back to our place and tried to hit us as we ran inside."

"A water balloon shattered your window?" Joanne asked, dubious.

“Yes. It must have been a big one,” Cody said. She kicked James again, harder this time.

“Yup. A really big one,” he said.

“Wow. Are you all right?”

“We’re fine,” Cody said.

“And don’t worry about replacing the glass—I already made my friend pay for it,” James said, and stood up to pull his wallet out of his khakis. He counted out some bills and handed them to Joanne. “Sorry about all that.” James sat back down sheepishly, but Cody was the one feeling terrible. She felt bad taking James’s money, but she knew he had it and she didn’t.

Joanne took the bills, still a bit confused. “Well, thank you. I’d yell at you to be careful playing with water balloons, but that just seems crazy,” she said. “Fries and shakes, coming right up.”

As her mom walked off to the kitchen, Cody turned to James, ready to apologize, but he was sliding out of his seat. “Be right back,” he said, gesturing toward the restrooms. “Can you order a bag of ice for my shin?” James said, smiling as he faked a limp.

“Thank you. I’m sorry about that. My mom has seemed pretty freaked out lately. She doesn’t need to know bricks are flying through my window.”

“Water balloons, though?” James said, shaking his head. “Not your best work.”

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Cody laughed as he walked away. She leaned back in her chair, trying to enjoy a rare moment of calm, when a stranger slid into the seat next to her. Pretty rude, she thought, considering the diner was empty. Then the person turned and looked her straight in the eyes.

"It's Cody, right?" he said. He was only a couple of years older than she was but gave off an air of confidence and maturity, as if he had dealt with things that Cody couldn't even fathom. And even as he made the most intense eye contact that Cody had ever experienced, he still managed to keep glancing quickly all around the diner, alert to every corner.

"Do I know you?" she asked. No, obviously. Cody surely would have remembered someone so striking, with his sharp features, tawny skin, and closely cropped dark hair. Even though he seemed to be hiding in a dark hooded sweatshirt and baggy cargo pants, his body appeared to be made up of tightly coiled wires. Whoever this person was, he looked like he had parachuted in straight from an army-recruitment commercial.

"No. But we know you," he said. "We heard you were attacked last night. And we heard how you reacted."

"What do you mean, *we*? And how do you know that?"

"I can't get into it here, but I'll fill you in later." He handed her a slip of paper. "Come to that address tonight. We're having a meeting, and you should be there."

Was this guy serious? He was acting as if the greasy-

spoon diner in Shasta was teeming with spies. “Dude, I have no idea what you’re talking about it,” she said.

“The Ones, Cody. We’ve decided to do something.”

Cody felt a chill go down her spine as it dawned on her what this meant. There were others out there, others like her who saw what was coming and realized they had to act. Cody felt vindicated. She wasn’t crazy, and she wasn’t alone. But even with that thrill, she remembered what she had just promised James. She would stop acting so recklessly, stop making things worse. He was probably right—every rash action of hers had only made people hate them more. Surely whatever group this guy belonged to was doing that to an even greater extreme. Cody took the paper and looked down at the address, but she knew she shouldn’t go.

“No, thank you,” she said.

He stared at her with piercing dark brown eyes and then reached out and grabbed her arm, his firm grip keeping her whole body in place. Cody knew she had every right to knock him away, to shout for help, to have her mom kick him out, but the power of his look stopped her. Cody saw a kindred spirit, someone equally as passionate and tempestuous as she was, but with a measure of self-possession that she had never been able to manage. She was shocked that such a balance could exist, that a person could radiate so much energy while staying perfectly calm. Even if she didn’t go to the meeting, she wanted to learn how that was possible.

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“Who are you? What’s your name?” she asked.

“Kai,” he said softly after looking over his shoulder. “So you’ll come, then?”

She wanted to trust him, was practically willing to jump out of her seat and follow him out the door to hop on the back of whatever motorcycle he surely rode in on. But she thought of James, the amazing boy she loved, who had saved her life, who knew her better than anyone, who was always trying to protect her, who had the dimples and the curls, and who was probably walking back to her this very second. She couldn’t do that to James.

“No. I can’t.”

Kai’s eyebrows furrowed. “I didn’t want to explain this here,” he said, frustrated, “but you deserve to know.”

He stood up and leaned into Cody’s ear, their cheeks practically touching, tiny bits of electricity tickling her nerves. His tone was cold, but his breath on the back of her neck was warm. “As we speak, the government is working on a program that they think will solve the equality problem. They’re developing a technology to reverse the genetic engineering of all the existing Ones.”

Kai paused.

“They’re calling it the Vaccine.”

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# CHAPTER 4

AS JAMES DROVE Cody home from the diner, she sat quietly in the passenger seat, staring out the window in a daze. James couldn't figure out what was bothering her, but he knew from experience that he should probably be apologizing for something. It was never the small stuff that got James in trouble, like not holding open a door or forgetting that she hated cinnamon. In that sense, Cody was super chill. But if it was a mistake like not sticking up for her in front of his parents or disagreeing about something she thought was obvious, then look out, Cody was a pit bull. So as he drove along with the tension thick in the car, James racked his brain for something she could be mad about.

"I'm sorry I gave your mom the money," he said, knowing Cody would probably resent him for paying his way

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out of trouble. “Your ridiculous story kind of backed me into a corner.”

“Yup.”

“What does that mean?” he said.

James looked at her and realized she hadn’t been listening. “Hey. What’s going on?”

“Nothing, I’m sorry. Just spaced out for a second,” she said.

“Cody . . .”

He turned to her and saw that she was definitely not spaced out. He could tell by the tiny, tensed muscle in her jaw that her mind was working overtime.

“What do you think you’d be like if you hadn’t been genetically engineered?” she finally asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Like, who would you be right now if the scientists hadn’t messed around with your DNA? Would you still be the same person?”

James thought for a moment. It was a question he’d considered before, and the answer was obvious to him. Of course he’d be different. He’d look different, his body and mind would work differently, and every experience he’d ever had might have played out differently. Hell, if a butterfly had sneezed differently on the day his brother died, James probably wouldn’t even exist. It was kind of pointless to get worked up over it, he thought.

“No, I wouldn’t be the same,” he said. “I bet I’d be pretty

similar, but who cares? I wouldn't even know any other way to be."

James saw that Cody wasn't satisfied with this. It was different for her, and he understood why. If Cody hadn't been picked for the pilot program, there was a good chance she wouldn't be similar at all. There were plenty of kids in her neighborhood who were living proof of that, kids who had the odds hopelessly stacked against them by virtue of the block they were born on and the parents who bore them. James knew Cody felt guilty about overcoming this, but again, he thought, what was the point?

People were born with all kinds of advantages and disadvantages. You couldn't control it, so how could you feel bad about it? Nor did it make much sense to be proud of it. James knew he didn't possess any advantages because he was particularly deserving of them. And people born with birth defects, incurable diseases, lifelong handicaps—they didn't deserve that, either. As he saw it, that was the whole point of testing this new technology. Once the science was all figured out, no one would ever be born unlucky again.

James turned to Cody. "Why are you asking this?"

Her thousand-yard stare had returned, and James knew he wasn't going to get a real answer. He had come to accept that they would always feel differently about being Ones, always disagree about how much of it was a gift and how much was a curse. And since he was pulling up to her

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house now, he wasn't going to push her. He did, however, stop the car with an extra hard jolt to the brakes. Cody slammed back in her seat.

"Easy there," she said, a little surprised.

"Just trying to wake you up. You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I think I just caught a food coma," she said, then smiled at him playfully. "If I never come out of it, promise me that you won't waste your life sitting at my bedside. You have to live, James, promise me you'll live!" Cody collapsed on top of him in a poorly acted death scene.

James laughed and tried to hold her up, then grabbed her hands in mock seriousness. "I'll mourn silently for a year . . . then grab the first girl I see and head straight for the diner."

Cody smacked his arm. "You would not!" She got her stuff together and started to get out of the car. "Sorry if I was acting weird. Talk to you later tonight?"

"Of course," James said. Cody leaned in for a quick kiss, then shut the door. As she walked up to her tiny house with the faded paint and lopsided porch, James thought about shouting after her. He wanted to reassure her, to ease her guilt and tell her that if she hadn't been a One, he was sure she'd be exactly the same—just as smart, beautiful, fast, witty, and stubborn. That she'd be an identical and equally perfect version of herself. He wanted

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to shout it after her, but he didn't. Because James knew it wasn't true.

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Back at home, James ate dinner with his parents at their regularly scheduled time. Michael was nowhere to be found, which had become common in recent days. James didn't know which way he preferred it. With Michael gone, at least he knew there wouldn't be a fight at the dinner table, but his empty chair seemed to create a tension all on its own. As they ate silently, James thought about how much these family dinners had changed. Before Michael went off to college, meals were loud, raucous affairs. The two brothers would be yelling excitedly about something that happened at a sports practice, Arthur would be trying to stump them with a math brainteaser, and Helen would snap her napkin at the boys as they fought over food and made a mess. Tonight, though, it was so quiet that James could hear his parents chewing.

When they finished eating, James helped clear the table, dutifully loaded the dishwasher, and tied up the full trash bag. Then he stepped out of the kitchen door and walked down to drop the trash at the curb. At the bottom of the long driveway, James stopped suddenly. In the darkness just ahead of him, he saw a figure sitting at the edge of the street. After a moment of surprise, James recognized the slumped silhouette of his brother. James crossed

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behind him and tossed the bag in a garbage can. It rattled loudly, but Michael didn't even look up. James was offended that his brother had ignored him, so he sat down right next to him on the curb.

They sat in silence for a minute, and then Michael reached over to a half-finished six-pack and offered it to James. "Beer?"

"No, thanks," James said.

"Right, stupid question. Of course the perfect son wouldn't have a beer," Michael said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" James asked.

"Look at you. Doing all the chores, getting good grades, captain of the debate team. What an impressive specimen!"

James looked at Michael warily, realizing how drunk he was. He didn't want to fight him and had no interest in provoking him, so he grabbed the beer and popped the top. "Happy?" he asked. "And, by the way, you did all those things, too—pretty well, if I remember correctly."

"No, brother, you do it better than I did. That's the difference," Michael said.

James shook his head, knowing it was pointless to argue. Michael had been his idol for as long as he could remember. James grew up following him around and copying his every move, from the stupid way they still tied their shoes to the part in their hair. If Michael was criticizing

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James, then he was really being critical of himself. So James just ignored him and took a swig of beer.

“So you agree, then? You do all that stuff better than me?” Michael asked.

“Shut up, will you?”

“You’re better than me, James. It’s okay to admit it. Not every person is equal.”

“Can we just sit here and enjoy—”

“Say it!” Michael shouted. “Admit that you’re better than I am.”

“Better at holding my liquor,” James said, trying to keep things light.

“Better at everything,” Michael said. “Well, almost everything. I bet you still can’t get out of a super-deluxe head clamp.”

Before James could react, Michael had pounced on him, reached around his neck and under one armpit, and locked his head into a painful position that James was all too familiar with. It was Michael’s favorite little-brother torture device, a trump card that could put a stop to any fight. James was always helpless in the grasp of his stronger brother and would eventually concede the point rather than getting choked out. And now he was back in that excruciating position, with the full weight of his brother pushing down on him and the sound of laughter ringing in his ear.

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“Still got it, bro!” Michael yelled. “Damn, that was quick.”

James felt the searing pain start in his neck and tried to squirm free. But he knew it was hopeless. “All right, you got me. Now let go,” he croaked.

But Michael kept leaning down on him, laughing joyfully. “Come on, buddy, you can get out of this, right?”

James began to struggle for real, getting angry now. “Loosen up, I’m serious,” he said, starting to get scared. Besides being drunk, his brother had been acting different for a while. This didn’t feel like roughhousing. It just felt like James couldn’t breathe.

“I know you can get out of this, Superboy,” Michael said, even as he tightened his hold. “Or did Mom and Dad not order this skill from the breeding catalog?”

The anger burst out of James in an instant of pure fury. First there was the surge of strength as he twisted his body to grab Michael behind the knees and lift him off his feet. Then he threw both of them to the ground, landing with a crushing thud as he drove his shoulder into his brother’s chest. And then, as Michael rolled on top of him, James threw a violent right hook with such power and precision that it shattered his brother’s nose with a crunch. James cocked his left arm, ready to throw again, but Michael had collapsed onto his back, blood streaming from his face.

James staggered a few steps away, catching his breath as his heart raced. He tried to process an odd combination

of feelings—the thrill of victory mixed with remorse at having hurt a member of his family. But most of all, there was the sensation of something totally new: He had never beaten his brother before, in anything. And now he stood over him, looking down as Michael lifted an arm to gingerly touch his face and then let out a pained moan. James looked on for a moment as tears that he couldn't quite explain began to fill his eyes. Then he turned and walked away.



Cody didn't answer her phone as James walked toward her house, so he wasn't too alarmed when her mother opened the door with a look of surprise. Joanne craned her neck to see behind him, worry creeping across her face.

"Is Cody all right?" she asked.

"What?" James said, confused.

"Where is she? Did something happen?"

"I was just coming over to see her . . . is she not here?"

Now full-fledged panic came over Joanne. "She took her bike and said she was going out to meet you."

Inside the house, they tried to call her again, looked around her room, and only after it was clear that Cody was totally off the grid did Joanne think to tell James about the guy at the diner. As she recounted what she saw, James couldn't help but imagine the worst. A stranger had approached her at the counter, whispered to her, left her shaking, and disappeared as quickly as he arrived. Well,

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that explained Cody's weird behavior in the car ride home. What did this guy say to her? Joanne didn't know much—she was across the diner when they were talking—but somehow saw fit to mention that the guy looked like an underwear model. *Terrific*, James thought, *the one thing we know about Cody's kidnapper is that he's handsome*. Growing more worried, James opened up Cody's computer. He typed in her password and immediately saw the last thing Cody had been looking at: a map and directions to an address outside town.

Within a minute, James was on the road, gunning Joanne's car out of Shasta and toward wherever Cody had been lured. Even as he was desperate to find her, James couldn't help but be angry with her, too. She was always running straight into trouble, and every reckless decision put her in a new, unpredictable bind. James had no idea what this current one would be, but he had a terrible feeling about it. Joanne's car was a piece of junk, and even while stomping down on the accelerator, he felt like he was barely moving.

Miles later, when James saw that he was getting close to the address that he'd written down, he began to recognize his surroundings. He was near Cal State–Redding, the university where his father worked. But instead of taking him onto the familiar campus, the directions led him to an area he'd never been before, which was run-down and seemingly deserted. He stopped the car near a crum-

bling church and double-checked the address. This was it. James got out of the car and walked up to the entrance of the church. The front doors were padlocked, but he could see some light coming from the windows just above the basement. James walked around to the back of the building and found a rusted metal door that was cracked open.

James stood frozen outside the church, and as he felt a cold sweat start to cover his skin, he wondered if he was about to break his own rule. Wasn't walking blindly through this doorway just as foolish as anything Cody had done? Perhaps, he rationalized, but at least he had a legitimate reason. Cody was in trouble; he was sure of that much. And she wasn't very good at getting out of it on her own.

James pulled the door open and grimaced at the grating screech of its hinges. There was a staircase directly in front of him, dropping down into pitch darkness. He started to walk down, the metal stairs echoing with every step, and reached a dank hallway that had a single lightbulb hanging in it. Then he saw the girl, seated in front of a doorway, staring at him.

James froze and tried to conceal the fear pulsing through him. After a second, though, he relaxed just a bit. All things considered, he realized, his descent into this abyss could have yielded a lot worse. Instead, there was a girl, maybe a couple of years older than him, sitting in a chair. She didn't look very nice—that much was true—but she didn't look like a serial killer, either. Serial killers didn't

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usually have cute pixie cuts that swooped down over big brown eyes like that. At least that was what James was counting on.

“Hi,” he said.

She didn’t answer, so he began to walk cautiously toward her. James started to see her more clearly now, struck by the extreme contrast of her jet-black hair against her fair complexion. And she had a few piercings on her face that he didn’t even think were possible. When James got halfway down the hallway, she held up her hand to stop him.

“What do you want?” she said.

James didn’t really know how to answer that. “I’m here to meet my girlfriend.”

“Did she tell you to come here?” the girl asked, eyeing him suspiciously.

“Well . . . yeah. She did.”

“All right,” she said. “Then tell me which way the wind blows.”

“Huh?” James said, not even meaning to speak. Had he heard her correctly? Because if so, he had no idea what she was talking about. And as she stared at him, waiting for an answer, it didn’t seem like she was going to repeat the question. “I don’t understand. I’m just going to go in there and get my girlfriend, okay?” James took a step forward, but the way the girl stood from her chair made him stop in his tracks.

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“Get the hell out of here,” she said, and if she had merely seemed cold and grumpy before, her tone now was downright chilling. James saw the change in her face, the new angles of her nostrils and the flush of her cheek—whatever the “or else” was that she had only implied, James wasn’t interested in finding out. So he backed toward the staircase, climbed up to the backyard of the church, and shut the door behind him.

As he stood there trying to figure what to do next, a cool breeze rustled the branches of a tree above him. Should he go back down there and make up something about the wind? No, he didn’t want to do that—it would only make him look stupider. He would be grateful to never encounter that girl for the rest of his life.

James knew Cody was somewhere in the basement of that church, but he still didn’t know if she was actually in danger. As he walked back to the street, he looked helplessly at the small illuminated windows that rested just above the ground. Something was happening down there, but the glass was clouded over and he couldn’t see inside. Maybe he could slip in through the front doors and find a different way downstairs. Granted, they were locked, but they seemed a lot easier to get past than that girl.

Then, as he made his way back to the front, he noticed a metal grate set against the foundation of the church. He walked over and saw that it was covering some ancient

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heating equipment with plenty of room in the well for a person to squeeze in on either side of it. And best of all, James saw there was a boarded-up window down there as well, the wood half-crumbled off already. He knelt down next to the grate and tried to pry it up with his fingers. It didn't move easily, but he could tell it was just grass and mud holding it down. He pulled harder, got the grate in the air, and gently leaned it against the church, taking care to be as silent as possible. Then he lowered himself into the well, landing softly on the gravel bottom. He turned his attention to the boarded-up window and found a crack that was almost big enough to see through. He could tell there were people on the other side and could hear voices now. If he could just shift it open a little more, he'd have a clear view of what was going on.

But just as James was about to peer inside, he heard the gravel crunch behind him. Before he could turn around, his face was pinned against the concrete wall of the church basement.

"I told you to leave."

It was the same voice that James had heard in the hallway. He twisted his neck just enough to see out of the corner of his eye. The girl was standing behind him with a gun pointed at his head.

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# CHAPTER 5

CODY HAD SPENT most of the meeting trying not to draw any attention to herself. Between not knowing exactly what was going on and seeing that everyone else was a few years older than her, it seemed wise to find a seat in the back and keep her head down. When she had arrived at the church earlier, she found Kai outside, and he greeted her warmly and led her downstairs. But as other people filed into the large storage room, Kai took a seat up front and left Cody to fill in the blanks herself.

It was pretty obvious that everyone in the room was a One. There were maybe two dozen of them, and Cody realized she had never been in one place with so many Ones before. The thought thrilled her as she contemplated the talent and potential that was gathered in this grimy church basement. At the same time, she had the unfamiliar

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feeling of being intimidated. It wasn't just that they were older, they also had a confidence and seriousness that she envied. It was the same feeling Kai gave off in the diner, that mix of passion and self-control that Cody found so difficult to balance in her own life.

So Cody sat in the back and listened. A well-dressed, preppy guy named Brandon stood up and began to speak.

"Welcome to the Northern California chapter of the New Weathermen," he said. "I know many of us have been talking in smaller groups, but it's time we get more organized."

"Fuck Amber Reed!" a wild-haired kid shouted from the back.

"Indeed," Brandon said, trying to continue. "But let's not get distracted with the Supreme Court. We can't fix that. It's all these new local laws that are really the problem. And now Congress is writing a new bill they are calling the Equality Act. It's going to make it legal everywhere to discriminate against us for the sake of national security."

Daphne, a girl in the front who looked like an Olympic swimmer, stood up. "People are already starting to get hurt. They found a One in Arizona hanging from a tree last night. He was only fifteen." Daphne wiped tears from her eyes.

"Suicide, they said," someone else mumbled in disgust.

“Interesting call, since the victim had cuts and bruises all over his face.”

Cody stiffened up imagining this: a boy, all of fifteen years old, hanging by his neck. She thought about how many people must have had the opportunity to stop it, but not a single one did. Rage began to bubble up inside her.

“An eye for an eye—let’s hang one of *them!*” the loud-mouth from the back shouted. As everyone yelled at him to calm down, they all called him J-Dog. Cody wondered how his obvious over-aggression had slipped past the genetic engineers.

Brandon tried to get back on track. “Before we do anything, we need to figure out a leadership structure. We need a public relations strategy. We need to figure out how we are going to communicate with the other chapters.”

A geeky guy named Marcus jumped in quickly. “I can build a secure server to send messages—”

Daphne interrupted him. “How is this going to stop the next lynch mob?”

A few of the other Ones yelled in agreement. Cody sided with this faction, and she wanted them to go even further. If Kai had been telling the truth about the Vaccine, what were they going to do about *that*? She could barely get her mind around such an absurd idea—technology that could somehow alter your genetic makeup even though you were already a fully formed person. It seemed

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impossible, but so did a lot of things, including her own perfect genetics.

Cody squirmed in her chair as the debate continued, everyone talking over each other about logistics and how the group would function. They all had a lot of passion, but there was no cohesive plan. It seemed the only thing they agreed on was this name of the New Weathermen.

Cody leaned over and tapped Marcus on the shoulder. With his dorky glasses and ill-fitting shirt, he seemed like one of the few people there who wouldn't bite her head off. "What does that name even mean?"

Marcus smiled at her with pride. "We know which way the wind blows."

*Oh, really helpful,* Cody thought. She was getting frustrated, but then she saw Kai stand up. He surveyed the rest of the Ones, stepped to the center of the room, and spoke for the first time.

"Fact number one: The rest of the country has every right and incentive to be afraid of us. Our society is set up as a gigantic zero-sum game. As we start to acquire more resources, both tangible and intangible, there will be less for everyone else. They are going to act rationally and try to prevent this from happening.

"Fact number two: They can, in fact, do just that. They control the government, the financial system, the media, and the military. We, on the other hand, have nothing. No

money, no organization, no access to the traditional levers of power. This is going to be the harsh reality for at least the next five to ten years.

“Fact number three: If we don’t do something, we are doomed. Inaction is capitulation. So our choice is already made. We must resist, we must fight back, and we must degrade any entity that seeks to force us down. Whether we have a vice-treasurer or an encrypted e-mail network, I don’t care. Whether we use pipe bombs or speeches, I don’t care. Until total victory or total annihilation, we follow one rule: The New Weathermen protect the basic rights of Ones at any cost.”

As Kai returned to his seat, there were loud murmurs of assent. For her part, Cody wanted to jump up, rush over, and hug him. He had articulated exactly what she already knew to be true: A storm was coming, and they had no choice to but to face it head-on. And then it dawned on Cody with a wave of excitement—she saw how the wind was blowing.

Before the next person could speak, the back door of the storage room crashed open. As Cody and everyone else turned to look, she let out an audible gasp. James was being led into the room at gunpoint.

Cody covered her mouth, not knowing whether to scream out or hide. A girl Cody had met outside, Taryn, was pushing James to the front of the room.

“I found him outside, spying. Not sure how much he

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heard,” Taryn said. She turned to Kai. “What are we going to do with him?”

Brandon jumped out of his seat. “Whoa, hold on a second,” he shouted. “First of all, why are you asking Kai? No one’s in charge here, remember?”

Taryn rolled her eyes, then made a big show of addressing the whole room. “Sorry . . . what are *we* going to do about this?”

“And second of all,” Brandon continued, “why the hell do you have a gun? We’re certainly not going to kill him!”

“Gimme the gun—I’ll kill him!” J-Dog shouted.

Taryn turned to Brandon. “Wake up, dude. This is exactly the type of stuff we need to worry about now,” she said. “If you want me in charge of security, then don’t bitch about how I handle it.”

Cody watched as Kai stepped in between them and lightly pressed on Taryn’s arm to lower the gun. And then Cody made eye contact with James for the first time, saw the panic on his face, and realized she had to do something.

“He’s with me!” she shouted from the back of the room. Everyone turned to look at her. “It’s fine. He’s with me. And he’s a One.”

“And who the hell are you?” Brandon sneered.

“It’s cool, I invited her,” Kai said. “She’s the high school kid I told you about. The one who fought back.”

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"Since when are we including kids at these things?" Taryn asked.

"Hey, remember the point of all of this? We're a minority that makes up one percent of the population . . . we need all the help we can get," Kai said. Then he turned back to Cody. "Do you vouch for him?"

Cody hesitated. She could certainly vouch that James was a terrific person, a good boyfriend, moral, trustworthy, and kind. But somehow she knew that was not what Kai was asking. And now her standing in the group would be forever tied to James. But what else could she do other than vouch for him? She'd just have to make James understand that whether or not he completely agreed with what was happening here, he'd have to accept it. Everyone else in the church saw what the Equality Movement was trying to do—if James didn't, Cody would make him.

She looked Kai in the eye and nodded. She vouched for him.

Up in the front of the room, Kai turned to James and gave him a rough pat on the arm. "Welcome. Have a seat," he said.

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After the meeting ended, Cody waited until they had walked away from the church before she turned on James.

"I can't believe you followed me here!" she said.

"Are you serious? Don't you mean *thank you*?"

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“Thank you for what? I was fine. Meanwhile, you almost got yourself shot and made us both look like idiots.”

“Which all could have been prevented if you had just told me where you were going.”

“I wasn’t allowed to. Kai told me to come alone.”

“Oh. Kai. I didn’t realize he was in charge of our relationship.”

“He’s not. And neither are you. You’re not my babysitter.”

“Right, I’m sorry. Your mom’s freaking out, I’m worried sick, but from now on I’ll just wait until it’s crystal clear that you’re in trouble before I lift a finger to help. Wouldn’t want to embarrass you again.”

As James walked off ahead of her, Cody realized she was being a jerk. She caught up with him and grabbed his arm.

“You didn’t embarrass me, okay? It’s just that . . . you heard what they were talking about down there. I didn’t want us to look like ignorant kids,” she said.

“Yeah, I did hear them. And honestly, they’re all crazy.”

“James, keep your voice down.”

“I’m sorry. But they’re talking about a national network of college students that’s going to run around—doing what? Planting bombs? Can we just get out of here, please?”

Now something scarier occurred to Cody, an issue that was much bigger than their petty bickering. She was almost afraid to ask, but she had to.

“You actually think we deserve this, don’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You agree with them, the rest of the country. You think we are a mistake—a problem that needs fixing. That we shouldn’t be treated the same as everyone else.” Cody glared at him. “Am I right?”

James struggled to formulate a response. “Not exactly, okay? I just . . . I understand why people think it’s unfair. We have an advantage, don’t we? And if there needs to be some adjustments to make things fair again, I don’t believe that bombing government buildings is an appropriate response.”

“*Adjustments*? Kids are getting killed! No one should be punished simply because of how they were born. I thought we always agreed on that.”

“We do. But whatever is happening in there,” James said, pointing back toward the church, “that’s not the solution.”

Cody’s heart sank as she realized how big the rift was between her and James. But she knew this wasn’t the moment to convince him. She needed to get him away from the rest of the Ones and explain things in the car. Make him understand that he was now obligated, at the very least, to keep quiet about this. She had vouched for him.

As she pushed James toward her mother’s car, she heard Kai call out from behind her. “Cody!” he yelled. “Wait up a second.”

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Cody and James stopped at the edge of the street, and Kai jogged over to them. He stood between them and put his arms around both their shoulders. Cody thought it was supposed to be friendly, but it still felt a little weird.

"I'm glad you two made it today," Kai said. "I know there may have been a lot to take in, but I hope you felt it was worthwhile."

"Yeah, thanks for including us. We're honored to be part of this," Cody said.

"Okay, great. That's what I expected," Kai said. Then he turned to look at James. Cody fixed her gaze on him as he stood silently for a moment.

"Yup. Ditto," James said.

"Well, listen . . . I think there's a real opportunity to get you guys organized over at the high school. Like I said inside, it can't just be us old geezers—if this is going to work, we need every One to be involved."

"Yeah, I totally agree," Cody said.

"Here, take my number," Kai said, handing her a slip of paper. "We should bounce some ideas around. And don't worry, it's not my regular phone. This one is safe to call."

Cody took the paper and slid it into her pocket. She could feel James staring daggers at her. And yes, they were definitely daggers, not butter knives. Cody wanted to pull Kai aside and ask him about the Vaccine, since that was the whole reason she had come in the first place. But she had a feeling that she should focus on separating Kai and

James as quickly as possible. Nothing good was going to come from their interacting any longer. Anyway, she had Kai's number now—she could ask him about the Vaccine on her own.

"Sounds good," Cody said. "We should really be going now."

"Of course. Be safe, and we'll talk soon," Kai said. He nodded at both of them and then jogged back toward the church.

James started walking to the car. Cody grabbed her bike and ran to catch up with him. She threw it in the trunk and got inside, and then they rode back to Shasta in silence.

It was the last time they'd be together before everything changed.

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When Cody woke up on the morning of List Day, she had a clear plan in her head. She was going to jog over to James's house, thank him for looking out for her, and then in the calmest way possible explain why she agreed with the New Weathermen. If he disagreed, she'd be disappointed, but at least they'd be communicating about it. And if she absolutely had to, she would tell him the rumor about the Vaccine. That was what had worked on her, after all, when Kai had left her in the diner. She had imagined James or herself being irrevocably changed, and it was too much to bear. She liked them the way they were

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and knew James did, too. So that was the plan—she truly believed that she and James could fix things.

But when James threw open her bedroom door while Cody was still blinking awake, she knew something terrible had happened.

“Have you checked your computer yet?” he asked gravely.

“No. I just woke up. What’s going on? Why are you over here so early?”

James picked up Cody’s computer. “Here. See for yourself.” He handed it to her and gave her some space.

Cody opened the computer and caught up with the rest of world. At six o’clock that morning, every American citizen had received the same e-mail. It was sent by a woman named Edith Vale, an analyst at the National Security Agency. Attached to the e-mail was a remarkable document.

It was a list of every single One in the country.

It included their names, addresses, and photos. Each identity was confirmed by the Social Security number that the NIH used to monitor the genetic-engineering program. The List, it seemed, could not be more comprehensive and official. It had everyone from the most recent newborns to those in their early twenties. Cody gasped in horror, realizing the gravity of this action. The List was meant to unleash terror. To serve as a map. To expose each

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individual One to the fate they deserved. Edith Vale had put a bull's-eye on every single one of them.

And then came the greater shock.

Cody's name wasn't on it.

The List was divided by zip code, and Cody quickly scrolled down to the section that contained the citizens of Shasta. She saw James's name. She saw the names of the Ones she knew from school. She saw Kai's name and others that she vaguely recognized. Cody scrolled around, checking in every possible way. She imagined that maybe they had mixed up her name somehow, or where she lived. If this was a list of every single One, then she had to be on it. She did a formal computer search within the entire document, and still there was nothing. No matter how hard she looked, her name wasn't listed.

Cody turned to James, who was hanging over her shoulder searching, as well. They locked eyes as the same thought shook each of them with all the grace of an earthquake.

Cody wasn't a One.

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