

# CHAPTER ONE



THE AIR AT THE UPPERMOST REACHES OF HAVEN IS HOT AND thick with the stench of rat droppings. Small price to pay for free food. Normal girls run screaming when this close to rats, but I can't afford luxuries like fear.

The sky looms close to our building's rooftop, and I duck to avoid cracking my head on a beam. If this section of the dome was ever painted blue, the pigment wore off long ago, leaving barely reflective metal panels.

Bent at the waist, I creep forward and scan the less-than-five-foot gap between the roof and the sky. Heat and darkness press in from all sides and sweat trails down my spine. I wish I could carry some form of light, but a lantern would make the rats run. Behind me, something moves.

I crouch deeper and spin.

"Who's there?" My voice comes out higher than I'd like, and the rats echo with screeches.

A large shadow slides across the roof near an air vent, and I press myself down, gravel digging into my knees and palms. The shadow's too huge to be cast by a person, but my pulse engulfs my senses, blurring my eyes, filling my ears, clouding my judgment.

I blink and the shadow's gone; all that's left is the undulating wave of rats over rats.

Shielding my nose to block the smell, I draw in long breaths. *You're okay. You're safe. No one knows.*

If the shadow was a Comp, he'd arrest me, not stalk from the shadows. And by living inside Haven, we're safe from the Shredders that roam outside the dome.

I'm crazy to imagine danger around every corner, but this sense of being watched has haunted me for the three years since my brother Drake and I became orphans. Growing taller and nearing puberty, my brother's become thin and needs more meat, so I return to my task.

Focusing on the scritch-scratch of rat claws, I home in on individual rodents—sense each body, each breath.

One skitters into a sliver of light and lifts its head to make eye contact.

*Big mistake, Mr. Rat.*

Held in my gaze, the rodent can't look away. Emotions heighten my senses, and soon I can feel the rat's rapidly beating heart, hear its blood coursing as adrenaline floods its veins. It's as if my fingers are pressed to its pulse, my ear to its chest. But they're not. The sensations build until the rat's completely under my control.

Crushing my instinct to release the poor creature, I dig

for more useful emotions than pity, emotions I'm certain can kill. I think of the person who hurt me most, who shattered my childhood, who betrayed my trust—who murdered my mother.

I think of my father. I think of the blank look on his face three years ago when the Compliance Officers, in their black masks and body armor, took him away.

Hate and anger crash through an inner door and sizzle like water hitting hot oil. Just the fuel I need. Locked on the rat's glare, my eyes tingle and sting. My emotions build, and my curse sparks to life at the back of my eyes.

Focusing my power, I picture the rat's heart, sense it compressing, and will my emotions to squeeze.

The rodent's eyes widen, its whiskers glisten with humidity, and it opens its mouth to reveal needle-sharp teeth. A shudder traces through me but I can't back down. I will do this. I must. Drake needs to eat.

The rodent seizes, every muscle stiffening at once. Its heart rate slows, then it gasps and falls on its side, legs twitching in death throes. Sympathy creeps up my throat, but I push it back down; one rat won't fill Drake's belly for long. When I'm sure it's dead, I pull our dinner forward by the tail and find another victim—then another.

I sway forward, nearly losing my balance. To regain control, I close my eyes and rub my thumb along my mother's wedding band, worn low on my index finger since the day she died. My curse passes, and I slump down to sit. At least this time I didn't pass out.

As useful as it's proved for rat hunting, I hate that I'm a

Deviant. Hate it because it makes me dangerous yet puts me in danger. Hate it because it make me different and lets me do things I can't understand or control. Hate it because it links my DNA to Shredders. But most of all, I hate it because it connects me to my father.

But I'm luckier than most. At least my curse is easy to hide. When my brother's hits, his skin changes, and I once saw a woman, cornered by the Comps, whose hair turned into barbed spikes. Management believes Deviants threaten the safety of Haven, that we're one step away from being Shredders. They want us all dead.

I reach for my knife to skin the animals but hear scuffling behind me.

*I am being watched.*

Spinning, I back farther into the shadows under the sloped girders of the sky. My ponytail brushes the back of my neck—or was it a rat?—then the light from a portable lantern rises above the roof's edge, followed by a small body climbing over the side from the rope.

"Glory, you up here?" my friend Jayma whispers.

"Over here." Relaxing, I creep forward, dropping my dinner, hoping it'll go unnoticed. Not that I'm afraid she'd report me for contraband rat meat. She'd never do that. She doesn't like seeing dead rats.

"Wow, nice haul." Scout steps into her lantern light. Raising my eyebrows, I shoot Jayma a questioning look, and she smiles softly. Scout pulls his hands from his hoodie pockets and rests them on lean thighs as he crouches to examine my catch.

"I got lucky with my net today." I shift to put the rats in my shadow. "Want one?"

"No thanks." Scout straightens as far as he can. "I can catch rats on my own. Bigger rats. Those don't have much meat."

"Scout has very good aim." Jayma looks at him like he's the god of all rat catching, and he puffs out his chest as much as is possible in his hunched-over position.

"Happy hunting then." I gesture toward the fugitive rats that must have escaped from a farm factory, where rats are raised and slaughtered for food. Or they may have breached the dome from Outside. Out there rats are the only animals that can survive the dust. Rats and Shredders.

Scout pulls out his slingshot, turns, and shoots a small stone into the darkness. Based on the squeaks and skitters, he's hit something, but it's not clear whether his strike was lethal. After pulling a crank torch from his pocket, he winds its handle until a faint light glows, then moves forward to investigate. The rats scatter.

"Isn't he great?" Jayma tucks hair behind her ear, and then turns her lantern's handle a few times before setting it down on the rooftop between us. She's got a smudge on her pale, freckled cheek, and I reach over to wipe it with my thumb. It smears.

"What's on my face?" Her eyes cry distress, then she brings up her sleeve to rub her cheek. "Do you think Scout noticed?"

"It's gone now." I smile to cover my white lie. There's no way to get clean up here in this filth, and Scout's not exactly

a master in the hygiene department. I doubt he noticed or cared.

She leans in close. “Do you think he’ll ask me?” Red spots flare on her cheeks.

“If he doesn’t, he’s crazy.” I grin, happy she’s happy, but an uncomfortable squirming grabs hold of my belly. I can’t believe we’re sixteen and old enough for official dating license bracelets. Next step is a marriage contract.

But it’s not like *I* could date. The risk is too high. If I apply for a license, someone in HR is bound to review my employment records and ask questions about my brother. He can’t be discovered. No one except Jayma knows he’s alive.

“I need a favor.” Jayma’s hands slip down to mine. “Scout’s going to the Hub, and—”

“Today? On day one?” The Hub’s always swarming on the first of the three days designated for employees in our pay-grade to pick up monthly rations. Some people can’t plan. But as much as I don’t want to go today, Jayma can’t go to the Hub alone with a boy without a dating license. If I agree to go, she’ll get more time with Scout, even if I’m the third wheel.

“Of course I’ll go to the Hub with you.” I squeeze her hands.

“You’re the best.” She leans in closer. “Plus Management is holding a lottery to celebrate the quarter-end holiday.”

“What’s the prize?”

“An entry-level Management position. Can you believe it?” Jayma bends and cranks her lantern.

Hope drifts up with the news, filling my head with dreams

of the future. Even employees born into Management families have to work really hard and pass qualifying exams to be eligible to apply for those jobs. “Do you think they’ll really promote the winner?”

Jayma nods. “And what great timing—just before we graduate and get our work placements.” She smiles and, even though her lantern’s fading, I swear the rooftop grows brighter.

My mood certainly does. Imagine having a Management job. And straight out of GT? A job like that might give me the power to protect Drake. There must be Deviants born into Management families, but I’m not sure I’ve seen one expunged. The possibility of winning tingles, even if the promised prize is a long shot.

*Clang.* A rock slams into steel at the edge of the roof, and I cringe. The surveillance cameras up here haven’t been repaired since before I was born, but too much noise is a sure way to get caught.

“Rat dung,” Scout curses, and we look over to where he’s been shooting rocks and, based on what I’ve heard, hitting more roof than rat.

“Are we going to the Hub, or not?” A deep male voice comes from the darkness, and my shoulders shoot up. Cal, Scout’s older brother, steps out of the shadows and my heart takes off at full sprint.

Cal grins. “Did I scare you?”

“No.” I stand taller and brush my hand over my hair. “When did you get up here?” Has he been there since Jayma and Scout arrived, standing in the shadows listening to Jayma

and me? I hope I didn't say anything embarrassing. Anything to reveal how I feel.

Cal's arrival, not to mention the way his blond hair drapes down over his blue eyes, makes it hard to keep calm. While my curse isn't powerful enough to hurt anything as large or smart as a human, it wouldn't do for anyone—even my friends—to associate me with a cramp in the stomach, a shot of pain to the kidneys, a squeeze in the heart. As much as I trust my friends, they can't know I'm a Deviant.

Cal's work boots crunch across the fine gravel; his back and knees bend to fit his tall body into the tight space. "Where's your net?"

"My net?" I can't keep my eyes off Cal's handsome face.

"You said you got lucky with your net. Where is it?"

He *was* listening. I gesture idly behind me.

He tips his head to the side, clearly knowing I'm lying, but he doesn't take it any further. Now eighteen, Cal was top of his General Training class, aced the M-Ap exams, yet got a work placement in Construction & Maintenance. That waste of brains is all the proof I need: Management only promotes from within. My dreams of the lottery deflate.

Cal brushes hair from his eyes, and the light from Jayma's fading lantern sharpens his chiseled features. Always tall and lean, his body's grown harder from physical labor—his neck, his arms, and legs transformed by hard work into strong ropes covered by skin. My eyes focus on his wrist, still without a dating bracelet, but I can't afford dreams.

"Don't you girls look pretty today." His compliment makes my heart stutter.

Cheeks burning I meet his gaze, and my insides squeeze with a sharp stab I only feel around Cal. Buzzing I rub my mother's ring to invite in her calmness, her strength, to push down emotions that make me dangerous to my friends.

"Jayma," Scout calls from the shadows. "Did you bring any stones? I ran out."

"I did." She lifts a hand to shield her eyes from the lantern light bouncing off the sky. "Where are you?"

Scout's hunched silhouette waves a slingshot about fifteen feet away, and Jayma picks up her fading lantern and cranks the handle. "Okay if I take this?" She must really like Scout if she's willing to head into those rats. When she leaves, I'm alone with Cal and the dark.

I didn't think the temperature could increase up here, but Cal's muscular form exudes heat and a strong spicy smell that tempers the rat droppings and makes me feel safe and in danger all at once. My skin prickles with tension that I need to defuse before emotions trigger my curse.

I pick up a rat by the tail. "Want a bite?"

"Very funny." He widens his stance and puts his hands on his hips, copying the way the Comps stand when they want to look particularly intimidating. "Young lady"—there's a sly grin under his stern expression—"did you use ration points to purchase that meat at the Hub?"

Cal is treating me like an equal, not a little girl, and my insides warm. "Of course I did, Officer. Obtaining rat meat any other way is strictly prohibited in the Policies & Procedures Manual. Black-market goods damage the Haven economy and threaten our very way of life."

“Haven Equals Safety.” We say the Haven slogan in unison, then laugh. My chest heats.

“Glad to hear you’re still drinking the coolade, little lady.”

“It’s so, so refreshing.”

Such a strange expression—none of us knows what coolade is—but it’s one of those things that everyone in the Pents grows up saying to describe employees who act and talk as if they’re reading straight from the P&P.

Cal’s hand lands on my shoulder, and a thrill traces through me as he draws in close. “I’ve got a secret, but you have to promise you won’t tell anyone—ever.”

He leans forward, moving his lips close to my ear, and he’s all I can smell, all I can feel. His heart beats so strong and steady I feel it inside and melt as his breath burns my neck. *Please don’t let my Deviance trigger.*

“I was recruited into the Jecs.”

I jump back, alarm causing my heart to race more than Cal’s touch. Emotions spark the back of my eyes—anger, disbelief, betrayal. I don’t dare look at his eyes and instead stare at his feet. “Why would you do that?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

I straighten and my head bangs the sky.

“Careful.” Cal reaches forward and his hand grazes my cheek. “I joined for a chance at a better future, a way out of the Pents.”

My breaths come more quickly, but I fight to hold myself together as emotions inflate and threaten to explode like a bomb. “The Junior Ethics Committee?”

His eyebrows draw closer together. "I know some of them are slimy and turn in their friends for petty crimes, but it doesn't need to be like that. The committee's a stepping-stone to a better life. If I work hard, I have a shot at Compliance Officer Training." He grins. "Besides, I'll just go after Deviants."

*I'll just go after Deviants.*

My stomach caves, my chest tightens. "But—" Words won't come. My tongue's dry. If he discovers my secret, I'm as good as exed.

Cal reaches for me, but lets his hand drop. "I thought you'd be happy. You took the M-Ap exams; I know you're ambitious." His jaw twitches and hurt builds in his eyes, before understanding flashes. "Is this about your father?" He takes my hand. "You must hate him."

My gaze shoots straight for Cal's eyes. "Hate him?" Cal's right, mostly, but the man was my father, and it's more complicated than that.

"Glory, your dad was a Deviant." Cal's voice is hard and deep. "He had to be exed."

Nausea builds and pain crushes my chest as Cal's revelation exposes then incinerates my dream of a normal life, my dream of being with him. My hand, slick with sweat, slides from his grip.

"Say something." He looks worried.

"You'll only turn in the dangerous Deviants, right?"

His head jerks. "They're *all* dangerous. Part Shredder."

"No one knows that for certain." And the idea that I'm related to Shredders, might turn into one, is something

I can't let myself think. My nightmares are bad enough.

"Glory." Cal's voice takes on a patronizing tone. "You can't deny history or science. The Deviants and Shredders both arrived when the earth died."

I bite down on my lip. The earth didn't die—not really—but over three generations ago it was buried in coarse dust from the asteroids and volcanic eruptions. In GT we learned that much of the world was burned, the rest of it buried. We learned how the dust kills normal humans. But some of the things we're taught about life Before The Dust—like air travel and long-distance telephones—seem like science fiction, not history. And since discovering my Deviance, I no longer believe every word we were taught in GT.

No one knows why the dust killed most life on earth. No one knows why Shredders can feed off the dust, or why some people became Deviant, neither Normals nor Shredders. If someone does know, Management's not telling. Everyone knows that neither Deviants nor Shredders existed BTM, and I shudder to think I might have DNA in common with Shredders.

"You won't tell anyone I joined the Jecs, will you?" Cal's forehead wrinkles. He's clearly uncomfortable with my silence, and I wonder what he might do without reassurance.

"I won't tell."

"Good." His shoulders relax. "Because if you told anyone, I'd have to kill you." He laughs and lightly punches my arm.

I force a smile.

Cal leans forward and places his hands on his thighs.

“The first thing they told us at Jecs orientation was, ‘Don’t tell anyone you’re in,’ but I had to tell you.”

Scout and Jayma approach and save me from asking why. I’m not sure I want to know. Scout’s got two rats by the tail, dripping blood, and Jayma’s face is even paler than normal. My mind spins. Cal, one of the Jecs? I wonder how far he’ll go with his role. Scout’s violating policy right now, and it’s reassuring that Cal doesn’t comment.

“Let’s head back down,” Scout says. “I’ve got to stash these at home before we go to the Hub.”

I break away from Cal to pick up my catch, but as I’m wrapping them in a scrap of cloth, he steps close.

“Do you know why I trust you? Only you?”

I flick my gaze to his eyes, then down, and draw a ragged breath. *Only me.*

My tongue feels thick. Conflicting emotions wage war inside me.

His head drops, his lips inches from my ear. “You won’t tell, right?”

I nod, my neck tense.

He exhales, his breath warm on my neck. “I knew you could keep a secret,” he whispers, “because you’ve got secrets, too.”