

The Giver

Chapter 11

Jonas felt nothing unusual at first. He felt only the light touch of the old man's hands on his back.

He tried to relax, to breathe evenly. The room was absolutely silent, and for a moment Jonas feared that he might disgrace himself now, on the first day of his training, by falling asleep.

Then he shivered. He realized that the touch of the hands felt, suddenly, cold. At the same instant, breathing in, he felt the air change, and his very breath was cold. He licked his lips, and in doing so, his tongue touched the suddenly chilled air.

It was very startling; but he was not at all frightened, now. He was filled with energy, and he breathed again, feeling the sharp intake of frigid air. Now, too, he could feel cold air swirling around his entire body. He felt it blow against his hands where they lay at his sides, and over his back.

The touch of the man's hands seemed to have disappeared. Now he became aware of an entirely new sensation: pinpricks? No, because they were soft and without pain. Tiny, cold, featherlike feelings peppered his body and face. He put out his tongue again, and caught one of the dots of cold upon it. It disappeared from his awareness instantly; but he caught another, and another. The sensation made him smile.

One part of his consciousness knew that he was still lying there, on the bed, in the Annex room. Yet another, separate part of his being was upright now, in a sitting position, and beneath him he could feel that he was not on the soft decorated bedcovering at all, but rather seated on a flat, hard surface. His hands now held (though at the same time they were still motionless at his sides) a rough, damp rope.

And he could see, though his eyes were closed. He could see a bright, whirling torrent of crystals in the air around him, and he

could see them gather on the backs of his hands, like cold fur.

His breath was visible.

Beyond, through the swirl of what he now, somehow, perceived was the thing the old man had spoken of-- *snow*-- he could look out and down a great distance. He was up high someplace. The ground was thick with the furry snow, but he sat slightly above it on a hard, flat object.

Sled, he knew abruptly. He was sitting on a thing called *sled*. And the sled itself seemed to be poised at the top of a long, extended mound that rose from the very land where he was. Even as he thought the word "mound," his new consciousness told him *hill*.

Then the sled, with Jonas himself upon it, began to move through the snowfall, and he understood instantly that now he was going downhill. No voice made an explanation. The experience explained itself to him.

His face cut through the frigid air as he began the descent, moving through the substance called snow on the vehicle called sled, which propelled itself on what he now knew without doubt to be *runners*.

Comprehending all of those things as he sped downward, he was free to enjoy the breathless glee that overwhelmed him: the speed, the clear cold air, the total silence, the feeling of balance and excitement and peace.

Then, as the angle of incline lessened, as the mound--the *hill--flattened*, nearing the bottom, the sled's forward motion slowed. The snow was piled now around it, and he pushed with his body, moving it forward, not wanting the exhilarating ride to end.

Finally the obstruction of the piled snow was too much for the thin runners of the sled, and he came to a stop. He sat there for a moment, panting, holding the rope in his cold hands. Tentatively he opened his eyes--not his snow-hill-sled eyes, for they had been open throughout the strange ride. He opened his ordinary eyes,

and saw that he was still on the bed, that he had not moved at all.

The old man, still beside the bed, was watching him. "How do you feel?" he asked.

Jonas sat up and tried to answer honestly. "Surprised," he said, after a moment.

The old man wiped his forehead with his sleeve. "Whew," he said. "It was exhausting. But you know, even transmitting that tiny memory to you--I think it lightened me just a little."

"Do you mean--you did say I could ask questions?"
The man nodded, encouraging his question.

"Do you mean that now you don't have the memory of it--of that ride on the sled--anymore?"

"That's right. A little weight off this old body."

"But it was such fun! And now you don't have it anymore! I *took* it from you!"

But the old man laughed. "All I gave you was one ride, on one sled, in one snow, on one hill. I have a whole world of them in my memory. I could give them to you one by one, a thousand times, and there would still be more."

"Are you saying that I--I mean we--could do it again?" Jonas asked. "I'd really like to. I think I could steer, by pulling the rope. I didn't try this time, because it was so new."

The old man, laughing, shook his head. "Maybe another day, for a treat. But there's no time, really, just to play. I only wanted to begin by showing you how it works.

"Now," he said, turning businesslike, "lie back down. I want to --"

Jonas did. He was eager for whatever experience would come next. But he had, suddenly, so many questions.

"Why don't we have snow, and sleds, and hills?" he asked. "And when did we, in the past? Did my parents have sleds when they were young? Did you?"

The old man shrugged and gave a short laugh. "No," he told Jonas. "It's a very distant memory. That's why it was so exhausting--I had to tug it forward from many generations back. It was given to me when I was a new Receiver, and the previous Receiver had to pull it through a long time period, too."

"But what happened to those things? Snow, and the rest of it?"

"Climate Control. Snow made growing food difficult, limited the agricultural periods. And unpredictable weather made transportation almost impossible at times. It wasn't a practical thing, so it became obsolete when we went to Sameness.

"And hills, too," he added. "They made conveyance of goods unwieldy. Trucks; buses. Slowed them down. So--" He waved his hand, as if a gesture had caused hills to disappear. "Sameness," he concluded.

Jonas frowned. "I wish we had those things, still. Just now and then."

The old man smiled. "So do I," he said. "But that choice is not ours."

"But sir," Jonas suggested, "since you have so much power--"

The man corrected him. "Honor," he said firmly. "I have great honor. So will you. But you will find that that is not the same as power."

"Lie quietly now. Since we've entered into the topic of climate, let me give you something else. And this time I'm not going to tell you the name of it, because I want to test the receiving. You should be able to perceive the name without being told. I gave away snow and sled and downhill and runners by telling them to you in advance."

Without being instructed, Jonas closed his eyes again. He felt the hands on his back again. He waited.

Now it came more quickly, the feelings. This time the hands didn't become cold, but instead began to feel warm on his body. They moistened a little. The warmth spread, extending across his shoulders, up his neck, onto the side of his face. He could feel it through his clothed parts, too: a pleasant, all-over sensation; and when he licked his lips this time, the air was hot and heavy.

He didn't move. There was no sled. His posture didn't change. He was simply alone someplace, out of doors, lying down, and the warmth came from far above. It was not as exciting as the ride through the snowy air; but it was pleasurable and comforting.

Suddenly he perceived the word for it: *sunshine*. He perceived that it came from the sky. Then it ended.

"Sunshine," he said aloud, opening his eyes.

"Good. You did get the word. That makes my job easier. Not so much explaining."

"And it came from the sky."

"That's right," the old man said. "Just the way it used to."

"Before Sameness. Before Climate Control," Jonas added.

The man laughed. "You receive well, and learn quickly. I'm very pleased with you. That's enough for today, I think. We're off to a good start."

There was a question bothering Jonas. "Sir," he said, "The Chief Elder told me--she told everyone--and you told me, too, that it would be painful. So I was a little scared. But it didn't hurt at all. I really enjoyed it." He looked quizzically at the old man.

The man sighed. "I started you with memories of pleasure. My previous failure gave me the wisdom to do that." He took a few

deep breaths. "Jonas," he said, "it *will* be painful. But it need not be painful yet."

"I'm brave. I really am." Jonas sat up a little straighter.

The old man looked at him for a moment. He smiled.

"I can see that," he said. "Well, since you asked the question--I think I have enough energy for one more transmission."

"Lie down once more. This will be the last today."

Jonas obeyed cheerfully. He dosed his eyes, waiting, and felt the hands again; then he felt the warmth again, the sunshine again, coming from the sky of this other consciousness that was so new to him. This time, as he lay basking in the wonderful warmth, he felt the passage of time. His real self was aware that it was only a minute or two; but his other, memory-receiving self felt hours pass in the sun. His skin began to sting. Restlessly he moved one arm, bending it, and felt a sharp pain in the crease of his inner arm at the elbow.

"Ouch," he said loudly, and shifted on the bed. "Owww," he said, wincing at the shift, and even moving his mouth to speak made his face hurt.

He knew there was a word, but the pain kept him from grasping it.

Then it ended. He opened his eyes, wincing with discomfort. "It hurt," he told the man, "and I couldn't get the word for it."

"It was sunburn," the old man told him.

"It hurt a *lot*," Jonas said, "but I'm glad you gave it to me. It was interesting. And now I understand better, what it meant, that there would be pain."

The man didn't respond. He sat silently for a second. Finally he said, "Get up, now. It's time for you to go home."

They both walked to the center of the room.

"Goodbye, sir," he said. "Thank you for my first day."

The old man nodded to him. He looked drained, and a little sad.

"Sir?" Jonas said shyly.

"Yes? Do you have a question?"

"It's just that I don't know your name. I thought you were The Receiver, but you say that now *I'm* The Receiver. So I don't know what to call you."

The man had sat back down in the comfortable upholstered chair. He moved his shoulders around as if to ease away an aching sensation. He seemed terribly weary.

"Call me The Giver," he told Jonas.