

## ***The Giver***

### ***Chapter 9***

Now, for the first time in his twelve years of life, Jonas felt separate, different. He remembered what the Chief Elder had said: that his training would be alone and apart.

But his training had not yet begun and already, upon leaving the Auditorium, he felt the apartness. Holding the folder she had given him, he made his way through the throng, looking for his family unit and for Asher. People moved aside for him. They watched him. He thought he could hear whispers.

"Ash!" he called, spotting his friend near the rows of bicycles. "Ride back with me?"

"Sure." Asher smiled, his usual smile, friendly and familiar. But Jonas felt a moment of hesitation from his friend, an uncertainty.

"Congratulations," Asher said.

"You too," Jonas replied. "It was really funny, when she told about the smacks. You got more applause than almost anybody else." The other new Twelves clustered nearby, placing their folders carefully into the carrying containers on the backs of the bikes. In each dwelling tonight they would be studying the instructions for the beginning of their training. Each night for years the children had memorized the required lessons for school, often yawning with boredom. Tonight they would all begin eagerly to memorize the rules for their adult Assignments.

"Congratulations, Asher!" someone called. Then that hesitation again. "You too, Jonas!"

Asher and Jonas responded with congratulations to their groupmates. Jonas saw his parents watching him from the place where their own bicycles were waiting. Lily had already been strapped into her seat.

He waved. They waved back, smiling, but he noticed that Lily was watching him solemnly, her thumb in her mouth.

He rode directly to his dwelling, exchanging only small jokes and unimportant remarks with Asher.

"See you in the morning, Recreation Director!" he called, dismounting by his door as Asher continued on.

"Right! See you!" Asher called back. Once again, there was just a moment when things weren't quite the same, weren't quite as they had always been through the long friendship. Perhaps he had imagined it. Things couldn't change, with Asher.

The evening meal was quieter than usual. Lily chattered about her plans for volunteer work; she would begin, she said, at the Nurturing Center, since she was already an expert at feeding Gabriel.

"I know," she added quickly, when her father gave her a warning glance, "I won't mention his name. I know I'm not supposed to know his name.

"I can't wait for tomorrow to come," she said happily.

Jonas sighed uneasily. "I can," he muttered.

"You've been greatly honored," his mother said. "Your father and I are very proud."

"It's the most important job in the community," Father said.

"But just the other night, you said that the job of making Assignments was the most important!"

Mother nodded. "This is different. It's not a *job*, really. I never thought, never expected--" She paused. "There's only one Receiver."

"But the Chief Elder said that they had made a selection before,

and that it failed. What was she talking about?"

Both of his parents hesitated. Finally his father described the previous selection. "It was very much as it was today, Jonas- the same suspense, as one Eleven had been passed over when the Assignments were given. Then the announcement, when they singled out the one--"

Jonas interrupted. "What was his name?"

His mother replied, "Her, not his. It was a female. But we are never to speak the name, or to use it again for a newchild."

Jonas was shocked. A name designated Not-to-Be-Spoken indicated the highest degree of disgrace.

"What happened to her?" he asked nervously. But his parents looked blank. "We don't know," his father said uncomfortably. "We never saw her again."

A silence fell over the room. They looked at each other. Finally his mother, rising from the table, said, "You've been greatly honored, Jonas. Greatly honored."

Alone in his sleepingroom, prepared for bed, Jonas opened his folder at last. Some of the other Twelves, he had noticed, had been given folders thick with printed pages. He imagined Benjamin, the scientific male in his group, beginning to read pages of rules and instructions with relish. He pictured Fiona smiling her gentle smile as she bent over the lists of duties and methods that she would be required to learn in the days to come.

But his own folder was startlingly close to empty. Inside there was only a single printed sheet. He read it twice.

## **JONAS**

### **RECEIVER OF MEMORY**

1. Go immediately at the end of school hours each day to the

Annex entrance behind the House of the Old and present yourself to the attendant.

2. Go immediately to your dwelling at the conclusion of Training Hours each day.
3. From this moment you are exempted from rules governing rudeness. You may ask any question of any citizen and you will receive answers.
4. Do not discuss your training with any other member of the community, including parents and Elders.
5. From this moment you are prohibited from dream-telling.
6. Except for illness or injury unrelated to your training, do not apply for any medication.
7. You are not permitted to apply for release.
8. You may lie.

Jonas was stunned. What would happen to his friendships? His mindless hours playing ball, or riding his bike along the river? Those had been happy and vital times for him. Were they to be completely taken from him, now? The simple logistic instructions--where to go, and when--were expected. Every Twelve had to be told, of course, where and how and when to report for training. But he was a little dismayed that his schedule left no time, apparently, for recreation.

The exemption from rudeness startled him. Reading it again, however, he realized that it didn't compel him to be rude; it simply allowed him the option. He was quite certain he would never take advantage of it. He was so completely, so thoroughly accustomed to courtesy within the community that the thought of asking another citizen an intimate question, of calling someone's attention to an area of awkwardness, was unnerving.

The prohibition of dream-telling, he thought, would not be a real

problem. He dreamed so rarely that the dream-telling did not come easily to him anyway, and he was glad to be excused from it. He wondered briefly, though, how to deal with it at the morning meal. What if he *did* dream--should he simply tell his family unit, as he did so often, anyway, that he hadn't? That would be a lie. Still, the final rule said ... well, he wasn't quite ready to think about the final rule on the page.

The restriction of medication unnerved him. Medication was always available to citizens, even to children, through their parents. When he had crushed his finger in the door, he had quickly, gasping into the speaker, notified his mother; she had hastily requisitioned relief-of-pain medication which had promptly been delivered to his dwelling. Almost instantly the excruciating pain in his hand had diminished to the throb which was, now, all he could recall of the experience.

Re-reading rule number 6, he realized that a crushed finger fell into the category of "unrelated to training." So if it ever happened again--and he was quite certain it wouldn't; he had been very careful near heavy doors since the accident!--he could still receive medication.

The pill he took now, each morning, was also unrelated to training. So he would continue to receive the pill.

But he remembered uneasily what the Chief Elder had said about the pain that would come with his training. She had called it indescribable.

Jonas swallowed hard, trying without success to imagine what such pain might be like, with no medication at all. But it was beyond his comprehension.

He felt no reaction to rule number 7 at all. It had never occurred to him that under any circumstances, ever, he might apply for release.

Finally he steeled himself to read the final rule again. He had been trained since earliest childhood, since his earliest learning of language, never to lie. It was an integral part of the learning of precise speech. Once, when he had been a Four, he had said, just prior to the midday meal at school, "I'm starving."

Immediately he had been taken aside for a brief private lesson in language precision. He was not starving, it was pointed out. He was *hungry*. No one in the community was starving, had ever been starving, would ever be starving. To say "starving" was to speak a lie. An unintentioned lie, of course. But the reason for precision of language was to ensure that unintentional lies were never uttered. Did he understand that? they asked him. And he had.

He had never, within his memory, been tempted to lie. Asher did not lie. Lily did not lie. His parents did not lie. No one did. Unless ... Now Jonas had a thought that he had never had before. This new thought was frightening. What if *others--adult--* had, upon becoming Twelves, received in *their* instructions the same terrifying sentence?

What if they had all been instructed: *You may lie?*

His mind reeled. Now, empowered to ask questions of utmost rudeness and promised answers--he *could*, conceivably (though it was almost unimaginable), ask someone, some adult, his father perhaps: "Do you lie?"

But he would have no way of knowing if the answer he received were true.