

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

In this chapter, Tris returns to the dormitory after visiting hours with families and finds Al alone, avoiding his parents. Al confesses he didn't want to face their questions about his poor performance in Dauntless initiation, particularly his losing streak in fights. He reveals his parents secretly admired Dauntless, which influenced his faction choice, though he claims his primary motivation was to protect others, inspired by Tris's bravery. Their conversation highlights Al's struggle to reconcile his ideals of courage with the brutal reality of Dauntless training, leaving Tris reflecting on how the faction's values have shifted over time.

The tension escalates when Al awkwardly expresses his feelings for Tris by putting his arm around her. Tris, uncomfortable with physical affection due to her upbringing, pulls away, creating a moment of mutual embarrassment. Though she regrets hurting him, Tris recognizes the personal nature of his feelings and the impossibility of reciprocating. She attempts to diffuse the situation with humor, but the encounter leaves their friendship strained. Tris's internal conflict—balancing empathy for Al with her own boundaries—adds depth to their dynamic and underscores the emotional complexities of their initiation experience.

Later, at dinner, Tris, Al, Christina, and Will attempt normalcy, but the awkwardness between Tris and Al lingers. Their group's lighthearted debate about pets contrasts with the underlying tension, particularly when Christina's nostalgia for her dog triggers memories of the aptitude test. Tris's anxiety spikes as the conversation brushes against the taboo subject of test results, reminding her of the secret she must protect: her Divergence. This moment reinforces her isolation and the constant pressure of hiding her true identity, even among friends.

The chapter closes with Tris's unease about the upcoming stage one rankings, which will determine her standing in initiation. Her competitive drive clashes with her doubts,

especially as Dauntless-born initiates pose a threat to her position. The juxtaposition of Al's vulnerability, the strained friendship, and the looming rankings creates a sense of impending tension. Tris's introspection—weighing her actions against her father's ideals—hints at her moral growth, even as she navigates the cutthroat world of Dauntless initiation.

