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FREE FOUR

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DIVERGENT
STORY

Free Four:
Tobias Tells the Story
Divergent 1.1

By Veronica Roth

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A never-before-seen piece from #1 New York Times bestselling author Veronica Roth:
a pivotal scene from DIVERGENT told from Four's point of view.

Free Four:

Tobias Tells the Story

I wouldn't have volunteered to train the initiates if not for the smell of the training room—the scent of dust and sweat and sharpened metal. This was the first place I ever felt strong. Every time I breathe this air I feel it again.

At one end of the room is a slab of wood with a target painted on it. Against one wall is a table covered with throwing knives—ugly metal instruments with a hole at one end, perfect for inexperienced initiates. Lined up across from me are the faction transfers, who still bear, in one way or another, the marks of their old factions: the straight-backed Candor, the steady-eyed Erudite, and the Stiff, leaning into her toes so she's ready to move.

"Tomorrow will be the last day of stage one," Eric says.

He doesn't look at me. I hurt his pride yesterday, and not just during capture the flag—Max pulled me aside at breakfast to ask how the initiates were doing, as if Eric was not the one in charge. Eric was sitting at the table next to mine at the time, scowling into his bran muffin.

"You will resume fighting then," Eric continues. "Today, you'll be learning how to aim. Everyone pick up three knives, and pay attention while Four demonstrates the correct technique for throwing them." His eyes fall somewhere north of mine, like he is standing above me. I straighten up. I hate when he treats me like his lackey, like I didn't knock out one of his teeth during our own initiation.

"Now!"

They scramble for knives like factionless kids over a spare piece of bread, too desperate. All except her, with her deliberate movements, her blond head slipping between the shoulders of taller initiates. She doesn't try to look comfortable with the blades balancing on her palms, and that is what I like about her, that she knows these weapons are unnatural yet she finds a way to wield them.

Eric walks toward me, and I back away by instinct. I try not to be afraid of him, but I know how smart he is and that if I'm not careful he'll notice that I keep staring at her, and that will be my undoing. I turn toward the target, a knife in my right hand.

I requested that the knife-throwing be taken from the training curriculum

this year, because it serves no actual purpose other than fueling the Dauntless bravado. No one here will ever use it except to impress someone, the way I will impress them now. Eric would say that dazzling people can be useful, which is why he denied my request, but it's everything I hate about Dauntless.

I hold the knife by its blade so the balance is right. My initiation instructor, Amar, saw that I had a busy mind, so he taught me to tie my movements to my breaths. I inhale, and stare at the target's center. I exhale, and throw. The knife hits the target. I hear a few of the initiates draw breath at the same time.

I find a rhythm in it: inhale and pass the next knife to my right hand, exhale and turn it with my fingertips, inhale and watch the target, exhale and throw. Everything goes dark around the center of that board. The other factions call us brutish, as if we don't use our minds, but that is all I do here.

Eric's voice breaks my daze. "Line up!"

I leave the knives in the board to remind the initiates of what is possible, and stand against the side wall. Amar was also the one who gave me my name, back in the days when the first thing initiates did upon arriving in the Dauntless compound was go through our fear landscapes. He was the sort of person who made a nickname stick, so likable that everyone imitated him.

He's dead now, but sometimes, in this room, I can still hear him scolding me for holding my breath.

She doesn't hold her breath. That's good—one less bad habit to break. But she has a clumsy arm, awkward as a chicken leg.

Knives are flying but, most of the time, not spinning. Even Edward hasn't figured it out, though he's usually the quickest, his eyes alive with that Erudite knowledge-craving. "I think the Stiff's taken too many hits to the head!" Peter says. "Hey, Stiff! Remember what a

knife
is?"

I don't usually hate people, but I hate Peter. I hate that he tries to shrink people, the same way Eric does.

Tris doesn't answer, just picks up a knife and throws, still with that awkward arm, but it works—I hear metalslam against board, and I smile.

"Hey, Peter," Tris says. "Remember what a target is?"

I watch each of them, trying not to catch Eric's eye as he paces like a caged animal behind them. I have to admit that Christina is good—though I don't like giving credit to Candor smart-mouths—and so is Peter—though I don't like giving credit to future psychopaths. Al, however, is just a walking, talking

sledgehammer, all power and no finesse.

It's a shame Eric also notices. "How slow are you, Candor? Do you need glasses? Should I move the target closer to you?" he says, his voice strained.

Al the Sledgehammer has unexpectedly soft insides. The taunting pierces them. When he throws again, the knife sails into a wall.

"What was that, initiate?" Eric says.

"It—it slipped."

"Well, I think you should go get it."

The initiates stop throwing.

"Did I tell you to stop?" Eric says, his pierced eyebrows raised.

This is not good.

"Go get it?" says Al. "But everyone's still throwing."

"And?"

"And I don't want to get hit."

"I think you can trust your fellow initiates to aim better than you. Go get your knife."

"No."

The Sledgehammer strikes again, I think. The response is stubborn but there is no strategy in it. Still, it takes more bravery for Al to say no than for Eric to force him to get a knife to the back of the head, which is something Eric will never understand.

"Why not? Are you afraid?"

"Of getting stabbed by an airborne knife?" says Al. "Yes, I am!"

My body gets heavy as Eric raises his voice. "Everyone stop!"

The first time I met Eric he wore blue and his hair was parted down the side. He was trembling as he approached Amar to receive the injection of fear-landscape serum in to his neck. During his fear landscape, he never moved an inch; he just stood still, screaming into clenched teeth, and somehow maneuvered his heartbeat down to an acceptable level using his breath. I didn't know it was possible to conquer fear in your body before you did it in your mind. That was when I knew I should be wary of him.

"Clear out of the ring," Eric says. Then, to Al: "All except you. Stand in front of the target."

Al, gulping, lumbers over to the target. I pull away from the wall. I know what Eric will do. And it will probably end with a lost eye or a pierced throat; with horror, as every fight I've witnessed has, each one driving me further and further from the faction I chose as a haven. Without looking at me, Eric says,

“Hey, Four. Give me a hand here, huh?”

Part of me feels relief. At least I know that if I am throwing the knives instead of Eric, Al is less likely to get injured. But I also can't be this cruel, and I can't be the one who does Eric's dirty work.

I try to act casual, scratching my eyebrow with a knifepoint, but I don't feel casual. I feel like someone is pressing me into a mold that does not fit my body, forcing me into the wrong shape.

Eric says, “You're going to stand there as he throws those knives until you learn not to flinch.”

My chest feels tight. I want to save Al, but the more I defy Eric, the more determined he will be to put me in my place. I decide to pretend that I am bored by the whole thing.

“Is this really necessary?”

“I have the authority here, remember?” Eric says. “Here, and everywhere else.”

I can feel blood creeping into my face as I stare at him, and he stares back at me. Max asked me to be a faction leader and I should have said yes; I would have, if I had known that I would prevent things like this, things like dangling initiates over the chasm and forcing them to beat each other senseless.

I realize that I have been squeezing the knives so tightly that the handles have left impressions in my palms. I have to do what Eric says. My only other choice is leaving the room, and if I leave, Eric will throw the knives himself, which I can't allow. I turn toward Al.

And then she says—I know it's her because her voice is low, for a girl's, and careful—“Stop it.”

I don't want Eric to turn on her instead. I glare at her as if that will make her think twice. I know it won't. I'm not stupid.

“Any idiot can stand in front of a target,” Tris says. “It doesn't prove anything except that you're bullying him. Which, as I recall, is a sign of cowardice.”

Dauntless brutes—bullies, Lower Level children—that is what we are, beneath the tattoos and the piercings and the dark clothing.

Maybe I am stupid. I have to stop thinking of her this way.

“Then it should be easy for you,” Eric says, pushing his hair back so it curls around his ear. “If you're willing to take his place.”

And then his eyes shift to mine, just for a second. It's like he knows, he

Knows I have a thing for her, so he's going to force me to throw knives at

her. For an instant—no, longer than an instant—I think about throwing a knife at him instead. I could hit him in the arm, or the leg, no harm done...

"There goes your pretty face," Peter says, across the room. "Oh, wait. You don't have one."

I barely register the comment. I am too busy watching her.

She stands with her back to the board. The top of her head skims the bottom of the target center. She tips her chin up and looks at me with that Abnegation stubbornness I know so well. She may have left them, but they are what's making her strong.

I can't tell her it will be okay, not with Eric here, but I can try to make her strong.

"If you flinch, Al takes your place. Understand?" I say.

Eric stands a little too close, tapping his foot on the floor. I have to get this right. I can't throw the knife to the edge of the board, because he knows I can hit the center. But a clumsy throw, an inch in either direction, and I could hurt her.

There goes your pretty face.

But Peter's right, she's not pretty, that word is too small. She is not like the girls I used to stare at, all bend and curve and softness. She is small but strong, and her bright eyes demand attention. Looking at her is like waking up.

I throw the knife, keeping my eyes on hers. It sticks in the board near her cheek. My hands shake with relief. Her eyes close, so I know I need to remind her again of her selflessness.

"You about done, Stiff?" I say.

Stiff. That's why you're strong, get it?

She looks angry. "No."

Why on earth would she get it? She can't read minds, for God's sake.

"Eyes open, then," I say, tapping the skin between my eyebrows. I don't really need her eyes to be on mine, but I feel better when they are. I breathe the dust-sweat-metal smell and pass a knife from my left hand to my right. Eric inches closer.

My view of the room narrows around the part in her hair, and I throw with my exhale.

I hear Eric behind me. "Hmm" is all he says.

"Come on, Stiff," I say. "Let someone else stand there and take it."

"Shut up, Four!" she says, and I want to yell back that I'm as frustrated as she is, with an Erudite vulture analyzing my every move, searching for my weak points so he can hit them as hard as he can.

I hear that “hmm” again and I’m not sure if it’s Eric or my imagination, but I know I have to convince him that she’s just another initiate to me, and I have to do it now. I breathe deep, and make a quick decision, staring at the tip of her ear, the quick-healing cartilage.

The fear does not exist. My beating heart, tight chest, and sweating palms do not exist.

I throw the knife and look away when she winces, too relieved to feel bad for hurting her. I did it.

“I would love to stay and see if the rest of you are as daring as she is, but I think that’s enough for today,” says Eric. To me, he mutters, “Well. That should scare them,huh.”

I think—I hope—that means he’s not suspicious of me any more.

He touches her shoulder, and gives her a metal-framed smile. “I should keep my eye on you.”

I watch blood trickle down her ear and onto her neck and feel sick.

The room empties, the door closes, and I wait until the footsteps disappear before starting toward her.

“Is your—” I start to reach for the side of her head.

She glares. “You did that on purpose!”

“Yes, I did,” I say. “And you should thank me for helping you—” I want to explain about Eric and how badly he wants to hurt me and everyone I even remotely care for, or about how I know where her strength comes from and wanted to remind her, but she doesn’t give me a chance.“

Thank you? You almost stabbed my ear, and you spent the entire time taunting me. Why should I thank you?”

Taunting? I scowl at her.

“You know, I’m getting a little tired of waiting for you to catch on!” I say.

“Catch on? Catch on to what? That you wanted to prove to Eric how tough you are? That you’re sadistic, just like he is?”

The accusation makes me feel cold. She thinks I’m like Eric? She thinks I want to

Impress him?

“I am not sadistic.” I lean closer to her and suddenly I feel nervous, like something is prickling in my chest. “If I wanted to hurt you, don’t you think I would have already?”

She’s close enough to touch, but if she thinks I’m like Eric, that will never happen.

Of course she thinks I'm like Eric. I just threw knives at her head. I screwed it all up. Permanently.

I have to get out. I cross the room and, at the last second before I slam the door, shove the point of my knife into the table.

I hear her frustrated scream from around the corner, and I stop, sinking into a crouch with my back to the wall. Before she got here everything had stalled inside me, and every morning I was just moving toward nighttime. I'd thought about leaving—I'd decided to leave, to be factionless, after this class of initiates was done. But then she was here and she was just like me, putting aside her gray clothes but not really putting them aside, never really putting them aside because she knows the secret, that they are the strongest armor we can wear.

And now she hates me and I can't even leave Dauntless to join the factionless, like I was going to, because Eric's eye is on her like it was on Amar last year, right before he turned up dead on the pavement near the railroad tracks. All the Divergent end up dead except me, because of my fluke aptitude test result, and if Eric is watching her, she's probably one, too.

My thoughts skip back to the night before, how touching her sent warmth into my hand and through the rest of me, though I was frozen with fear. I press my hands to my head, press the memory away.

I can't leave now. I like her too much. There, I said it. But I won't say it again.