

Rebellion

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REBELLION

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CHAPTER ONE

Sacrifices must be made for the greater good.

—CITIZEN'S SOCIAL CODE, VOLUME VI

Evie

My life is just about perfect.

These are the words Mother has permanently etched into my memory, as if it's nothing more than another of the stone plaques placed around the city bearing her Motherisms.

There are times I actually believe it.

But it's not true.

At least not yet.

I've been beaten down. Chased away. Used as a pawn in Mother's sadistic games. My own people see me as a monster and have turned against me. Even my memories have been stolen from me and tampered with or just plain damaged beyond repair.

However, although I'm metaphorically crippled, I've not been broken.

For the past month I've been watching. Waiting. Planning.

Today's the day it's all going to come together. The day we remove Mother from office and put her where she belongs. The Surface.

Luckily, even as messed up as my memories are, the one thing Mother never fiddled with was my knowledge of the city. It's a simple matter to walk through Sector Two from the Residential Sector. I stride right past the Guard at the tunnel to the Palace Wing. My heart skips a beat when he looks up. But like everyone else, he quickly returns his attention to the podium, and I breathe a bit easier.

One step down, and so far everything is going according to plan. That's probably a problem.

From what Father told me and my own warped memories, I know Mother will be holding court during what I'd called Request Day once upon a time. The Enforcer currently in the room will be rotated out in a few minutes, and thanks to Father's interference there will be no one to take her place.

No one but me, that is.

When Father first brought me an Enforcer's uniform, I'd been convinced I wouldn't be able to pull it off. Even with my memories back, it's been so long—I was only ten when I was relieved of duty. The next six years were devoted to being groomed to become the next leader of Elysium. The Daughter of the People. And I'd spent those years being as afraid of the Enforcers as every other Citizen.

But the minute I pulled the cloak around me, everything about me changed. My mind easily adapted. It terrifies me how my brain works now. Gauging everyone and everything and its threat level.

But now, face-to-face with the doors to the Enforcer entrance to the request room, a few doubts slip in. Will Mother see who I really am? Surely she will. Who knows me better than the woman who watched my training personally and then raised me as her own when I “failed” in my Enforcer directive? Even if my mind has changed, my appearance has not.

But that doesn’t mean she pays attention to the girls she orders to kill for her. Hopefully, she won’t even glance at me.

I push the uncertainty away. I have to make this work. There’s no room for failure. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, then blow it out, slow and measured. When I open my eyes again, I’ve forced all my emotions down. I’m not playing an Enforcer now. I am one.

I push open the doors and step into the large room. A line has already formed inside and extends out the main door. The Citizens step away from me as I pass, avoiding my grazing glance. But then I turn my attention toward the reason I’m here.

I freeze when I see her.

Mother.

A dose of terror makes it impossible to move for a second, and I’m bombarded with a barrage of memories. None of them are nice. I have to clamp down on the emotions they cause.

Mother glances up, and for a second that stretches into eternity I'm sure my cover's blown. But then she turns away again, dismissing me to resume her talks with the couple in front of her.

I force myself to move, slowly making my way around the perimeter of the room, as an Enforcer would. Using the shadows as my cover until I'm standing in the corner—still in the shadows—practically behind Mother.

I survey my surroundings. My position is fairly ideal. It's exactly where an Enforcer would be to make sure Mother is safe from any potentially brave but foolhardy Citizens who think they can take Mother down. I also have a view of all the doors and can see anyone who leaves or enters. The corner is to my back, so no one can sneak up behind me, not even a real Enforcer, should Father be wrong and I'm not alone as an Enforcer in the room today. It's not that I don't have faith in Father, but Mother is far from foolish. She's never trusted anyone but herself, and I can't imagine she'd put enough confidence in Father to tell him the complete truth about anything.

Exactly as I'm thinking that, I look into the corner opposite of where I'm standing and meet the eyes of an Enforcer. A real one. My heart stops as we stare at each other. I'm not sure what to do. She isn't supposed to be here, but she is. And obviously she knows who I am.

One corner of her mouth slides up into a half-smile that chills the blood in my veins. I don't know what that expression means. Enforcers don't show emotion. It's the biggest

thing drilled/brainwashed into us. But then something catches my eye and I glance down at the only skin an Enforcer can show—the half circle right under her collarbones. She's wearing a necklace. I reach for my own and worry the pendant between my thumb and first finger. Father told me we had an insider. He wouldn't tell me who it was, just that I'd recognize her when I saw her. He couldn't have meant an Enforcer, could he? If he had an Enforcer on his side, why would he need me?

I meet her eyes again, my mind shouting questions at her from where I stand. She glances at my hand and her smile grows a fraction before she nods and backs into the dark, where I can't see her or where she goes. *If* she goes anywhere.

Warning? Or greeting?

I don't start breathing again until I hear the side door open and then close. That *must* have been our insider. But . . . why? And if she wasn't, what . . . ?

I don't even know where to start with the questions. But I haven't seen anyone else that it could be, and I need my team to know I'm in place.

For the next hour, I stand behind Mother, a pistol held tightly in my hand and hidden in the special pockets of my skirt, waiting impatiently while everything sets up. Or, more accurately, while I hope everything is being set up. This next part has to go flawlessly. One tiny mistake could mean failure.

I stand straighter as the last Citizen vacates the room. It's showtime, as Asher would say.

As if on cue, Asher walks in, dragging a struggling Gavin. Even though I knew this was going to happen, my heart lurches. I want to run to him and drag him out of here, but I can't. So I bide my time, as Father follows directly behind him.

Gavin shouts curses at Asher, who keeps a tight hand on his bound arms. He tosses Gavin to the ground at Mother's feet. I can't tell from my angle what her expression is, but she does lean forward.

"What have we here?" The unmistakable sound of glee in her voice makes me want to hit her, but I stay quiet and slip closer like any good Enforcer would do.

"The Surface Dweller." Asher's voice is deep and sans accent. I have to admit I'm impressed he was able to pull it off. We've worked on it for two weeks, but he never really lost the slight twang. "We caught him skulking around the Medical Sector."

Mother steps down off her throne—I don't really know what else to call it; it's too lavish to be simply a chair. She bends down and then grasps Gavin's chin in her hand. He tries to shake loose, but she holds tight.

"I never thought I'd see you again . . . Gavin, isn't it?"

Gavin only glares at her.

Mother claps her hands twice; my cue that she needs me. I should have already moved closer. A real Enforcer would have, but I'd frozen at the sight of Gavin. I brush off the emotions as best I can and step completely out of the shadows now, my head held high as I slowly walk to her and Gavin.

Making sure my arm doesn't shake, I pull the pistol from

my skirt and aim it level at Gavin's head, as if I'm awaiting orders to shoot him. It gives me the uncomfortable reminder of the time in Sector Three when I did the same thing—when my Conditioned programming took over, and I had every intention of actually killing him. When he glances at me out of the corner of his eye and visibly swallows before turning a glare at Mother again, I wonder if he had the same thought.

“What brings you back here, Surface Dweller? Have you brought my traitorous daughter with you?” There's a slight sound of a laugh in her voice, as if this is just some great joke to her. It sends my instincts humming.

Gavin spits at her.

She jumps back and wrinkles her nose. “Well, I see she hasn't been able to teach you any manners. Pity.” She turns to Asher. “How were you able to capture him? Why did you not alert an Enforcer?”

Asher averts his gaze. “He seemed quite desperate. He was muttering something about someone named Evie and infections. It took me only a moment to realize he was the Surface Dweller who kidnapped the Daughter. Forgive me, Mother, but I thought time was of the essence and I did not want him to get away again. I had hoped to find an Enforcer along the way.”

Mother jerks her gaze back to Gavin. “Is this true, Surface Dweller?” He doesn't answer, but she nods. “I think it is. Why else would you risk another trip here, knowing what fate awaited you? Did you bring Evelyn with you?” He still doesn't speak and she pushes his head away in disgust. “Just the same

as before. But this time, there is no one weak enough to help you escape. You've sealed your own death sentence." She looks to Asher. The way she studies him has me wishing I'd insisted he cut his hair—and the blue streak completely out—instead of just dyeing it. I'm certain she sees a shadow of the blue tint. But then she waves him away. "You may go." She turns to Father. "Escort him from the Palace Wing and then make sure he's fairly compensated for his . . . bravery."

My blood freezes at her tone. She's going to order me to kill Gavin. It's what we've been expecting. It's also the moment I've been dreading. The true test to see if the other side of myself—the Conditioned Enforcer part of me—is wiped out, or at least destroyed enough that I can refuse a direct order.

Father's convinced that this won't even be an issue for me. I've been able to resist her orders before. And the hard reset caused by leaving Elysium in the first place should have erased enough of the old programming.

She glances over at me and I fight the urge to look down. An Enforcer wouldn't. I keep my eyes focused on Gavin.

She stares at me so long, I start to worry she knows who I am. If anyone here knew who I was, it would be her. It's why I've kept my distance and made sure the hood, and its shadow, covered my face. But she's my adoptive mom, and a mother always knows her child.

This was a mistake. I should have listened to Asher and Gavin, not Father. I should have taken more time to hatch a better plan. One that wasn't so bold and risky.

But then she surprises me by saying, "Take him to the

Detainment Center. This time I'm going to get answers from him, whether or not he wants to give them to me." She waves me toward him.

Trying not to show my relief that the plan is working, I pocket the gun, then reach down and yank Gavin to his feet. He fights me as I drag him from the room. I'm slightly worried that I'm hurting him as he struggles against me. But I can't do anything less or Mother will suspect something. We're lucky she hasn't already. But, as expected and hoped for, Mother follows as I drag him across the marble floors of the Palace Wing and then over to the concrete of Sector Two and the Detainment Center.

So far everything has gone as planned, and that worries me. Nothing ever goes as planned. There's always bound to be mistakes. But this is going so smoothly I *know* something's wrong.

It doesn't take long to figure it out. My stomach flips when we step into the Detainment Center.

There's no one here. There's supposed to be members of the Underground waiting to help us subdue Mother and remove her from Elysium. There's supposed to be backup.

For a moment I think something must have changed in the plans, but Gavin stiffens when he sees the empty room. Even from my less than ideal vantage point as I drag him to the cell door, I can see his eyes darting all over the room as if he's expecting the people that are supposed to be here to jump out of some hidden crevice.

I don't know exactly what to do, so I keep walking, then

turn at the glass door of the cell, as if waiting for someone to open it. That's when I notice that Mother has stopped at the door to the Detainment Center. She's smiling at me.

Not Gavin.

Me!

My stomach doesn't just sink; it drops.

She knew the entire time and we fell into her trap like rats.

At least I can be grateful that Asher and Father got away. With only Gavin to protect from Mother, I can do this. I might have to kill her to do it, but if it's a choice between her and Gavin, I don't even have to think about it.

She starts clapping. "Well done, Evelyn. I was beginning to worry that you weren't going to pass."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Gavin demands. His entire posture has changed from the defiant one he'd had before, to angry and protective as he steps a little in front of me. But when his hand takes mine, it trembles a little and I know he's just as afraid as I am.

Mother scoffs. "You didn't think I'd let my daughter just walk out of Elysium, did you?"

"I'm *not* your daughter."

"Of course you are." She sighs. "I raised you. Loved you."

"What you did wasn't love."

"You'll see it my way soon." She purses her lips. "But now we have a problem. You brought *two* Surface Dwellers back with you. That wasn't part of the plan. We only need one."

Mother steps to the side and out of the doorway, revealing

a group of people standing behind her. Two Enforcers rush into the room. One levels a pistol at Gavin, but before I can protect him, my body erupts with a million tiny fires. My screams echo throughout the tiny room as I collapse into a mass of writhing muscles on the hard concrete floor.

I know exactly what's happening; I've felt it before. Every time Dr. Friar brainwashed me with some new memory. Or when Mother wanted to punish me for some wrongdoing—intentional or not. But it had always followed an injection of the nanite serum. I don't understand how it's happening now. My ears ring from my screams and even though my vision tunnels, I can see Gavin struggling to get to me, until an Enforcer hits him over the head with the butt of her gun and he joins me on the floor.

Then, just as my vision almost completely fades, the pain stops as suddenly as it began.

Every single muscle in my body is pulled taut. To even think about moving is a fresh agony, and I'm still whimpering from the memory of the pain, but at least the raging inferno in my body has been doused. Gavin lies on the floor next to me, a trickle of blood seeping from the cut the Enforcer gave him. He seems to be out cold. I try to push myself up to at least crawl to him, but my arms can't even handle that little amount of pressure and I collapse onto the ground again.

The sound of more tussling comes from the doorway and I glance over in horror to see Asher struggling with another Enforcer. The one who saw me in the Palace Wing.

That's why she smiled. Why she let me know she was there. She'd known the whole time. And apparently so did Mother.

Mother crouches down next to me. "I wish you wouldn't have done that, Evelyn. You were doing so well. I hoped not to have to use your nanos like that again, but it's for your own good." She pats my cheek. I have the quick thought that if I could move, I'd rip her arm from her body. She turns to the Enforcer looking down at Gavin. "Pick him up." Once the Enforcer does, Mother smiles at me. "It's too bad he hasn't learned how to control his emotions better. I believe he would have made an acceptable match for you."

I don't really pay attention to what she's saying. I'm starting to get the feeling back in my muscles, but I don't move. I don't want to waste the energy I have. I need it to get to my pistol. I have to get Asher and Gavin out of here.

She turns to Asher. "This one, though." She smiles at him. "He reminds me of Timothy." She looks down at me. "Do you remember him, dear?"

I glare at her. There are no words to describe the amount of hate I feel for her in this instant. "I remember you had him killed so you could Couple me with that *Guard*."

"Ah, yes. A mistake on my part. I should have just let you Couple with Timothy. The Guard was an unfortunate failure and had to be put down after he attacked one of my Enforcers."

"Put down? Like a dog?" Asher asks. The incredulous tone to his voice makes me want to laugh. Of course she killed him, then dismissed him like he was some sick animal she was putting out of its misery.

All of her experiments with the Guards were a failure then. How can someone be so callous? “How can you be like this? How can people be nothing more than toys to you that you just throw away when you break them?” My voice cracks just thinking about how many lives she’s destroyed.

“They were broken to begin with. I’m trying to fix them.” She shrugs. “You should be grateful.”

The feeling is almost completely back in my legs. If I can just move them without her seeing me, I could knock out the Enforcer next to me and then grab Mother. If I held her hostage, she’d *have* to let Asher go. Other people may be disposable, but *she* isn’t.

“Bitch,” Asher spits at her.

She immediately stands and walks toward Asher, giving me the opportunity to make my move. I jump up and shove the Enforcer leaning over Gavin aside, wincing when she hits the wall and crumples to the floor.

Oops, I think, but wrench the gun from her hand and swing around to grab Mother. She’d make a better hostage anyway. Even though I hold the gun against her temple, Mother laughs.

“You can’t do it.” Her voice sounds almost like she’s singing it. “You can’t kill me. I’m Mother.”

I merely lift an eyebrow at the other Enforcer and cock the gun. “Wanna try me?” Mother stops laughing. “Let Asher go.”

The Enforcer glances at Mother, then at me. Just before she releases him, something crosses her eyes. The look she gives me next is almost an apology as she shoves Asher at me. He

knocks into me so hard I fall, losing my grip on Mother. I hear the sound of a gunshot, just milliseconds before I hit the ground. My head bounces off the concrete, and Asher falls on top of me, still as death.