



She spoke to him before the world fell apart.

*Hey, are you still asleep?*

Thomas shifted in his bed, felt a darkness around him like air turned solid, pressing in. At first he panicked; his eyes snapped open as he imagined himself back in the Box – that horrible cube of cold metal that had delivered him to the Glade and the Maze. But there was a faint light, and lumps of dim shadow gradually emerged throughout the huge room. Bunk beds. Dressers. The soft breaths and gurgly snores of boys deep in slumber.

Relief filled him. He was safe now, rescued and delivered to this dormitory. No more worries. No more Grievors. No more death.

*Tom?*

A voice in his head. A girl's. Not audible, not visible. But he heard it all the same, though he could never have explained to anyone how it worked.

Exhaling a deep breath, he relaxed into his pillow, his

razor-edged nerves settling down from that fleeting moment of terror. He spoke back, forming the words with his thoughts.

*Teresa? What time is it?*

*No idea, she replied. But I can't sleep. I probably dozed for an hour or so. Maybe more. I was hoping you were awake to keep me company.*

Thomas tried not to smile. Even though she wouldn't be able to see it, it would be embarrassing all the same. *Didn't give me much choice in the matter, did you? Kind of hard to sleep when someone's talking directly into your skull.*

*Boo hoo. Go back to bed, then.*

*No. I'm good.* He stared at the bottom of the bunk above him – featureless and darkly fuzzy in the shadow – where Minho was currently breathing like a guy with ungodly amounts of phlegm lodged in his throat. *What've you been thinking about?*

*What do you think?* Somehow she projected a jab of cynicism into the words. *I keep seeing Grievors. Their disgusting skin and blubber bodies, all those metal arms and spikes. It was way too close for comfort, Tom. How're we gonna get something like that out of our heads?*

Thomas knew what he thought. Those images would never leave – the Gladers would be haunted by the horrible things that had happened in the Maze for the rest of their lives. He figured that most if not all of them would have major psychological problems. Maybe even go completely nutso.

And above it all, he had one image burned into his memories as strongly as a branded mark from a searing hot iron. His friend Chuck, stabbed in the chest, bleeding, dying as Thomas held him.

Thomas knew he would *never* forget that. But what he said to Teresa was: *It'll go away. Just takes a little time, that's all.*

*You're so full of it, she said.*

*I know.* How ridiculous was it that he loved hearing her say

something like that to him? That her sarcasm meant things were going to be okay? *You're an idiot*, he told himself, then hoped she didn't hear that thought.

*I hate it that they separated me from you guys*, she said.

Thomas understood why they had, though. She was the only girl and the rest of the Gladers were teenage boys – a bunch of shanks they didn't trust yet. *Guess they were protecting you.*

*Yeah. I guess.* Melancholy seeped into his brain with her words, stuck to them like syrup. *But it sucks being alone after everything we went through.*

*Where'd they take you, anyway?* She sounded so sad that he almost wanted to get up and look for her, but he knew better.

*Just on the other side of that big common room where we ate last night. It's a small room with a few bunks. I'm pretty sure they locked the door when they left.*

*See, told ya they wanted to protect you.* Then he quickly added, *Not that you need protecting. I'd put my money on you against at least half these shanks.*

*Only half?*

*Okay, three-quarters. Including me.*

A long stretch of silence followed, though somehow Thomas could still sense her presence. He *felt* her. It was almost like how, even though he couldn't see Minho, he knew his friend lay only a few feet above him. And it wasn't just the snoring. When someone is close by, you just know it.

Despite all the memories of the last few weeks, Thomas was surprisingly calm, and soon sleep overpowered him once more. Darkness settled on his world, but she was there, next to him in so many ways. Almost . . . touching.

He had no concept of time passing while in that state. Half asleep, half enjoying her presence and the thought that they'd been rescued from that horrible place. That they were safe, that he and Teresa could get to know each other all over again. That life could be good.

Blissful sleep. Hazy darkness. Warmth. A physical glow. Almost floating.

The world seemed to fade away. All became numb and sweet. And the darkness, somehow comforting. He slipped into a dream.

*He's very young. Four, maybe? Five? Lying in a bed with blankets pulled to his chin.*

*A woman sits next to him, her hands folded in her lap. She has long brown hair, a face just beginning to show signs of age. Her eyes are sad. He knows this even though she's trying very hard to hide it with a smile.*

*He wants to say something, ask her a question. But he can't. He's not really here. Just witnessing it all from a place he doesn't quite understand. She begins to talk, a sound so simultaneously sweet and angry it disturbs him.*

*"I don't know why they chose you, but I do know this. You're special somehow. Never forget that. And never forget how much" – her voice cracks and tears run down her face – "never forget how much I love you."*

*The boy replies, but it's not really Thomas speaking. Even though it is him. None of it makes sense. "Are you gonna be crazy like all those people on TV, Mummy? Like . . . Daddy?"*

*The woman reaches out and runs her fingers through his hair. Woman? No, he can't call her that. This is his mother. His . . . mummy.*

*"Don't you worry about that, sweetie," she says. "You won't be here to see it."*

*Her smile has gone away.*

Too fast the dream faded into blackness, leaving Thomas in a void with nothing but his thoughts. Had he seen another memory crawl up from the depths of his amnesia? Had he really seen his mum? There'd been something about his dad being crazy. The ache inside Thomas was deep and gnawing,

and he tried to sink further into oblivion.

Later – how much later he had no idea – Teresa spoke to him again.

*Tom, something's wrong.*