

# THE CALLING

FEAR IS A POWERFUL SEDATIVE FOR REBELLION

RACHELLE DEKKER

## PRAISE FOR *THE CHOOSING*

“The strong female heroine will appeal to teen readers, and adults and teens alike may also enjoy the themes of corruption and religion, absolute human power, and government as God. . . . Dekker’s debut is worth choosing.”

*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

“The story vacillates between the sweetness of a tender coming-of-age romance and moments that almost resemble a Dean Koontz thriller. . . . At times frightening but often beautiful, this first volume of Carrington’s story will leave readers eager for the next book of this new series.”

**SERENA CHASE**, *USA Today*

“This is an amazing debut novel full of heart, drama, and complex believable characters . . . with a detailed plot, and gripping truths that pierced my heart.”

**THE BOOK CLUB NETWORK INC.**

“A swiftly moving plot puts readers in the center of the action, and the well-described setting adds to the experience. Deeper themes of value and worth will appeal to both young adult and adult readers.”

*ROMANTIC TIMES*

“Whatever expectations you have of debut author Rachelle Dekker, go ahead and put them aside. Rachelle, daughter of bestselling author Ted Dekker, is carving out a space of her

own. Her debut novel, *The Choosing*, is a rich statement about the author's future and her impact on Christian fiction."

**FAMILY FICTION**

"Ripe for discussion, [*The Choosing*] may inspire some readers to open up about the social pressures that they feel both in and out of their faith community. Expect it to appeal to dystopian fans of all ages."

**FOREWORD REVIEWS**

"Readers will find Dekker's storyline somewhat akin to her father's works in terms of action, adventure, and unpredictability. *The Choosing*, though, explores more the inner workings of her characters and how they feel about their lot in life. I look forward to more dystopian titles from Dekker in the near future."

**BOOKREPORTER.COM**

"*The Choosing* is an inspiring tale that reaches deep into the hearts of men and women, showing both the love and the darkness that can lurk within."

**FRESH FICTION**

"Marrying the themes of the popular Kiera Cass Selection novels with the action danger of *The Hunger Games*, Dekker asserts a strong imaginative voice that had me gulping down sentences and events as quickly as they were relayed on [the] page."

**NOVEL CROSSING**

“This book is part adventure, part romance, part mystery, and it works. The writing is wonderful. It flows in such a way that it keeps the reader turning page after page . . . more than likely long into the night to find out what happens!”

**RADIANT LIT**

“In her stunning debut novel, Rachelle Dekker plunges readers into a unique yet familiar-feeling dystopian society, where one girl’s longing for acceptance, identity, and purpose becomes a mind-bending, pulse-pounding journey that’ll [leave] you breathless and reeling. A superb story!”

**JOSH OLDS**, *LifelsStory.com*

“A stunning debut, masterfully written and filled with deep questions of the spirit; I could not put it down.”

**TOSCA LEE**, *New York Times* bestselling author

“A powerful tale for anyone who has ever felt worthless, or feared that their true value is an award they’ll never be able to earn.”

**ERIN HEALY**, author of *Motherless*

“A true page-turner! Compelling and intriguing, *The Choosing* is a fantastic debut that will have you glued to the pages all the way to the climactic ending!”

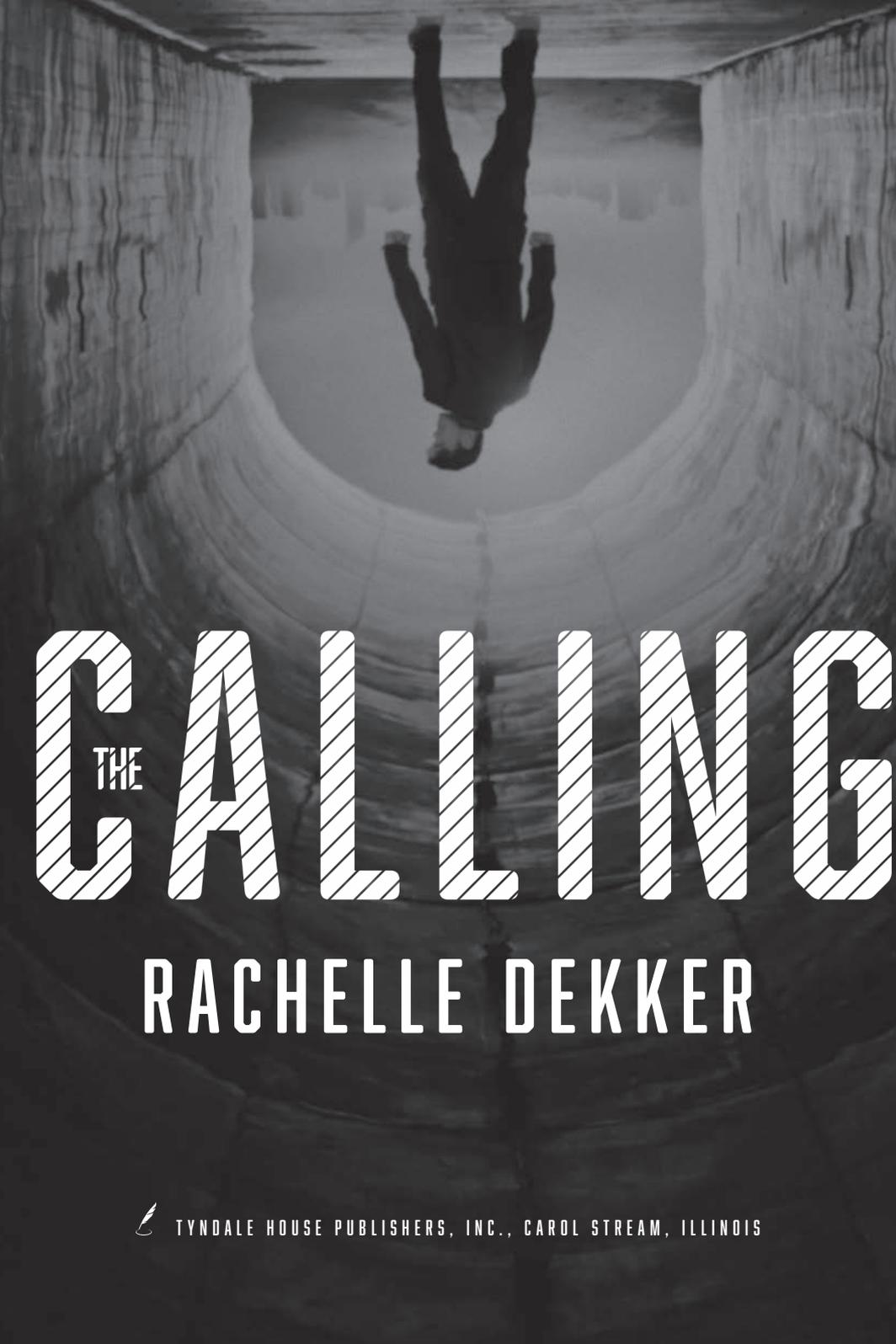
**SUSAN MAY WARREN**, bestselling, Christy Award–winning author



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RACHELLE DEKKER



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*The Calling*

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Designed by Dean H. Renninger

*The Calling* is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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## PROLOGUE

Damien Gold sat down beside Roth Reynard, better known as the Scientist, on the hard wooden bench. The sun was high, the wind soft, and the garden around them still. Things were already in motion and change was upon them all.

The Scientist didn't glance over as Damien sat. He kept his eyes forward, squinting through the sun's rays and clearly lost in his own thoughts. They had these meetings sometimes, out here in the Capitol gardens, because the Scientist enjoyed the sun from time to time, and the garden area itself provided isolation.

"Things have begun," the Scientist said.

"Yes, the compound is fully operational," Damien said.

"Results should happen quickly then?"

"Ideally."

"And the rebels?"

"Aaron's movements are impossible to—" Damien started.

## THE CALLING

“I have told you before, Aaron is not our primary concern. Remko Brant is the one who steers that ship.”

“I disagree; Aaron holds the power.”

“Aaron is a delusional radical. But Remko possesses training and wit. He has managed to break through our security systems on numerous occasions.”

“On Aaron’s authority, though.”

“Don’t be a fool. If we break Remko, we break their will. Remko is the key.”

Damien tried to hide his frustration at the man’s clear disregard for Damien’s insight. But now was not the time to engage in discourse. With so much happening, they needed to be on the same side.

“We are working on an inside man, as you suggested,” Damien said.

“Good. How close are we?”

“Close.”

“Then the plan to change the world is functioning as we predicted.”

Damien smiled and nodded. “You had doubts?”

“I’m a scientist. I always doubt until evidence is laid before me.”

“Don’t worry; you’ll have all the evidence you need soon.”

The Scientist turned to Damien and they shared a knowing look before Damien stood and left.

**L** Remko sensed panic from the group behind him. It filled the air around his head and pressed against his skull. They were running out of time. He pushed away the pocket of dread threatening to knock his legs from under him. They couldn't afford to run out of time.

Carrington was on his heels, moving quickly as they maneuvered through the underground tunnel. Sam and his younger sister, Kate, followed alongside Wire, all of their faces focused yet terrified. They all knew time was against them, and they all knew what that meant.

Remko could hear Carrington's fear screaming at him, begging him to move faster, to be better, to save them. He was supposed to keep them alive, to lead them against the Authority, to be their hero, their protector. He was failing.

It had been the same song and dance for the last several months. A ticking clock they were fighting against. Each of them hoping for a pause in its constant rhythm so they could stand still and breathe. Each of them desperately needing a moment in which it didn't feel like the world was crushing them from above, where they came out on top, victorious for once. Remko would settle for just a moment.

A large, round steel grate overhead occupied the

## THE CALLING

majority of the tunnel's top surface. It operated on a mechanical lock system, like most of the exits within the tunnels. Wire easily disabled the lock using the handheld device that never left his side. He called the device Roxy, something Kate mocked him for constantly, which usually inspired a witty response, and the two of them would fill the space with banter. No one said anything today. Their fear kept them quiet and made the silence deafening.

Sam stepped past Remko, the top of his six-foot-four-inch frame brushing the tunnel's ceiling, and yanked the grate open with a labored pull. They ascended one at a time, Sam leading to help pull the others up and Remko coming through last. Once aboveground, the group awaited Remko's lead. They were now at the end of a long alley deep within the Authority City. The walls of the surrounding buildings towered into the sky above. Dark clouds covered the sun and cast a shadow across the city. The smell of rain hung in the air, the street before them already soaked from the morning's storm.

The streets should be empty by now. People would have already gone inside for the viewing. It was mandatory that all executions of criminals be watched—a visual reminder of what happened to those who rebelled against the Authority. It didn't matter your age or status; even the youngest in the society were required to participate. Back when Remko had felt pride in being a part of the Authority's CityWatch Guard, he'd never felt comfortable with the idea of mandatory viewing of executions. But

then, he'd only ever experienced one in person: Arianna Carson, eldest daughter of President Ian Carson and loyal follower of Aaron. Her death felt like a lifetime ago, even though only a year and a half had passed.

Now the executions happened monthly. Trials occurred less and less, people sometimes sentenced to death without a single word of defense. All because they followed Aaron, a man Remko increasingly found himself questioning. Many believed he was their saving grace, but Remko couldn't help but wonder if his grand ideas for change were simply the naive ramblings of a madman. All the same, Aaron had called the woman Remko loved out of the city, and the woman had asked Remko to follow, and he had. He would have followed Carrington anywhere. He still would.

She placed her hand on his shoulder, shaking him from his thoughts. There was no time for thinking; they had to move. He caught her eye for a brief moment and her expression made him sick. Yes, there was plenty of worry and fear, but he could see the hope that lay beyond, hope that they could complete their mission, hope that they wouldn't fail, hope in him. Misplaced hope.

Executions were held in the Capitol Building, which stood a couple of blocks to their left and was always surrounded by a heavy CityWatch presence. They had never broken into the Capitol Building before. Usually they were helping people flee the city from their homes or workstations. People Aaron had called to join the Seers in the wreckage of earth that lay miles beyond the city

## THE CALLING

walls. Called to a life that would consist of always looking over their shoulders and wondering how long they could actually survive before they were discovered. Before the Authority rained down terror and vengeance on their group for leading the charge against them. For igniting curiosity and inspiring hope.

Usually Remko and the other Seer scouts spirited people out under the cover of darkness, outwitting and outmaneuvering those chasing them. Like magicians using a curtain to disguise the illusion, pulling the white rabbit out of the hat at precisely the right moment, they employed quick sleights of hand and crafty distractions.

In the beginning it had thrilled Remko. It had thrilled them all—the way Wire broke down the Authority's internal programming at lightning speeds before anyone knew a breach in security had been made; the way Kate slithered into secure locations without detection, moving with speed and strength that seemed impossible for her small frame; the way Sam inflicted fear at just the sight of his stature, the quiver you could see in the guards' expressions when they encountered him. And Remko, calling the shots, directing their perfectly assembled plans. Using the talents of his team to fool and confuse the enemy. It had been a rush. A rush that covered their fear and kept them stable.

Moving through the streets now, that rush was gone, replaced with a sense of shame that this had ever felt thrilling. Shame in believing that at some point they could

actually win the game they were playing, that they could actually pull off the big end trick. But the real illusion was that they could ever be successful. Behind the curtain the Authority was pulling all the strings. The rest of them were still just puppets, convinced for a brief moment that they could be real boys and girls.

Remko clenched his molars and reset his focus. He could see the grand Capitol Building through the clouds ahead. As suspected, the streets were nearly empty, but the team still clung to the dark alleyways and moved like shadows toward their destination.

A loud mechanical grind echoed around them and sent a shiver through the ground beneath them. Remko knew the sound. They all did.

High above, large steel plates were sliding back to reveal plasma screens that stretched fifteen feet across and stood over nine feet in height. There were six main government buildings surrounding the Capitol Building. They stood twice as high as the Capitol, their walls reaching into the clouds, and every one of them had a large screen attached to its front. Screens easily seen throughout the Authority City and even into the outskirts of the Cattle and Farm Lands.

Remko could remember seeing those screens from the CityWatch barracks. They weren't used often back then—Remko could only remember a couple of times from his childhood—but they were being used more frequently of late. The Authority broadcast every execution; even with a

## THE CALLING

plasma screen occupying a wall in each home throughout the city, these screens were still used. It was an extra twist of cruelty, another reminder that the Seers were losing. The revealing of the screens meant Remko's time was up.

He increased his speed and the others followed. The plan was to drop into an old water main that was out of commission and traverse its length under the Capitol Building and up through an unused service entrance that would pop them out on the eastern side of the structure. The execution room was on the second floor. Wire knew the guards' rotation schedules, so maneuvering through the side hallways and up an ancient staircase would be all about timing. From there it would be a combination of software and electrical distractions so that they could slide into the room, obtain the objective, and leave.

Even running through the plan now in his mind, Remko knew the chances of success were less than favorable, but they couldn't just sit and watch one of their own die without trying a rescue.

They reached the street grate that led them back underground. Remko yanked it open and one by one they dropped below. They didn't pause to collect themselves; they didn't have time for that. Sam was up front now, crouching but still moving quickly. Kate and Wire were right behind him, and Carrington was inches ahead of Remko. He tried not to think about what must be going through her head right now. Would she blame him if they failed? Was she already? How many times would he have

to let her down before she stopped believing in him altogether? Could he survive if she did? Like blows from a hammer—*pound, pound, pound*—the questions rocked his stability and threatened his resolve. He swallowed the fear and pressure as they reached the end of the tunnel.

In one swift movement Sam opened the overhead hatch and hauled himself up into the service room from which they would access the building. After a pause to make sure the room was clear, he signaled for the others to follow. Once all were back aboveground, Remko again took the lead. Slowly he approached the main door, twisted the knob, and peered down the narrow corridor that bled out into the main lobby several feet ahead. It was clear. He motioned for the group to move on his count.

Wire glanced down at his Roxy device's screen and softly read off the rotation quadrants where the guards were currently patrolling. This was going to be tight and needed to be precise. They could only be in the main lobby for a couple of counts before they chanced being spotted.

Remko took a deep breath and nodded. They moved in sync, one step after the other. The main lobby was darkened from the gray sky, which they could use to their advantage. Two guards stood several yards away, their backs to Remko as they surveyed the main entrance to the Capitol. According to the rotating schedule, two more guards swept the room every six minutes and were headed back to do so any moment. There was no time to wait for the sweep to be completed; they needed to move now.

## THE CALLING

Another deep breath and Remko started across the lobby, making sure to stay low and quiet. He could feel the others behind him and was grateful he couldn't hear their steps. Their destination was at the end of the room. The back wall was covered with thick streams of red material that billowed to the ground and stretched the entire length of the wall, hiding a second service door that led to a small stairway. Remko glanced over his shoulder and saw the two guards still facing away, unaware of him and the others.

They reached the edge of the hanging material and slowly slipped behind it. The door was only a couple feet beyond and Remko prayed that their movement behind the loose hanging wall coverings wouldn't pull the attention of the guards near the front. He reached the door and softly pulled it open. He let the others move inside first, then followed, closing the door behind him.

Like the room they had come up into from the water main, this hallway was dim and narrow and smelled of mold. It was all wood—the walls, the floor, the low ceiling.

Remko followed as the group moved forward. According to the building plans Wire had accessed, this passageway should lead to a staircase that would escort them to the second floor. From there they could access the HVAC system above the ceiling. They would have to drop down into the execution room; there was no other way to enter without walking right in through the heavily guarded door.

The execution room was set up simply: a square space with two sections. The main and larger part of the room

was a viewing area filled with chairs for those invited to watch the execution, which took place on the other side of a large glass wall. The second part of the room, half the size of the first section, sat behind the glass and held the execution chair and materials. Usually the only people in the second section were the prisoner, the administrator, and two CityWatch guards. This was the part of the room that Remko planned to drop down into.

Once they were above the room, Wire would override the locking system on the single door between the execution chamber and the viewing section of the room, preventing anyone from entering or exiting. Then he'd close the metal plate that slid down over the glass, eliminating the possibility of anyone breaking through the glass or even seeing what was happening beyond it. That would leave the prisoner alone with a single doctor and two guards. Wire planned to cut the power to just the second section of the room if possible, without killing power to the entire floor.

If everything went according to plan, maybe they could actually save the prisoner. The problem was hardly anything ever went according to plan anymore.

They found the stairs and slowly ascended, mindful of limiting the creaking of their steps. At the top another hallway stretched for several more feet and ended at a small ladder that ran up the wall.

Sam reached the ladder first but stepped aside for Kate and Wire. Sam would stay here, as his massive frame wouldn't easily move through the ventilation system above.

## THE CALLING

Carrington was up next and Remko gave Sam a nod before following. Now enclosed in large steel boxes, the four pulled themselves along toward their target. After a couple of turns, they saw the grate that sat above the execution room.

Remko, Carrington, and Wire stayed back a couple of feet as Kate, the smallest of the group, easily scurried toward the grate. She lowered her head to look through the metal strips and survey the room. Remko waited for her to confirm the number of bodies in the room, but when her face lifted, it was marked with confusion.

She dropped her head again and came back up with the same look in her eyes. Her lips parted as if she couldn't find the words and after a moment she spoke. "It's empty."

"Empty?" Carrington said and turned her gaze to Remko. A weight dropped against his chest and he knew what was coming next.

Roxy beeped at Wire's side. He grabbed for the contraption and his eyes filled with fear. "We have massive movement on the heat scanner. At least ten bodies, maybe more, headed this way."

*It's a trap.* Remko didn't need to say it; they all knew. He twisted as quickly as possible and moved, the others following. The sound of a familiar Authority member's voice crackled to life, and they all paused.

"Let the record now mark the start of execution 267.1a," Enderson Lane said. The sound was too loud to be coming from a human in close proximity, which meant it was coming from the broadcast system. The execution was starting.

“But she isn’t here,” Carrington said.

Remko couldn’t find words to settle the raging panic that filled her voice. “We have to keep moving,” was all he could say.

They slid back across the ventilation ducts until they reached the ladder. Remko was the first down, trying to sort through what was happening. Sam’s face was puzzled as the group descended empty-handed. They needed a moment to stop and figure out what had happened, but they didn’t have it.

“The prisoner has been found guilty of treason against the Authority by crimes committed in the name of Aaron,” Enderson said.

His voice rattled the fragile wooden walls in the narrow hallway and made Remko’s mind spin. Somehow the Authority had known they’d come and had moved the execution somewhere else, and now who could say what they would find when they tried to leave.

“What is happening?” Sam asked.

“This isn’t good,” Kate said.

“If she isn’t here then where is she?” Carrington asked.

Remko ignored them all. The sound of muffled shouting grabbed his attention. It was coming from the other side of the wall, signaling that soldiers were gathering in the Capitol lobby. Remko imagined the army of CityWatch members waiting for them to emerge, an army they couldn’t fight against. They couldn’t go back that way, but they couldn’t stay here.

## THE CALLING

He turned to Wire, who was punching away at Roxy vigorously. “Give me something,” Remko said.

Wire nodded. “Okay, there’s another way out of these service walkways, but they built a wall up over the exit years ago. The materials they used are cheap; we should be able to break it down.”

“What’s our time?” Remko asked.

“Maybe a minute till they’re on us,” Wire said. “I don’t think—”

“Let’s go,” Remko said, grabbing Roxy from Wire’s hand and following the machine’s guidance. Back the way they had come, running at full speed now, none of them caring about the noise they made. Around a corner to the left, then to the right and down to the end of a final hallway that dead-ended in a wooden wall. Sam pushed to the front without having to be asked and he and Remko started pounding away at the slabs.

Voices reached Remko’s ears and he knew that CityWatch guards were now somewhere in the service tunnels headed for them. He kicked the wall with brute force. Pain shot up his calf and into his knee, but he ignored it and kicked again, harder. A crack split across the middle of the wall. Sam crouched and used his shoulder to slam the break, splitting the wood in half. A large crack in the wood showed another long path and their only escape.

Remko reached into the crack and gripped a plank, wrenching it backward and away from the wall. The guards’ voices grew in volume and Kate joined in the destruction.

After another second the hole was big enough for her to climb through, then Wire, and then Carrington. It took another hard kick to make room for Remko and Sam to barely squeeze through. The path was shrouded in darkness, thick enough to feel suffocating. It smelled like dead rats and spoiled food. The ground mushed under their feet as they ran forward.

Enderson's voice echoed, bouncing around the dark above their heads. "At this time I would like to impress upon the people of this city how essential the law is to our survival."

Remko struggled to block out Enderson's words.

"The idea that you can survive outside the law, following the whims of a rebel group and their maniac leader, will only bring turmoil and destruction to our way of life. Resisting the way of the law only ends in death. The *Veritas* is very clear about this."

Remko could sense Carrington's crazed worry; he could hear it in her breath as they ran, feel it in her steps as they pounded against the floor. He wanted to stop, sweep her up in his arms, beg her for forgiveness, and promise her that he could save them. But he couldn't do that; all he could do was run.

Enderson continued, "Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. As God set forth the law, so the law must be obeyed."

Angry shouts followed them down the long corridor, and more splitting of wood commenced. Remko grabbed

Carrington's hand and yanked her forward. She nearly tripped, but he ignored the physical pain he must be causing her. Better to be in pain than dead. The group was tight now; he could hear the others breathing as they all pushed themselves to their limits. Streams of light filtered through the darkness a couple yards in front of them. Another grate, one that led to a false sense of freedom. They weren't actually ever free. They might still escape the imprisonment of the Authority's law, but they would just find themselves confined by their fear.

Sam reached the grate and started to heave. It was bolted to the wall and his efforts alone weren't going to free it. Remko and Wire stepped forward to join him. All three strained at the grate, but it didn't budge.

"Come on, come on," Kate said under her breath.

"You wanna help?" Wire said. "We're pulling as hard as we can."

"Enough," Sam said urgently. "We need to concentrate on just one corner, not the whole thing. Pull together in short bursts."

More shouting came from behind. Closer.

Sam, Wire, and Remko positioned themselves so they were each holding the grate just inches from the upper-left corner. "One, two, *three!*" Sam yelled.

They all yanked. No movement.

"Bring the prisoner forward," another voice boomed over the broadcasting system.

"Again," Sam said. "One, two, *three!*"

Another pull. Remko thought the grate might have moved just a hair.

“Again,” Sam said. “Every three seconds. Go!”

They continued pulling in bursts, following Sam’s instructions. Carrington and Kate stuck their hands in to join the effort as well. With every pull, the grate moved a little more. Finally, when Remko had nearly given up hope, the bolt popped free from the concrete wall. But the grate was still in place.

The loudspeakers screeched again. “Please state the name of the prisoner for the records.” Remko felt Carrington tremble beside him.

“It’s enough,” Sam said. Another long second passed as Sam shouldered the others aside, positioned himself at the newly freed corner of the grate, and with a labored pull, the veins in his arms pulsing from the effort, ripped the metal from the wall. Sam stumbled backward, knocking Wire and Kate nearly to the ground, but they recovered and didn’t wait for apologies before moving out into the light.

“Of course,” Enderson said. His voice was louder now that they were free from the service tunnels. It thundered above them and around them, as if it were part of the air itself.

Remko surveyed their surroundings. They were outside of the Capitol Building’s perimeter wall, on the opposite side from where they had entered. He wasn’t as familiar with this part of the city, but he knew the underground tunnel system ran beneath the majority of the streets. They

just needed to find a place to hide so they could regroup and make their next move.

“The prisoner slated for execution 267.1a is Larkin Caulmen,” Enderson said.

The world around them stilled for a split moment and Remko saw a single tear slide down Carrington’s cheek. Then the world came back into full swing.

“We have to move,” Sam said.

Remko nodded, fighting to tear his eyes away from the woman he loved. The woman he had failed. “We need a place to hide, Wire.”

“As is required, we will ask the prisoner if she has any last words before her execution,” Enderson said.

“I think I have something—a small abandoned shop,” Wire said, his eyes glued to Roxy’s screen. “There’s a back entrance not far from here and it has a basement tunnel grate.”

Remko nodded and they moved. Trying to stay out of sight, taking the corners slow so as not to run into unwanted company. The streets were still empty and the threat of rain still hung in the air, but the clouds had shifted and from here they could see the plasma screen where Larkin’s execution was being broadcast. She was strapped to a long white chair, reclined so it almost lay flat, tubes connected to her arms, the steady beat of her heart blinking across a monitor and beeping through the air. Her gray Lint uniform was gone, replaced with the thin, brown, shabby dress customary for all female prisoners. Her thick

curls spread around her skull, but more than anything Remko saw her eyes. Even from here he could see the calm sense of purpose, the confidence even in the face of death.

Pain racked itself across his heart and rage flooded his bones. He feared Carrington would stop moving at the sight of Larkin, but he could still sense her behind him. They weren't far from the shop now.

Suddenly a sweet sound echoed across the sky. A song, soft and pure. They all stopped and looked to see Larkin singing.

“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll . . .”

Remko felt as if the oxygen had been sucked out of his lungs. The air around his head seemed too thin to replace what had been taken. He heard Carrington whimper behind him and it felt like a punch to his gut.

“Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say . . .”

“That's enough,” Enderson said.

Larkin was lost within herself, though, and if she'd heard him she showed no sign. Her face filled with peace, her lips nearly turned up in a smile. “It is well; it is well with my soul.”

Roxy started beeping in Wire's hand. They had all become too familiar with that sound. The CityWatch guards were getting close; they couldn't stay out here in the open.

The song continued, “It is well . . .”

“I said enough,” Enderson said. He nodded to the doctor stationed at Larkin's left. The doctor picked up a

syringe from the small medical table beside him and pulled off the cap.

“No, please . . .” Carrington said, her face drenched in tears.

“With my soul . . .” Larkin’s voice remained strong and pure.

“We have to go, Remko,” Sam said. Darkness filled his face as he fought to keep the emotion from his voice. Larkin was one of their own, one of the originals. They all felt this moment as if they were being given the poison themselves.

“Carrington,” Remko said. She nodded, fighting sorrow that threatened to overcome her. They followed Wire across the street and into the alley that ran behind the shops.

Larkin’s voice drifted over them, cutting them with each step. “It is well . . .”

Remko couldn’t block out Larkin’s voice; it dug at his insides.

“With my soul . . .”

They reached the back of the abandoned shop and one by one they slipped inside.

“It is well . . .”

They took the stairs quickly, descending into the basement to the grate leading to the tunnels. Sam crossed the space in a few large strides and quickly they were inside the tunnel with the grate pulled back down over their heads.

Larkin’s voice reached them even here, and her song seemed to grow in power—“It is well with my soul”—her

notes stretching out across the city, her strength filling the sky. Carrington pressed her palms and forehead against the tunnel wall. Her shoulders shook, her tears silent. With one final note, Larkin proclaimed her faith, her belief, her undying resolve, and then everything fell quiet.

Silence encapsulated the tunnel, heavy and paralyzing. Carrington's cry broke the stillness and she slid to her knees, covering her mouth to keep her screams from echoing up into the streets and giving away their position. Remko moved and knelt beside her. He pulled her into his arms and silently begged for her forgiveness. His tears fell into her hair and her body trembled in his arms.

Now sorrow, not just fear, would be their prison.  
They had exchanged one prison for another.