

A woman in a white, sleeveless, floor-length dress stands in profile, looking down. She is positioned against a backdrop of a city skyline under a hazy, golden sky. The lower half of the image is a red-tinted reflection of the scene above, showing the woman's dress and the city buildings inverted. The title 'THE CHOOSING' is written across the middle in large, white, stylized letters with diagonal hatching. The word 'THE' is smaller and placed to the left of 'CHOOSING'.

THE CHOOSING

NOT TO BE CHOSEN WOULD YIELD A CRUEL FATE OF MY OWN MAKING

RACHELLE DEKKER

ADVANCED PRAISE FOR *THE CHOOSING*

“A chilling peek into a future where self-worth is determined by identity and grace has been supplanted by the statutes of obedience. 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! I was caught into the dystopian world where evil is disguised as truth, true love is forbidden, and freedom comes at a terrible cost. 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

“In her stunning debut novel, Rachele 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

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The Choosing

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Designed by Dean H. Renninger

The Choosing 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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CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE AUTHORITY

Ian Carson, *President*

Isaac Knight, *Chief Interpreter and Keeper of the Veritas*

Dodson Rogue, *Commander of the CityWatch*

Enderson Lane, *Minister of Labor and Director of
Authority Workers*

Monroe Austin, *Minister of Health and Wellness*

Clyde Bushfield, *Minister of Citizens' Welfare*

Rains Molinar, *Minister of Projects and Engineering*

Walker Red, *Minister of Education*

Riley Scott, *Minister of Finance*

Riddley Stone, *Minister of Justice*

CITYWATCH GUARDS

Remko Brant, *Petty Officer*

Helms DeMarko, *Petty Officer*

Smith, *First Lieutenant*

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HALE FAMILY

Seth Hale

Vena Hale

Carrington Hale

Warren Hale

LINTS

Larkin Caulmen

Neely, *Lint Leader*

HISTORIES CHARACTERS

Dr. Helena Zefnerbach, *Creator of the Prima Solution*

Robert Carson, *Founder of the Authority*

Phillip Watts, *Leader of the First Rebellion*

OTHERS

Arianna Carson, *Daughter of Ian Carson*

Foster, *Secretary to the Authority*

Milo, *Personal Chef to Isaac Knight*



YEAR
2257

L Carrington felt as though she'd collided with a moving train.

The room around her echoed with sweet laughter and flirtation. Handsome men softly led blushing young ladies around the dance floor while other girls looked on from corners, smiling with gleeful exuberance, all of them too consumed with their personal victories to notice the dread filling Carrington's face.

She should run. Maybe she could get away before they came for her. But how many girls had successfully escaped from the Authority? None.

Her hands trembled at her sides as bits of reality began to crash against the inside of her skull.

How could things have gone so wrong? This was not supposed to happen to her.

Panic pricked at her legs, and that voice of self-preservation shouted at her to stop standing there like a corpse and *move*.

Carrington turned toward the massive Capitol Building doors and saw the horde of CityWatch guards enter. Silently they spread out across the room and headed for Carrington and the other girls who stood in fearful recognition.

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The guards' black uniforms fit their forms tightly enough to punctuate how impossible it would be to overpower them. Their faces were fixed in stern focus on the task of collecting the Unchosen and escorting them to the Exiting Room.

Fear filled Carrington's chest like a balloon. Sweat bled through the skin on her forehead. The room felt as if it were being pumped full of hot air that wilted her lungs. This wasn't right; this wasn't the plan. She should be looking on others with pity, not feeling it for herself. All the hours spent; all the learning and dreaming and wishing. Her entire childhood had been consumed by one singular thought, preparing for a single moment. This wasn't right.

Before Carrington could form another thought, a CityWatch guard was standing inches from her. He stretched out his arm in the direction he wanted her to move. Still dumbstruck by her situation, she hesitated. His brow folded, his soulless eyes narrowed to slits, and the corner of his mouth began to twitch. He thought she was being defiant.

Carrington swallowed her panic and found her feet. Her legs felt like gelatin and the ground swayed beneath her. It was impossible to ignore the slight glances from girls she knew, girls she had grown up with, girls from her practicing classes, girls now standing beside the men who had chosen them.

The Exiting Room was through a large set of mahogany

double doors along the far east side of the Grand Capitol Ballroom. There were at least thirty other girls moving throughout the room, each one with a CityWatch escort.

Carrington kept her eyes on the marble floor, studying the shimmer of her red ball gown reflecting in the polished shine. How many hours had she spent dreaming about wearing this dress? This gown had represented a perfect moment. Now it would remind her of how worthless she really was.

As she passed through the doorway into the Exiting Room, a shudder crawled down Carrington's back. Surely there had been a mistake. If she could just have a couple more minutes . . . he would be there; he would choose her. She turned to rush back into the room that held all her hopes and dreams and watched as two guards pushed the doors closed. The sound echoed to the ceiling above her, and she fought to keep from collapsing.

Carrington heard whimpers from the girls around her as the reality of where they were spread through the group like a contagion. The realization that everything they had worked for since the moment they understood their purpose was gone. They were nothing without that purpose.

As was customary, the families of the girls were brought in for their good-byes. They had only a few moments before the CityWatch would round the girls up and transport them by train across the river to live and serve as Authority Workers. As "Lints." They would no longer be daughters or sisters, no longer attached to the families that had raised

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them, no longer a part of the world they had known. Now they would submit to the Authority, receive a low-level trade, and remain loyal to that trade until death. This was the law, given to them by God, set into motion by the Holy Robert Carson many years ago during the Time of Ruin.

Carrington closed her eyes and tried to focus on the pounding of her heart. She had been taught since childhood that everyone had a place, everyone was called to serve, and all were summoned by God to obey the laws of the *Veritas*. She'd hoped for a different future, prayed for a different path, but this road was now hers to walk. She could not change it. She opened her eyes and hoped that a small sense of comfort would begin to ease through her clenched muscles, but it didn't.

A small hand tugged on the side of Carrington's dress and she glanced down to see a familiar pair of deep-set blue eyes. She forced a grin and was greeted with a crooked smile. Tears welled along her bottom eyelids and she choked back the swell of emotion.

"Did you get picked?" he asked.

Carrington softly lowered herself to his level so she could look into her baby brother's eyes. She gently ran her fingers through his golden hair and it flowed across them like silk, thin and soft like her own. He looked very much like her—round face, tiny nose, unwanted scattered freckles that still looked adorable at his age—all but his striking blue eyes. Those he had gotten from their mother.

No. The word sat in her mouth like a foul taste. Even at

four years old, Warren would understand that this was not the desired outcome. She leaned forward and placed a kiss on his forehead. Fighting back another round of tears, she stood and was confronted by her mother's glare.

Some mothers were embracing their daughters, spending their last moments together reassuring them that even from afar they would always have their mothers' love. Carrington knew that she would not be granted this kind of comfort from the woman before her.

She could see the disapproval twisted in the angry lines around her mother's mouth. Cold eyes bored into Carrington with utter disappointment, casting a chill through the blood in her veins. She balled her fists tightly at her sides, her pale skin now ghostly white.

Her mother drew closer, grabbed for Warren, and pulled him away from his sister. The boy's small face changed; he knew something was wrong. He clutched the side of his mother's dress with tiny, fearful hands.

"Mother, I—"

"One thing, Carrington; only one thing was required of you." Her mother's voice was harsh and tight. "After everything I have done for you, how could you fail me so gravely?"

The strength to hold back her tears was fading as her mother's words crashed against her like physical blows.

"How is it possible you were not chosen? Girls half your worth were chosen while you just stood around and watched like a fool."

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“Mother, I tried.”

“Well, clearly you didn’t try hard enough or we would not be standing here!”

“Vena,” a comforting voice interjected.

Carrington’s father appeared like blanketing warmth. He laid his hand on his wife’s shoulder in a firm but loving grasp that seemed to defuse her momentarily. Then he stepped around her toward Carrington.

The urge to throw herself into his arms was overwhelming, but Carrington knew she would crumple into a ball of hysterics if she did. His eyes were green like hers. His face and hands had aged beyond his years from working long, hard hours in the Cattle Lands, but his smile was youthful, and the sight of it amplified what she was losing.

He gently pushed a loose strand of hair from Carrington’s face and placed a warm kiss on her cheek.

“Remember, we all have our place,” he said quietly.

Her mother let out an aggravated huff.

“Vena . . .”

“This is not supposed to be her place, Seth. She was supposed to be chosen.”

Tears gathered in her mother’s eyes, but Carrington knew her mother was crying for herself, for the way people would look at her now that her only daughter was an Unchosen. It was a mother’s duty to raise daughters whom men would be proud to take as wives. And the truth was, she had failed as much as Carrington.

She wished her mother could cry for her, mourn this

day as it would be the last they had together; yet it was foolish to think her mother could be anything other than who she was.

“But she wasn’t chosen, Vena,” her father said. “So this is her place now.”

A loudspeaker creaked to life overhead and the room fell to a hush.

“Good evening. This is Ian Carson, Authority President. I want to greet each of you as you make the transition from being children to assuming your roles as contributing members of society. Though this day may be clouded with grief, you must remember that we all have a place and a purpose. You are still a significant part of our growing city. Remember what the book of *Veritas* says: ‘A man’s heart plans his way, but God directs his steps.’ On behalf of the Authority, I wish you well in your new responsibilities. As God set forth the law, so the law must be obeyed.”

The room echoed in unison as the girls all recited the phrase as familiar to them as their own names. “As God set forth the law, so the law must be obeyed.”

“The train has now arrived. The CityWatch will escort you to the platform. Please conclude your farewells and make your way to the exit. Authority Workers, may you take pride in your service,” Ian said before another screech bounced around the room and then fell silent.

To the right, several guards pulled open another large set of double doors that let in the chilled night air. Carrington

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could see the side of a steel train car, and a pit formed in her stomach. This was it.

She dropped to her knees and pulled her little brother to her chest. She wasn't sure if he completely understood what was happening or if the entire situation was just too overwhelming, but tiny tears streaked the sides of his face.

She squeezed him until she thought he might pop and then pulled away, took his face in her hands, and pressed the end of her nose to his. "I love you, Warren. Never forget that."

A small whimper left his lips, and tears rushed down Carrington's cheeks. Her chest cramped with pain and she struggled to breathe.

"Assemble," a guard yelled from across the room.

Carrington stood and stared as the CityWatch guided girls quickly into a line to head toward the train.

Her father leaned over and hugged her tightly. She could feel the dampness from his chin on the top of her head.

Once separated from her father, she turned to face her mother. The woman was rigid and aloof, but she reached out and wiped the tears from Carrington's face. "Be good," she said, and her voice quivered with a hint of emotion.

"It's time to go," a guard said.

Carrington hadn't noticed him approach. She nodded and moved with the man. A hand reached out and grabbed hers and she spun back around. Warren held her hand tightly, his eyes wide with fear.

"Stay," he said.

“I can’t, Warren. But don’t worry. Everything will be fine.”

“Now,” the guard said.

Carrington yanked her hand away and watched her brother erupt into wails of confusion. Raging sadness threatened her balance, but she managed to remain steady as she followed the guard away from her family.

“Carrington!” Warren yelled.

She didn’t dare turn around for fear that her legs would stop working.

“Carrington!”

She could hear her mother and father trying to console the child as she stepped onto the train platform. Drawing one last breath of the air that held freedom, Carrington moved onto the train filled with weeping girls. Even as the CityWatch guard slammed the door shut she could still hear the heart-wrenching cries of the little boy she’d never get to watch grow up.