

The Giver

Lois Lowry

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The Giver

Lois Lowry

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Summary: Given his lifetime assignment at the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas becomes the receiver of memories shared by only one other in his community and discovers the terrible truth about the society in which he lives.

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For all the children
To whom we entrust the future

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Number the Stars

The Giver

Chapter 16

Jonas did not want to go back. He didn't want the memories, didn't want the honor, didn't want the wisdom, didn't want the pain. He wanted his childhood again, his scraped knees and ball games. He sat in his dwelling alone, watching through the window, seeing children at play, citizens bicycling home from uneventful days at work, ordinary lives free of anguish because he had been selected, as others before him had, to bear their burden.

But the choice was not his. He returned each day to the Annex room.

The Giver was gentle with him for many days following the terrible shared memory of war.

"There are so many good memories," The Giver reminded Jonas.

And it was true. By now Jonas had experienced countless bits of happiness, things he had never known of before.

He had seen a birthday party, with one child singled out and celebrated on his day, so that now he understood the joy of being an individual, special and unique and proud.

He had visited museums and seen paintings filled with all the colors he could now recognize and name.

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In one ecstatic memory he had ridden a gleaming brown horse across a field that smelled of damp grass, and had dismounted beside a small stream from which both he and the horse drank cold, clear water. Now he understood about animals; and in the moment that the horse turned from the stream and nudged Jonas's shoulder affectionately with its head, he perceived the bonds between animal and human.

He had walked through woods, and sat at night beside a campfire. Although he had through the memories learned about the pain of loss and loneliness, now he gained, too, an understanding of solitude and its joy.

"What is your favorite?" Jonas asked The Giver. "You don't have to give it away yet," he added quickly. "Just tell me about it, so I can look forward to it, because I'll have to receive it when your job is done."

The Giver smiled. "Lie down," he said. "I'm happy to give it to you."

Jonas felt the joy of it as soon as the memory began. Sometimes it took a while for him to get his bearings, to find his place. But this time he fit right in and felt the happiness that pervaded the memory.

He was in a room filled with people, and it was warm, with firelight glowing on a hearth. He could see through a window that outside it was night, and snowing. There were colored lights: red and green and yellow, twinkling from a tree which was, oddly, inside the room. On a table, lighted candles stood in a polished golden holder and cast a soft, flickering glow. He could smell things cooking, and he heard soft laughter. A golden-haired dog lay sleeping on the floor.

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On the floor there were packages wrapped in brightly colored paper and tied with gleaming ribbons. As Jonas watched, a small child began to pick up the packages and pass them around the room: to other children, to adults who were obviously parents, and to an older, quiet couple, man and woman, who sat smiling together on a couch.

While Jonas watched, the people began one by one to untie the ribbons on the packages, to unwrap the bright papers, open the boxes and reveal toys and clothing and books. There were cries of delight. They hugged one another.

The small child went and sat on the lap of the old woman, and she rocked him and rubbed her cheek against his.

Jonas opened his eyes and lay contentedly on the bed, still luxuriating in the warm and comforting memory. It had all been there, all the things he had learned to treasure.

"What did you perceive?" The Giver asked. "Warmth," Jonas replied, "and happiness. And--let me think. *Family*. That it was a celebration of some sort, a holiday. And something else--I can't quite get the word for it." "It will come to you."

"Who were the old people? Why were they there?" It had puzzled Jonas, seeing them in the room. The Old of the community did not ever leave their special place, the House of the Old, where they were so well cared for and respected.

"They were called Grandparents."

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"Grand parents?"

"Grandparents. It meant parents-of-the-parents, long ago."

"Back and back and back?" Jonas began to laugh. "So actually, there could be parents-of-the-parents-of-the-parents-of-the-parents?"

The Giver laughed, too. "That's right. It's a little like looking at yourself looking in a mirror looking at yourself looking in a mirror."

Jonas frowned. "But my parents must have had parents! I never thought about it before. Who are my parents-of-the-parents? *Where* are they?"

"You could go look in the Hall of Open Records. You'd find the names. But think, son. If you apply for children, then who will be their parents-of-the-parents? Who will be their grandparents?"

"My mother and father, of course."

"And where will they be?"

Jonas thought. "Oh," he said slowly. "When I finish my training and become a full adult, I'll be given my own dwelling. And then when Lily does, a few years later, she'll get *her* own dwelling, and maybe a spouse, and children if she applies for them, and then Mother and Father--"

"That's right."

"As long as they're still working and contributing to the community, they'll go and live with the other Childless Adults. And they won't be part of my life anymore.

"And after that, when the time comes, they'll go to the House of the Old," Jonas went on. He was thinking aloud. "And they'll be well cared for, and respected, and when they're released, there will be a celebration."

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"Which you won't attend," The Giver pointed out.

"No, of course not, because I won't even know about it. By then I'll be so busy with my own life. And Lily will, too. So our children, if we have them, won't know who their parents-of-parents are, either.

"It seems to work pretty well that way, doesn't it? The way we do it in our community?" Jonas asked.

"I just didn't realize there was any other way, until I received that memory." "It works," The Giver agreed.

Jonas hesitated. "I certainly liked the memory, though. I can see why it's your favorite. I couldn't quite get the word for the whole feeling of it, the feeling that was so strong in the room." "Love," The Giver told him.

Jonas repeated it. "Love." It was a word and concept new to him.

They were both silent for a minute. Then Jonas said, "Giver?" "Yes?"

"I feel very foolish saying this. Very, very foolish."

"No need. Nothing is foolish here. Trust the memories and how they make you feel."

"Well," Jonas said, looking at the floor, "I know you don't have the memory anymore, because you gave it to me, so maybe you won't understand this--"

"I will. I am left with a vague wisp of that one; and I have many other memories of families, and holidays, and happiness. Of love."

Jonas blurted out what he was feeling. "I was thinking that ... well, I can see that it wasn't a very practical way

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to live, with the Old right there in the same place, where maybe they wouldn't be well taken care of, the way they are now, and that we have a better-arranged way of doing things. But anyway, I was thinking, I mean feeling, actually, that it was kind of nice, then. And that I wish we could be that way, and that you could be my grandparent. The family in the memory seemed a little more--" He faltered, not able to find the word he wanted.

"A little more complete," The Giver suggested.

Jonas nodded. "I liked the feeling of love," he confessed. He glanced nervously at the speaker on the wall, reassuring himself that no one was listening. "I wish we still had that," he whispered. "Of course," he added quickly, "I do understand that it wouldn't work very well. And that it's much better to be organized the way we are now. I can see that it was a *dangerous* way to live."

"What do you mean?"

Jonas hesitated. He wasn't certain, really, what he had meant. He could feel that there was *risk* involved, though he wasn't sure how. "Well," he said finally, grasping for an explanation, "they had *fire* right there in that room. There was a fire burning in the fireplace. And there were candles on a table. I can certainly see why those things were outlawed.

"Still," he said slowly, almost to himself, "I did like the light they made. And the warmth."

"Father? Mother?" Jonas asked tentatively after the evening meal.

"I have a question I want to ask you." "What is it, Jonas?" his father asked.

He made himself say the words, though he felt flushed

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with embarrassment. He had rehearsed them in his mind all the way home from the Annex.

"Do you love me?"

There was an awkward silence for a moment. Then Father gave a little chuckle. "*Jonas*. You, of all people. Precision of language, *please!*"

"What do you mean?" Jonas asked. Amusement was not at all what he had anticipated.

"Your father means that you used a very generalized word, so meaningless that it's become almost obsolete," his mother explained carefully.

Jonas stared at them. Meaningless? He had never before felt anything as meaningful as the memory.

"And of course our community can't function smoothly if people don't use precise language. You could ask, 'Do you enjoy me?' The answer is 'Yes,' " his mother said.

"Or," his father suggested, " 'Do you take pride in my accomplishments?' And the answer is wholeheartedly 'Yes.' "

"Do you understand why it's inappropriate to use a word like 'love'?" Mother asked.

Jonas nodded. "Yes, thank you, I do," he replied slowly.

It was his first lie to his parents.

"Gabriel?" Jonas whispered that night to the newchild. The crib was in his room again. After Gabe had slept soundly in Jonas's room for four nights, his parents had pronounced the experiment a

success and Jonas a hero. Gabriel was growing rapidly, now crawling and giggling across the room and pulling himself up to stand. He could

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be upgraded in the Nurturing Center, Father said happily, now that he slept; he could be officially named and given to his family in December, which was only two months away. But when he was taken away, he stopped sleeping again, and cried in the night. So he was back in Jonas's sleepingroom. They would give it a little more time, they decided. Since Gabe seemed to like it in Jonas's room, he would sleep there at night a little longer, until the habit of sound sleep was fully formed. The Nurturers were very optimistic about Gabriel's future. There was no answer to Jonas's whisper. Gabriel was sound asleep. "Things could change, Gabe," Jonas went on. "Things could be different. I don't know how, but there must be some way for things to be different. There could be colors. "And grandparents," he added, staring through the dimness toward the ceiling of his sleepingroom. "And everybody would have the memories. "You know about memories," he whispered, turning toward the crib. Gabriel's breathing was even and deep. Jonas liked having him there, though he felt guilty about the secret. Each night he gave memories to Gabriel: memories of boat rides and picnics in the sun; memories of soft rainfall against windowpanes; memories of dancing barefoot on a damp lawn. "Gabe?" The newchild stirred slightly in his sleep. Jonas looked over at him.

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"There could be love," Jonas whispered. The next morning, for the first time, Jonas did not take his pill. Something within him, something that had grown there through the memories, told him to throw the pill away.

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Chapter 17

TODAY IS DECLARED AN UNSCHEDULED HOLIDAY. Jonas, his parents, and Lily all turned in surprise and looked at the wall speaker from which the announcement had come. It happened so rarely, and was such a treat for the entire community when it did. Adults were exempted from the day's work, children from school and training and volunteer hours. The substitute Laborers, who would be given a different holiday, took over all the necessary tasks: nurturing, food delivery, and care of the Old; and the community was free. Jonas cheered, and put his homework folder down. He had been about to leave for school. School was less important to him now; and before much more time passed, his formal schooling would end. But still, for Twelves, though they had begun their adult training, there were the endless lists of rules to be memorized and the newest technology to be mastered. He wished his parents, sister, and Gabe a happy day, and rode down the bicycle path, looking for Asher. He had not taken the pills, now, for four weeks. The Stirrings had returned, and he felt a little guilty and embarrassed about the pleasurable dreams that came to him

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as he slept. But he knew he couldn't go back to the world of no feelings that he had lived in so long. And his new, heightened feelings permeated a greater realm than simply his sleep. Though he knew that his failure to take the pills accounted for some of it, he thought that the feelings came also from

the memories. Now he could see all of the colors; and he could *keep* them, too, so that the trees and grass and bushes stayed green in his vision. Gabriel's rosy cheeks stayed pink, even when he slept. And apples were always, always red.

Now, through the memories, he had seen oceans and mountain lakes and streams that gurgled through woods; and now he saw the familiar wide river beside the path differently. He saw all of the light and color and history it contained and carried in its slow-moving water; and he knew that there was an Elsewhere from which it came, and an Elsewhere to which it was going.

On this unexpected, casual holiday he felt happy, as he always had on holidays; but with a deeper happiness than ever before. Thinking, as he always did, about precision of language, Jonas realized that it was a new *depth* of feelings that he was experiencing. Somehow they were not at all the same as the feelings that every evening, in every dwelling, every citizen analyzed with endless talk.

"I felt angry because someone broke the play area rules," Lily had said once, making a fist with her small hand to indicate her fury. Her family--Jonas among them--had talked about the possible reasons for rule-breaking, and the need for understanding and patience, until Lily's fist had relaxed and her anger was gone. But Lily had not felt anger, Jonas realized now. Shallow

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impatience and exasperation, that was all Lily had felt. He knew that with certainty because now he knew what anger was. Now he had, in the memories, experienced injustice and cruelty, and he had reacted with rage that welled up so passionately inside him that the thought of discussing it calmly at the evening meal was unthinkable,

"I felt sad today," he had heard his mother say, and they had comforted her.

But now Jonas had experienced real sadness. He had felt grief. He knew that there was no quick comfort for emotions like those.

These were deeper and they did not need to be told. They were *felt*.

Today, he felt happiness.

"Asher!" He spied his friend's bicycle leaning against a tree at the edge of the playing field. Nearby, other bikes were strewn about on the ground. On a holiday the usual rules of order could be disregarded.

He skidded to a stop and dropped his own bike beside the others. "Hey, Ash!" he shouted, looking around. There seemed to be no one in the play area. "Where are you?"

"Psssheeewww!" A child's voice, coming from behind a nearby bush, made the sound. "Pow! Pow! Pow!"

A female Eleven named Tanya staggered forward from where she had been hiding. Dramatically she clutched her stomach and stumbled about in a zig-zag pattern, groaning. "You got me!" she called, and fell to the ground, grinning.

"Blam!"

Jonas, standing on the side of the playing field, recognized

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Asher's voice. He saw his friend, aiming an imaginary weapon in his hand, dart from behind one tree to another. "Blam! You're in my line of ambush, Jonas! Watch out!"

Jonas stepped back. He moved behind Asher's bike and knelt so that he was out of sight. It was a game he had often played with the other children, a game of good guys and bad guys, a harmless pastime that used up their contained energy and ended only when they all lay posed in freakish postures on the ground.

He had never recognized it before as a game of war. "Attack!" The shout came from behind the small storehouse where play equipment was kept. Three children dashed forward, their imaginary weapons in firing position.

From the opposite side of the field came an opposing shout:

"Counter-attack!" From their hiding places a horde of children--Jonas recognized Fiona in the group--emerged, running in a crouched position, firing across the field. Several of them stopped, grabbed their own shoulders and chests with exaggerated gestures, and pretended to be hit. They dropped to the ground and lay suppressing giggles.

Feelings surged within Jonas. He found himself walking forward into the field.

"You're hit, Jonas!" Asher yelled from behind the tree. "Pow! You're hit again!"

Jonas stood alone in the center of the field. Several of the children raised their heads and looked at him uneasily. The attacking armies slowed, emerged from their crouched positions, and watched to see what he was doing.

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In his mind, Jonas saw again the face of the boy who had lain dying on a field and had begged him for water. He had a sudden choking feeling, as if it were difficult to breathe.

One of the children raised an imaginary rifle and made an attempt to destroy him with a firing noise.

"Psssheew!" Then they were all silent, standing awkwardly, and the only sound was the sound of Jonas's shuddering breaths. He was struggling not to cry.

Gradually, when nothing happened, nothing changed, the children looked at each other nervously and went away. He heard the sounds as they righted their bicycles and began to ride down the path that led from the field. Only Asher and Fiona remained.

"What's wrong, Jonas? It was only a game," Fiona said.

"You ruined it," Asher said in an irritated voice.

"Don't play it anymore," Jonas pleaded.

"I'm the one who's training for Assistant Recreation Director," Asher pointed out angrily. "Games aren't *your* area of expertness." "Expertise," Jonas corrected him automatically.

"Whatever. You can't say what we play, even if you *are* going to be the new Receiver." Asher looked warily at him. "I apologize for not paying you the respect you deserve," he mumbled.

"Asher," Jonas said. He was trying to speak carefully, and with kindness, to say exactly what he wanted to say. "You had no way of knowing this. I didn't know it myself until recently. But it's a cruel game. In the past, there have--"

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"I said I *apologize*, Jonas."

Jonas sighed. It was no use. Of course Asher couldn't understand. "I accept your apology, Asher," he said wearily.

"Do you want to go for a ride along the river, Jonas?" Fiona asked, biting her lip with nervousness. Jonas looked at her. She was so lovely. For a fleeting instant he thought he would like nothing better than to ride peacefully along the river path, laughing and talking with his gentle female friend. But he knew that such times had been taken from him now. He shook his head. After a moment his two friends turned and went to their bikes. He watched as they rode away.

Jonas trudged to the bench beside the Storehouse and sat down, overwhelmed with feelings of loss. His childhood, his friendships, his carefree sense of security--all of these things seemed to be slipping away. With his new, heightened feelings, he was overwhelmed by sadness at the way the others had laughed and shouted, playing at war. But he knew that they could not understand why, without the memories. He felt such love for Asher and for Fiona. But they could not feel it back,

without the memories. And he could not give them those. Jonas knew with certainty that he could change nothing.

Back in their dwelling, that evening, Lily chattered merrily about the wonderful holiday she had had, playing with her friends, having her midday meal out of doors, and (she confessed) sneaking a very short try on her father's bicycle.

"I can't wait till I get my very own bicycle next month. Father's is too big for me. I fell," she explained matter-of-factly.

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"Good thing Gabe wasn't in the child seat!"

"A very good thing," Mother agreed, frowning at the idea of it. Gabriel waved his arms at the mention of himself. He had begun to walk just the week before. The first steps of a newchild were always the occasion for celebration at the Nurturing Center, Father said, but also for the introduction of a discipline wand. Now Father brought the slender instrument home with him each night, in case Gabriel misbehaved.

But he was a happy and easygoing toddler. Now he moved unsteadily across the room, laughing.

"Gay!" he chirped. "Gay!" It was the way he said his own name.

Jonas brightened. It had been a depressing day for him, after such a bright start. But he set his glum thoughts aside. He thought about starting to teach Lily to ride so that she could speed off proudly after her Ceremony of Nine, which would be coming soon. It was hard to believe that it was almost December again, that almost a year had passed since he had become a Twelve.

He smiled as he watched the newchild plant one small foot carefully before the other, grinning with glee at his own steps as he tried them out.

"I want to get to sleep early tonight," Father said. "Tomorrow's a busy day for me. The twins are being born tomorrow, and the test results show that they're identical."

"One for here, one for Elsewhere," Lily chanted. "One for here, one for Else--"

"Do you actually *take* it Elsewhere, Father?" Jonas asked.

"No, I just have to make the selection. I weigh them, hand the larger over to a Nurturer who's standing by,

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waiting, and then I get the smaller one all cleaned up and comfy. Then I perform a small Ceremony of Release and--" He glanced down, grinning at Gabriel. "Then I wave bye-bye," he said, in the special sweet voice he used when he spoke to the newchild. He waved his hand in the familiar gesture.

Gabriel giggled and waved bye-bye back to him.

"And somebody else comes to get him? Somebody from Elsewhere?"

"That's right, Jonas-bonus."

Jonas rolled his eyes in embarrassment that his father had used the silly pet name.

Lily was deep in thought. "What if they give the little twin a name Elsewhere, a name like, oh, maybe Jonathan? And here, in our community, at his naming, the twin that we kept here is given the name Jonathan, and then there would be two children with the same name, and they would *look* exactly the same, and someday, maybe when they were a Six, one group of Sixes would go to visit another community on a bus, and there in the other community, in the *other* group of Sixes, would be a Jonathan who was exactly the same as the *other* Jonathan, and then maybe they would get mixed up and take the wrong Jonathan home, and maybe his parents wouldn't notice, and then-- She paused for breath.

"Lily," Mother said, "I have a wonderful idea. Maybe when you become a Twelve, they'll give you the Assignment of Storyteller! I don't think we've had a Storyteller in the community for a long time. But if I were on the Committee, I would definitely choose you for that job!"

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Lily grinned. "I have a *better* idea for one more story," she announced. "What if actually we were *all* twins and didn't know it, and so Elsewhere there would be another Lily, and another Jonas, and another Father, and another Asher, and another Chief Elder, and another--" Father groaned. "Lily," he said. "It's bedtime."

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Chapter 18

"Giver," Jonas asked the next afternoon, "Do you ever think about release?"

"Do you mean my own release, or just the general topic of release?"

"Both, I guess. I apologi--I mean I should have been more precise.

But I don't know exactly what I meant."

"Sit back up. No need to lie down while we're talking." Jonas, who had already been stretched out on the bed when the question came to his mind, sat back up.

"I guess I do think about it occasionally," The Giver said. "I think about my own release when I'm in an awful lot of pain. I wish I could put in a request for it, sometimes. But I'm not permitted to do that until the new Receiver is trained."

"Me," Jonas said in a dejected voice. He was not looking forward to the end of the training, when he would become the new Receiver. It was clear to him what a terribly difficult and lonely life it was, despite the honor.

"I can't request release either," Jonas pointed out. "It was in my rules."

The Giver laughed harshly. "I know that. They hammered out those rules after the failure ten years ago."

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Jonas had heard again and again now, reference to the previous failure. But he still did not know what had happened ten years before. "Giver," he said, "tell me what happened. Please."

The Giver shrugged. "On the surface, it was quite simple. A Receiver-to-be was selected, the way you were. The selection went smoothly enough. The Ceremony was held, and the selection was made. The crowd cheered, as they did for you. The new Receiver was puzzled and a little frightened, as you were."

"My parents told me it was a female." The Giver nodded.

Jonas thought of his favorite female, Fiona, and shivered. He wouldn't want his gentle friend to suffer the way he had, taking on the memories. "What was she like?" he asked The Giver.

The Giver looked sad, thinking about it. "She was a remarkable young woman. Very self-possessed and serene. Intelligent, eager to learn." He shook his head and drew a deep breath. "You know, Jonas, when she came to me in this room, when she presented herself to begin her training-- "

Jonas interrupted him with a question. "Can you tell me her name?"

My parents said that it wasn't to be spoken again in the community.

But couldn't you say it just to me?"

The Giver hesitated painfully, as if saying the name aloud might be excruciating. "Her name was Rosemary," he told Jonas, finally.

"Rosemary. I like that name."

The Giver went on. "When she came to me for the first

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time, she sat there in the chair where you sat on your first day. She was eager and excited and a little scared. We talked. I tried to explain things as well as I could."

"The way you did to me."

The Giver chuckled ruefully. "The explanations are difficult. The whole thing is so beyond one's experience. But I tried. And she listened carefully. Her eyes were very luminous, I remember."

He looked up suddenly. "Jonas, I gave you a memory that I told you was my favorite. I still have a shred of it left. The room, with the family, and grandparents?"

Jonas nodded. Of course he remembered. "Yes," he said. "It had that wonderful feeling with it. You told me it was love."

"You can understand, then, that that's what I felt for Rosemary,"

The Giver explained. "I loved her. "I feel it for you, too," he added. "What happened to her?" Jonas asked.

"Her training began. She received well, as you do. She was so enthusiastic. So delighted to experience new things. I remember her laughter ... "

His voice faltered and trailed off.

"What happened?" Jonas asked again, after a moment. "Please tell me."

The Giver closed his eyes. "It broke my heart, Jonas, to transfer pain to her. But it was my job. It was what I had to do, the way I've had to do it to you."

The room was silent. Jonas waited. Finally The Giver continued.

"Five weeks. That was all. I gave her happy memories: a ride on a merry-go-round; a kitten to play with; a picnic.

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Sometimes I chose one just because I knew it would make her laugh, and I so treasured the sound of that laughter in this room that had always been so silent.

"But she was like you, Jonas. She wanted to experience everything. She knew that it was her responsibility. And so she asked me for more difficult memories."

Jonas held his breath for a moment. "You didn't give her *war*, did you? Not after just five weeks?"

The Giver shook his head and sighed. "No. And I didn't give her physical pain. But I gave her loneliness. And I gave her loss. I transferred a memory of a child taken from its parents. That was the first one. She appeared stunned at its end."

Jonas swallowed. Rosemary, and her laughter, had begun to seem real to him, and he pictured her looking up from the bed of memories, shocked.

The Giver continued. "I backed off, gave her more little delights. But everything changed, once she knew about pain. I could see it in her eyes."

"She wasn't brave enough?" Jonas suggested.

The Giver didn't respond to the question. "She insisted that I continue, that I not spare her. She said it was her duty. And I knew, of course, that she was correct.

"I couldn't bring myself to inflict physical pain on her. But I gave her anguish of many kinds. Poverty, and hunger, and terror.

"I *had* to, Jonas. It was my job. And she had been chosen." The Giver looked at him imploringly.

Jonas stroked his hand.

"Finally one afternoon, we finished for the day. It had been a hard session. I tried to finish--as I do with

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you--by transferring something happy and cheerful. But the times of laughter were gone by then. She stood up very silently, frowning, as if she were making a decision. Then she came over to me and put her arms around me. She kissed my cheek." As Jonas watched, The Giver stroked his own cheek, recalling the touch of Rosemary's lips ten years before.

"She left here that day, left this room, and did not go back to her dwelling. I was notified by the Speaker that she had gone directly to the Chief Elder and asked to be released."

"But it's against the rules! The Receiver-in-training can't apply for rel--"

"It's in your rules, Jonas. But it wasn't in hers. She asked for release, and they had to give it to her. I never saw her again."

So that was the failure, Jonas thought. It was obvious that it saddened The Giver very deeply. But it didn't seem such a terrible thing, after all. And he, Jonas, would never have done it--never have requested release, no matter how difficult his training became.

The Giver needed a successor, and he had been chosen.

A thought occurred to Jonas. Rosemary had been released very early in her training. What if something happened to him, Jonas?

He had a whole year's worth of memories now.

"Giver," he asked, "I can't request release, I know that. But what if something happened: an accident? What if I fell into the river like the little Four, Caleb, did? Well, that doesn't make sense because I'm a good swimmer. But what if I couldn't swim, and fell into the river and was

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lost? Then there wouldn't be a new Receiver, but you would already have given away an awful lot of important memories, so even though they would select a new Receiver, the memories would be gone except for the shreds that you have left of them? And then what if-- "

He started to laugh, suddenly. "I sound like my sister, Lily," he said, amused at himself.

The Giver looked at him gravely. "You just stay away from the river, my friend," he said. "The community lost Rosemary after five weeks and it was a disaster for them. I don't know *what* the community would do if they lost you."

"Why was it a disaster?"

"I think I mentioned to you once," The Giver reminded him, "that when she was gone, the memories came back to the people. If you were to be lost in the river, Jonas, your memories would not be lost with you. Memories are *forever*."

"Rosemary had only those five weeks worth, and most of them were good ones. But there were those few terrible memories, the ones that had overwhelmed her. For a while they overwhelmed the community. All those *feelings!* They'd never experienced that before.

"I was so devastated by my own grief at her loss, and my own feeling of failure, that I didn't even try to help them through it. I was angry, too."

The Giver was quiet for a moment, obviously thinking. "You know," he said, finally, "if they lost *you*, with all the training you've had now, they'd have all those memories again themselves."

Jonas made a face. "They'd hate that."

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"They certainly would. They wouldn't know how to deal with it at all."

"The only way I deal with it is by having you there to help me," Jonas pointed out with a sigh.

The Giver nodded. "I suppose," he said slowly, "that I could--"

"You could what?"

The Giver was still deep in thought. After a moment, he said, "If you floated off in the river, I suppose I could help the whole community the way I've helped you. It's an interesting concept. I need to think about it some more. Maybe we'll talk about it again sometime. But not now.

"I'm glad you're a good swimmer, Jonas. But stay away from the river." He laughed a little, but the laughter was not lighthearted. His thoughts seemed to be elsewhere, and his eyes were very troubled.

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Chapter 19

Jonas glanced at the clock. There was so much work to be done, always, that he and The Giver seldom simply sat and talked, the way they just had.

"I'm sorry that I wasted so much time with my questions," Jonas said. "I was only asking about release because my father is releasing a newchild today. A twin. He has to select one and release the other one. They do it by weight." Jonas glanced at the clock. "Actually, I suppose he's already finished. I think it was this morning."

The Giver's face took on a solemn look. "I wish they wouldn't do that," he said quietly, almost to himself.

"Well, they can't have two identical people around! Think how confusing it would be!" Jonas chuckled.

"I wish I could watch," he added, as an afterthought. He liked the thought of seeing his father perform the ceremony, and making the little twin clean and comfy. His father was such a gentle man. "You can watch," The Giver said.

"No," Jonas told him. "They never let children watch. It's very private."

"Jonas," The Giver told him, "I know that you read your training instructions very carefully. Don't you remember that you are allowed to ask anyone anything?"

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Jonas nodded. "Yes, but-- "

"Jonas, when you and I have finished our time together, you will be the new Receiver. You can read the books; you'll have the memories. You have access to *everything*. It's part of your training. If you want to watch a release, you have simply to ask."

Jonas shrugged. "Well, maybe I will, then. But it's too late for this one. I'm sure it was this morning."

The Giver told him, then, something he had not known. "All private ceremonies are recorded. They're in the Hall of Closed Records. *Do you want to see this morning's release?*"

Jonas hesitated. He was afraid that his father wouldn't like it, if he watched something so private.

"I think you should," The Giver told him firmly.

"All right, then," Jonas said. "Tell me how."

The Giver rose from his chair, went to the speaker on the wall, and clicked the switch from OFF to ON.

The voice spoke immediately. "Yes, Receiver. How may I help you?"

"I would like to see this morning's release of the twin."

"One moment, Receiver. Thank you for your instructions."

Jonas watched the video screen above the row of switches. Its blank face began to flicker with zig-zag lines; then some numbers appeared, followed by the date and time. He was astonished and delighted that this was available to him, and surprised that he had not known.

Suddenly he could see a small windowless room, empty except for a bed, a table with some equipment on it--Jonas recognized a scale; he had seen them before, when he'd been doing volunteer hours at the Nurturing Center--

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and a cupboard. He could see pale carpeting on the floor.

"It's just an ordinary room," he commented. "I thought maybe they'd have it in the Auditorium, so that everybody could come. All the Old go to Ceremonies of Release. But I suppose that when it's just a newborn, they don't--"

"Shhh," The Giver said, his eyes on the screen. Jonas's father, wearing his nurturing uniform, entered the room, cradling a tiny newchild wrapped in a soft blanket in his arms. A uniformed woman followed through the door, carrying a second newchild wrapped in a similar blanket.

"That's my father." Jonas found himself whispering, as if he might wake the little ones if he spoke aloud. "And the other Nurturer is his assistant. She's still in training, but she'll be finished soon."

The two Nurturers unwrapped the blankets and laid the identical newborns on the bed. They were naked. Jonas could see that they were males.

He watched, fascinated, as his father gently lifted one and then the other to the scale and weighed them.

He heard his father laugh. "Good," his father said to the woman. "I thought for a moment that they might both be exactly the same. *Then* we'd have a problem. But this one," he handed one, after rewrapping it, to his assistant, "is six pounds even. So you can clean him up and dress him and take him over to the Center."

The woman took the newchild and left through the door she had entered.

Jonas watched as his father bent over the squirming newchild on the bed. "And you, little guy, you're only five

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pounds ten ounces. *A s hrimp!*"

"That's the special voice he uses with Gabriel," Jonas remarked, smiling.

"Watch," The Giver said.

"Now he cleans him up and makes him comfy," Jonas told him. "He told me."

"Be quiet, Jonas," The Giver commanded in a strange voice. " *Watch* ."

Obediently Jonas concentrated on the screen, waiting for what would happen next. He was especially curious about the ceremony part.

His father turned and opened the cupboard. He took out a syringe and a small bottle. Very carefully he inserted the needle into the bottle and began to fill the syringe with a clear liquid.

Jonas winced sympathetically. He had forgotten that newchildren had to get shots. He hated shots himself, though he knew that they were necessary.

To his surprise, his father began very carefully to direct the needle into the top of newchild's forehead, puncturing the place where the fragile skin pulsed. The newborn squirmed, and wailed faintly.

"Why's he--"

"Shhh," The Giver said sharply.

His father was talking, and Jonas realized that he was hearing the answer to the question he had started to ask. Still in the special voice, his father was saying, "I know, I know. It hurts, little guy. But I have to use a vein, and the veins in your arms are still too teenyweeny."

He pushed the plunger very slowly, injecting the liquid into the scalp vein until the syringe was empty.

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"All done. That wasn't so bad, was it?" Jonas heard his father say cheerfully. He turned aside and dropped the syringe into a waste receptacle.

Now he cleans him up and makes him comfy, Jonas said to himself, aware that The Giver didn't want to talk during the little ceremony.

As he continued to watch, the newchild, no longer crying, moved his arms and legs in a jerking motion. Then he went limp. His head fell to the side, his eyes half open. Then he was still.

With an odd, shocked feeling, Jonas recognized the gestures and posture and expression. They were familiar. He had seen them before. But he couldn't remember where.

Jonas stared at the screen, waiting for something to happen. But nothing did. The little twin lay motionless. His father was putting things away. Folding the blanket. Closing the cupboard.

Once again, as he had on the playing field, he felt the choking sensation. Once again he saw the face of the light-haired, bloodied soldier as life left his eyes. The memory came back.

He killed it! My father killed it! Jonas said to himself, stunned at what he was realizing. He continued to stare at the screen numbly.

His father tidied the room. Then he picked up a small carton that lay waiting on the floor, set it on the bed, and lifted the limp body into it.

He placed the lid on tightly.

He picked up the carton and carried it to the other side of the room. He opened a small door in the wall; Jonas could see darkness behind the door. It seemed to be the

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same sort of chute into which trash was deposited at school.

His father loaded the carton containing the body into the chute and gave it a shove.

"Bye-bye, little guy," Jonas heard his father say before he left the room. Then the screen went blank. The Giver turned to him. Quite calmly, he related, "When the Speaker notified me that Rosemary had applied for release, they turned on the tape to show me the process. There she was--my last glimpse of that beautiful child--waiting. They brought in the syringe and asked her to roll up her sleeve.

"You suggested, Jonas, that perhaps she wasn't brave enough? I don't know about bravery: what it is, what it means. I do know that I sat here numb with horror. Wretched with helplessness. And I listened as Rosemary told them that she would prefer to inject herself.

"Then she did so. I didn't watch. I looked away." The Giver turned to him. "Well, there you are, Jonas. You were wondering about release," he said in a bitter voice.

Jonas felt a ripping sensation inside himself, the feeling of terrible pain clawing its way forward to emerge in a cry.

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