

YOUNGBLOODS

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BRAND-NEW

Before they start, the doctors put me in a coma—it's safer that way.

Then they turn me into someone new.

They take out my bones, replace them with unbreakable alloys and spacecraft-hull ceramics. The muscles that I worked so hard to build are stripped away, whipcords of smart plastic threaded in their place.

The surgeons give me tougher skin, dotted with reservoirs of healing nanos. My nervous system is retrained; my reflexes honed to the flitting speed of insect wings.

They ramp up my pain threshold, extinguish all my fears, paint a calm landscape over my grief. My heartbeat is steadied to a slow, undeviating march, except when I need it rampant.

I get a new face—not the one I was born with, but mine alone. My twin sister no longer needs a body double. She has a whole city to protect her now, an army of her own. And I don't want to see Rafia of Shreve in the mirror anymore.

She killed Col, the boy I loved.

Besides, my new crew likes to fly under the radar. The last thing we need is another famous face to hide.

I step from the surgery tank a new person. Faster and stronger than I've ever been. Less breakable, more dangerous. Someone the world has never seen before.

I'm Special now.

Just like the rest of Tally Youngblood's crew.

Dear Little Shadow,

I hope this ping finds you. I hope the others have too.

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, I'm still missing you.

The last three months have been hard. I'm free of him, and Shreve is finally mine. But without my little shadow beside me, none of it feels real. Everything I've ever wanted is finally in my hands, and you aren't here to share it.

You were supposed to protect me forever, not run away.

I always thought that once Dad was gone, Shreve would fix itself. But it seems more broken even day.

The free cities were happy to help destroy him, but they've been slow to help us rebuild. They all know who I really am and what I did—Diego's troops recorded what happened that night—so they make me beg and barter for aid.

They'd be more obliging if you were here beside me.

I was wrong to steal your name, I know. But I needed that extra distance from the old days. The citizens need continuity, a familiar face, but also an excuse to go on loving me.

You were the perfect option.

Trust me—I'm paying for my deception. It was fun when I only had to fool some rebels in the wild. But running a city is much trickier.

I have to be both of us at once.

Candid and crafty. Deadly and wise.

Victim and hero.

Because I am the hero in this story, little sister—there was no choice. Throwing that knife was the only way to save our city.

I'm not sorry that I did it, only that it hurt you so much.

And that it was *him* forcing me to hurt you. Just like when we were littlies, and I had to pretend you weren't real.

Back then, I never forgot you were hiding in our room, waiting for me to free you. When the rest of the world didn't know you existed, I held you dear.

It was *you* I was saving that night from his bomb, more than anyone else.

Don't hold me guilty for our father's last crime.

—Rafia of Shreve