THE RECIEVERS – BY PATRICK CAULFIELD

Every morning, Jonas woke up knowing exactly what he was supposed to know. The memories of yesterday, his childhood, and the happiest moments of his life had been erased, leaving behind only the knowledge required to live a peaceful life. It was the way their community had always worked, and nobody questioned it because nobody remembered anything different.

There's one exception. Jonas's community is highly susceptible to geohazards. When major natural disasters strike, everyone's memories are temporarily restored. They would suddenly remember disasters from the past, along with the knowledge of how to survive. After the danger had passed, the memories would be erased once again, preventing the trauma that comes with tragedy. Jonas had never experienced receival of memory, but he knew it would come. Like a feeling, rather than an event.

Then, one afternoon, the ground began to shake. At first, Jonas thought it was just a tremor. Rapidly, the ground beneath his feet began to shift unpredictably, vibrating the community aggressively. The sharp shatter of glass windows masked the screams of fear, as the population descended into complete chaos. Buildings groaned as people flooded the streets in distress and bewilderment. Jonas swiveled his gaze toward Fiona. Tense, the eye contact spoke louder than words, with both of them expecting to suddenly remember what to do.

Nothing came.

"They should be here by now." Fiona muttered, though hurting to say.

"I know." Jonas replied, his voice barely audible.

Panic spread throughout the community. People ran without direction, desperately searching for somewhere safe, but nobody knew where to go; like a beehive without a queen bee. Sirens began to wale across the society. An unmistakable smell of dusty debris filled the air, along with a growing atmosphere of ash and soot encroaching each and every crevice. They had spent their entire lives depending on memories they had never been allowed to keep. Abruptly, a deafening crack came from behind the pair. Jonas turned just in time to see part of a building collapse.

"FIONA!"

He reached for her, but the crowd pushed them apart. Jonas stumbled through the street as the crashing structure exhaled soot in sets of copious clouds.

“Jonas!” He heard her scream. Then, everything went silent. The earthquake had stopped. Jonas stood frozen, staring at the ruins where Fiona had disappeared. He waited for somebody to tell him what to do, but nobody could.

Then, the memories came back. All at once, he remembered everything. He remembered the evacuation shelters beneath the town hall. He remembered the safest routes through the community, and the warnings of the exact building that fell on Fiona. A wave of guilt hit Jonas like a freight train. He remembered Fiona. He remembered that with the knowledge he has now, he could’ve saved her life. Around him, people began to burst out crying just as Jonas did, as they received their memories.

The next morning, the Chief Elder announced that all memories would be erased again. Everyone smiled with relief, but Jonas didn’t. He finally understood that forgetting hadn’t protected them. It had taken Fiona from him. And for the first time, Jonas wished he could remember everything.