

Alpha Kael

THREE

~Jada

Seeing this is making me shy away from my initial excitement.

The facility is imposing, a building behind the main office scaling larger than any other. The plaster cladding is an ash grey, the windows tinted dark and reflective. The office is slightly warmer, manicured gardens consumed by small topiary line a gravel footpath up to the main doors. The other buildings are similar, with more windows. But outside the ajar car door, despite the cold atmosphere, birds chatter and cherry blossoms from the drive sweeten the air.

“Inside, we will have your other contract ready for you to sign if you are willing,” Prior says, as I nervously slide out of the car, leaving the plush seats of the SUV behind. “And then we will proceed from there.”

I follow her as she abnormally strides along the gravel in her heels, leading me through the front door.

My assumptions were that this is an office. But there is no reception desk, no manicured lady or short sofas partnered with sleek coffee tables and lush green pot plants. Instead it’s a blank room with charcoal coloured carpet and white wash walls. The room folds to the left into a hallway lined with doors. Prior ignores the doors in front of us, and leads us down the hallway.

“If you want to leave, you can,” Prior tells me, not even bothered to glance over her shoulder to look at me. “Before you sign the contract.”

The flatness of her tone tells me that once this contract is signed, there’s no way out. And that makes me nervous. So much so that the walls seem smaller than they are as she leads me into a square, closed off room with a large one way mirror I can’t see behind. Someone is watching me on the other side. It sets the fine hairs on the back of my neck standing up.

The room only has a sturdy metal plated desk in the middle which reflects the harsh light from above it, sided by two chairs where myself and Prior sit.

I’m cold. An air conditioner smoothly berates my skin with brittle air. I didn’t have time to pack. I didn’t have time to shoulder on a cardigan before I left. Could this moment get any worse?

I surprise myself, waiting patiently for Prior to inform me on what I’m here for. These people won’t be pushed. They have an agenda that they will stick to, whether I press them or not. So I wait, rapping my bitten finger nails on the metal surface as Prior pulls a contract from her

briefcase, setting it in front of me with a blue ballpoint pen. This contract is thicker by a few extra papers.

“You can read the fine lines, or I can explain to you how these next few weeks may go,” Prior offers. I swallow nervously, glancing down at the words which jumble up in an utter mess before my eyes. I would much rather hear it from Prior, so I can question her if necessary.

“Go ahead,” I murmur.

Prior glances at the reflective mirror before she starts speaking. “As you know, this is a competition. You will be placed in a sect to compete. There are four sects containing ten different people, who have been selected for the same programme as you. Only two will be offered the opportunity at the end. The eliminated will be escorted to the prisons where they will remain.”

My throat goes uncomfortably dry. I knew that would be my fate regardless, however, the idea of going seems now repulsive. I don't expect to win, but I also hope that I don't get sent back. A part of me wants to run away.

“What does the end entail?” I question, my voice impassive and soft. My tact has changed. I'm simply curious and slightly anxious.

“Working for Alpha Kael, of course. Ever heard of Silents?”

I freeze. I have heard of Silents, however, I never believed in them. Sure, we never heard much from Kael, but believing he has a sect of Silent's that defend him, that obey his every wish willingly, seems absurd. Girls back at the institute used to gossip, saying they had seen them sneaking around, slinking through the shadows. Some would whisper that they knew one personally, or perhaps their long distance boyfriend was one. I always rolled my eyes and turned my head the other way.

Sitting here, staring at Prior's steely eyes, there's no joke. There's no lie. And when I glance down at the contract, I see the Alpha's name, and the word Silent. An offering...for me to become one.

“What does being a Silent entail?” I ask. My voice is hoarse, so I clear my throat. The sound rings loudly, shocking me into a freezing reality. What have I gotten into?

Prior gives me a tight smile, but I see some kind of sympathy there. Perhaps I should regret signing the first contract. Perhaps I should have pushed away. But no, I shouldn't have. Otherwise I would be living a life as a prison wardens slave. Perhaps I could have escaped, but where would I go? I have nothing in my life anymore. Nothing but this opportunity, with a thin slice of success at the end.

“You'll find that out later. It's not something you can be informed of, but something you find out,” she tells me, to which I strongly refrain from rolling my eyes. I should have seen that

coming. I'm not sure how keen I am to find it out. I would much rather know with certainty what I'm getting into.

"How does the competition work?" I ask, fingertips smearing across the metal table, which was once immaculate. "Are there judges?"

"Kael will make the final decisions, since they are his Silents. However, he has many trusted associates who he may consult in if necessary. Those who inform and train you also have a say, although it's minor," Prior tells me. Hearing the word training has the compression in my chest easing.

I'm not going in this blind. Hopefully.

"Explain the process to me."

Prior considers my uneasy demand. "You'll train, with your sect. And compete against them. If you make it far enough, you can start competing against the other sects. Remember, there are only two winners."

I so badly want to beg her for more information. What will I be doing as a Silent? Will I even want to be one in the end? I've heard almost nothing about Kael other than whispered rumours and the uncommon television appearance, which would leave more questions than answers. Sure I snuck around the halls back at the institute at night, but being an assassin sounds unreasonable.

"And what happens if I'm eliminated? Or anyone else?" I question. "Is that it? It's all over?"

Prior seems grim. "You'll be sent to your initial arrangements. Since no university or secondary school selected you for their programme, you'll be sent on default to the prisons. A warden will assign you from there."

I already knew this, I just wanted to hear it from someone else. I need to win this, or at least try to. Maybe then I'll have a chance to escape, or at least lead a life above ground.

Prior decides she had enough talking for the day, and with anticipation and fear in my stomach, I sign away at the contract, understanding that from here out, there's nothing that I can do. She takes the paper, nods at the reflective mirror and tucks it into her briefcase. It's a sign of finality. My life previously is over.

"I'll take you to your room. You'll be living on the same floor as a few of the others in your sect. We advise staying in your room for tonight, your dinner will be brought up to you. We believe it helps those settle in if they have time to themselves," Prior explains, leading me out of the enclosed room back into the hallway.

She continues down the corridor, and out a glass door at the end. We walk a small gravel path to another building, which she pops open, leading me inside.

The main floor has a kitchen and dining area that reminds me of where I used to live. However, it's much more modern and I can practically see my reflection in the polished linoleum floor. I have hardly enough time to delight in the commodities I would get my hands on tomorrow, before Prior whisked me up winding stairs.

The carpet in the hallway is a dark maroon spotted with navy blue print. The door we stroll past are made of solid dark wood, hopefully blocking out enough sound for me to get sleep tonight. That doesn't seem like an issue, though, considering the fact that I can hear my own footsteps on the plush carpet.

Prior finds my room and ushers me in, placing a key in my palm.

It's not significant. In fact, it's almost identical to what I had at the institute. A single bed with a metal frame pressed against the wall, white linen sheets pulled over; crisp and precise. A mahogany bedside table hugs the bed's side, a chest of drawers to match. It's all very basic, I notice, as I brush my fingers through the thick dust that rests upon the surface of my desk, the three floating shelves above it sharing a similar aesthetic.

"The last student here was the first to be eliminated last round," Prior tells me. "Thought you might like to know."

Great.

"Report to the dining room by sunrise tomorrow. We removed the curtains off your window so you won't sleep in. Good luck," she tells me, before she shuts the door behind her.

I stand in the middle of the room, uncomfortable. I'm not sure how much I like it here, and it's only the first day. And I have so much left to know. What my schedule is, what the training entails. I'm walking in blind, which was what I was most afraid of.

Falling back a few steps, I sit on my bed. What have I done?

I can't go back.