

Alpha Kael

SEVEN

~Jada

The next day, no one spoke.

It seemed as though there was a shared understanding that we wouldn't mentioned what happened last night. Whatever the interrogation was in relation to, it included our greatest insecurities. They targeted my family. The one thing I have. Or had. Everyone else seemed just as troubled, stares glazed over, lips tight shut.

By the swollen black bruises on Aric's face the next morning, accompanied by the seeping cuts plastered over by thin strips of gauze, he has something to hide. Something that required him to be so stubborn.

"Anyone know what this training is going to entail?" Dax asks. I like Dax. He seems kind, thus far. His eyes are so gentle and warm. I hope I can trust him throughout this.

It's Ace who shrugs. "Something demeaning I'm sure."

To be honest, I have no idea what today has in store. Kael is such an enigmatic figure, whatever is going on within his mind is unknown to all of us. If it's anything like last night, I'm not sure how I'll cope. I expect physical obstacles, no physiological warfare. If that was how Kael wanted to get inside our heads, it has worked. There isn't a single one of us that isn't victim to that slight quiver of apprehensive fear.

"Well we are here for a reason right?" Aric grunts, picking the crusts off his toast. "I'm going to win, because whatever else is out there for me, it can't be worse than this."

Those are brave words coming from the one who is sporting the harshest wounds from his own stubbornness. He's in to win it, and most likely will be my biggest competitor. Despite this, I'm not worried. If I start caring about what other people are doing, I'll be doomed for failure.

"If none of us win, then two others from the different secs will. We should work together to beat them, at least," Shana proposes.

I nod in agreement, hoping the rest would catch onto her idea. No one has time to truly discuss this before Niko wanders over to collect us. It seems as if everyone is too scared to speak around our trainer as we silently walk toward the gymnasium. One of us were surely interrogated by him last night. I make some think of the Silent that I saw. The sympathy in his eyes...

Something about him is eerily familiar. I'm unsure of what it is, but it's as if I have seen those eyes before. Hopefully I'll see him again so I can figure out what's going on. Until then, I need to focus on our training.

Once inside the gymnasium, Niko lines us up, squeezing me between Ace and Dax.

I would have hated to be the victim of Niko's infliction last night. Those eyes are hardened from years of experience. He may be young, but he's seen more than any of us combined. Whatever he wanted from his victim last night, he would have gotten. And something tells me it was Aric.

"The key to being a Silent is to obtain information without it being known to the subject. This is so essential, we get this out of the way right now in order to find the weakest links to eliminate out of the competition," Niko explains.

A part of me is relieved. Spying is something I used to do a lot in the institute. Mainly on Cunningham to figure out what I could use against her. It's also a relief this isn't a physical test yet. All I can do it run fast.

"You'll be given a name of a fellow competitor and your job is to find something out about them that no one else knows," Niko explains.

For a moment, my stomach flips.

I'm less worried about finding something out about someone else, but about what people find out about me. I broke a huge law in the Discipline Pack, which got my parents out in prison. The people here may not be the best people in the world, however, how will they treat me when they find out I evaded authority for an entire year.

"You cannot contact that person, otherwise you will be eliminated immediately. It takes cunning and sneak. If you don't have either of these things, then you're not worth my time," Niko says calmly. I shiver at the tone of his voice. It's dismissing. He doesn't care about us at all.

Before we could leave again, he's off talking again. "I would suggest using your time aptly. How you do so might determine how long you last here."

After being told we were not going to receive the names until later tonight, we dispersed.

Everyone still seems slightly on edge of each other, so we all walk awkward amounts a part. Baylee hangs back, apparently having a question to ask Niko. Shana slinks up beside me without me even noticing as we walk back to our building. I jump, turning to see her and her wicked smile.

"You know why Baylee's hanging back?" She asks, raising an eyebrow in a way I can only describe as troublesome. "It's so obvious she wants the trainers attention."

I try to act uninterested, not wanting on anyone's bad side. "Perhaps she didn't make sense of something he said. Or she's trying to get on his good side."

"Good side, that's an understatement," Shana says. She has a way of laughing that makes me nervous, as if she's hiding something at all times, and it ridiculing me for not knowing. I don't despise her for it, but I make a mental note not to get too close in case what she's hiding is something devious. I'm secretly hoping her name isn't written on my piece of paper.

I shrug dismissively. "I wouldn't think about it too much. She can do as she pleases."

"Trying to get into one of those Silent's pants could spell the end of this competition for us," she tells me, to which I have to refrain from rolling my eyes. It's an over exaggeration. "She's pretty, and any guy would be foolish not to get with her when she's offering it."

Something about the way she says it seems odd, but I brush it off. Niko would never want to be with one of the competitors. There's no way. He has other things to deal with rather than students who just left school.

Before we reach our residential building, the field I was dragged onto last night comes into view. It's littered with obstacles, and in the middle, stands a group of ten people.

Another sect.

"Well would you look at that," Shana says cunningly, raising her hand to shield her eyes from the clear. "Another set of competitors. Only these guys all look scrawny. We will win for sure."

I can't see too much with the distance, but what I can see is a group of people all staring at a Silent in front of them. They are petrified, just being told what is needed from them. Something tells me whatever they are doing has no relation to our task. But that's no what I'm focusing on.

That Silent's build is familiar. Broad shoulders, straight back. Unless I'm dreaming, it's my interrogator from last night. I knew he worked as a trainer here, just for another sect.

A dangerous thought seeps into my head. I need to find out who he is.

Shana continues off toward the building but I trail back, staring at him. His back is to me, facing the group of competitors who look like they could cower in fear with one scare. He's intimidating, I remember that much. Perhaps not nearly as much as the Alpha, but he put an uncomfortable shiver down my spine.

After dinner, I decided to head up to my room early. We would find out paper on our desks and the competition would truly begin. Plus, I needed away from that group. They were too much to handle.

Closing my door and locking it, I turn around.

There lies a piece of paper on the desk, my lamp light shining directly onto it. Swallowing apprehensively, I make my way toward it, picking it up between my fingertips. The paper almost seems more fragile than normal.

I fold it open, and there are a set of instructions plastered on it in handwritten ink.

Dear student.

You will be given the name of a competitor, who requires your full attention. You must find something out about them, that no one else knows. The darker the secret, the more likely your chance of being in the next round will raise.

Your strategy must be your own, with a few rules to guide it.

- Your subject must not know you're targeting them
- You may not directly ask questions
- You may not ask questions for other people
- You may not speak to any else about who your target it
- You may not request a different target

The name of your target is on the back of this paper. Good luck.

Niko.

Sighing deeply, I read it over a few more times. It would be foolish to forget these rules. Only after I have it ingrained in my mind, do I flip it over, revealing the name on the other side.

As my eyes lay upon the name, I gasp, the paper fluttering from my fingertips.

Because written on that paper was a name I could have never guessed.

