

The Boost

24 hours... That was 10 minutes ago. Now 23 hours and 50 minutes left to live. To prepare me to die, to say my goodbyes, get my affairs in order. Whatever those affairs may consist of at the age of 15. Looking beyond the window, the rest of my neighborhood has retreated into their houses, automatic blinds sliding down, the driverless cars pulling into garages. 10 years ago, a scientist discovered the key to reverse aging, to keep you young. People flooded to receive the creation of the scientist, who dubbed it the Boost. The government investigated the process and effects of this new "boost" and found that the scientist was using large quantities of human blood to create the serum. From this revelation and the need for blood, a monthly lottery emerged. You put your name in the lottery, no taxes. The more times you put your name in, the more benefits your family gets. But, if your name is drawn, then your blood will be used to make the Boost for the new recipient. The serum requires so much blood, they say it's better to just kill you so you don't suffer. The president calls it an honor to be chosen, we know it's nothing of the sort. The Boost recipients are all taken to California, to live a glamorous long life, cut off from this dreary world forever. This month, I was chosen. My name was drawn from the bowl. My name was on the slip of paper so delicately written in cursive, pulled out by long, thin fingers and read-aloud for the whole country to hear from the rosy red lips of the vice president, "Kiara Sterling". It had to have been a mistake. I've never entered my name once.

A tap on my shoulder sends me flying back into reality. "You better start packing", my best friend says next to me. I glanced over, surprised, and honestly hurt, I thought she'd be mad or sad. Ingrid has been in my life since we were born. We were friends before we could talk. All this year, I've been there for her, when she cried, I dried her tears and made her smile. Her mother passed away so her main source of income and parental guidance had been compromised. After all that, I'm going to die, and she has nothing to say. I nod, dazed, and in awe as I head to my room. As I look around, purple walls, posters, and pictures of Ingrid and I as kids tacked up everywhere, and I realize I'll never see this again. The thought is so startling, I stumble back. I'll never taste M&M's again. I'll never open a present on Christmas Day again. My hands begin to sweat, my vision blurring on the edges. I need to get out and I need to get out fast. Instinct takes over and I'm running, climbing out the window and not once do I look back. My mind is blank, my body moving of its own accord. My chest hurts, a hand reaching inside of me squeezing my lungs, no air coming in. 1, 2, 3, 4... count, breathe. I put my hands on my knees and slowly the world stops spinning. I look around and realize I've made it to the city center. The capitol building sparkles ahead of me, people walking in and out. Somewhere inside, the president is meeting with the Boost recipient. That person, that rich, vile, person, is taking my life away. Tears spring to my eyes, I'm going to die. I walk fast, head down, I don't want anyone to realize who I am. I don't want to feel the eyes downturned with pity, the mothers hiding their children, so they don't have to grow up remembering me, the girl who

died. I don't want to see the frowns and hear the whispers when they realize who I am. They all know who I am. I'm going to die. My thoughts are swirling in my head, everything moving so fast, I don't notice the boy standing in front of me, stopped against a wall. I run face-first into a coat. I reach out and steady myself against the wall.

"Oh shoot! I'm so sorry! I didn't see you there, Ummm are you okay? Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry! You were just there, and dang it was like hitting a wall..." I know I'm rambling. There's a slow chuckle making me glance up at the person I so rudely ran into. He's tall, maybe 6 foot, tan skin, and dark hair. He looks like a kid who definitely was the most popular in school.

"That's ok", he says, still laughing. "Does it really feel like hitting a wall? My workouts are paying off" I blush hard, my rambling didn't go unnoticed. I chuckle despite my embarrassment; his laugh is contagious. His smile widens. He speaks again and this time I notice the hint of a Spanish accent when he says his name. "I'm Xander, and you are?"

"Kiara", I reply. "Sterling". I watch as his eyebrows draw together in thought. He looks at me, confusion flickering over his face.

"Where do I know that name from?" he asks. "Do I know you?" My heart slowly sinks. The morning's events catch up to me and I wait for him to realize that I'm the girl whose name was drawn on live television. He's silent. What do I have to lose?

"Well, I got picked this morning", I start, my voice is hard and chilling. "I'm going to die tomorrow". Based on his clothes and jacket, both designers, he doesn't need to enter his name. Then again, neither did I.

"Jeez, wow. I'm so sorry", he blows out a hard breath, "how many times did you enter?" There it is. The million-dollar question.

"I didn't." I clench my fists. "I didn't even put it in once but somehow my name got picked out."

This time, I don't have to look up. He bends down to my level. "You didn't put your name in." It's not a question, but I nod anyway. He nods again and starts pacing. The only sounds in the alley are his expensive shoes hitting the brick as he continues to pace. He stops all of a sudden and turns to me so fast, I don't have time to flinch. "If you didn't enter, who says you have to die?" My eyes widen.

“What? What do you mean?” I’m confused, what is wrong with this guy?

“Well, why did you get chosen? Maybe we can stop this.” Almost as if he’s asking me.

“I don’t know! My own best friend didn’t even seem to care. But there is nothing I can do, right?” I ask, not expecting an answer, my eyes burning.

He’s smiling but it's more tentative now. “Well, maybe there is...” He says as he extends his hand out towards me.

Is he giving me a chance to see another day, to taste another M&M, another chance to live? I’ll take it.