

Alpha Kael

ONE

~Jada

I anticipated graduation until this point. Now I want nothing to do with it.

On the other side of the thick stage curtain, mumbling and chatter ensues between our potential scouters and family who came to watch the ceremony. On this side, girls prance around, dusting makeup onto each other's face, smoothing their dresses and pinning their hair into ridiculous patterns on their head.

Their hopes are high. Beyond this curtain, university liaison officers await, and scouters keep their eye out for the best potential student. They rehearse their speeches, full of their achievements and future aspirations.

I haven't planned anything. Here I sit, slouched in my seat, still dressed in my uniform, rather than the formal wear the rest of the girl's sport.

Mistress Cunningham has us all line up by alphabetical order. I'm right in the middle, between an aspiring lawyer and business major. According to this set up, the guests on the other side will be getting a very authentic, simple half time show.

I hate this.

Mistress Cunningham trots along the line, kicking the feet of girls who are in the wrong position, straightening jackets and pulling hair over girl's shoulders. She doesn't touch me. She doesn't even look at me. She knows I stand no chance beyond this curtain. Each of these girl's mistresses will be approached later on, offered a place in numerous universities.

"Remember girl's," Mistress Cunningham says from the side of stage, the unflattering amount of blush she applied this morning glowing merrily, "smile!"

The curtains are suddenly lugged open, revealing a crowd of awaiting people. Immediately I can discern the scouters from the parents. Some families wave at the girls on stage, gushing and whispering to each other. Scouters stand, clipboards in hand, jotting down their initial impressions.

This is like an auction. Of human lives.

Mistress Cunningham saunters on stage, microphone in hand. She stands almost directly in front of me in a rather petty maneuver. I'm sure she has such a glorious smile on her face as she

addresses the turnout. Her career relies on the girls upon this stage. The higher tier schools they are introduced to, the better she looks.

“Good morning and welcome everyone,” she says, voice puffed from her entrance to the stage. She should spend more time working out then harassing her students. “As you can see, we have some lovely woman upon this stage who are all looking for a place within your university.”

I glare at her back.

“If you look in your program, you can see who each girl belongs to. If you are interested, please speak to their Mistress after each have spoken,” she continues, motioning across the stage. At least her large body shields me from the spotlight, which is already making me start to sweat atop my brow.

Cunningham says some more words, attempting to come off charming and desirable before she hobbles off stage.

The bad taste in my mouth only increases as the glimmering halo from the spotlight flickers to the first girl. She doesn't freeze – she's been preparing.

She confidently steps forward. “My name is Brenna Aaliyah, and I'm aspiring to receive a place in a prestigious law school. I'm worthy, because this year, I have achieved....”

It doesn't take me long to zone out. Perhaps I'm jealous, but seeing this makes me uncomfortable. I've known Brenna for a long time, and have no doubt she will succeed with that winning smile, brilliant confidence and overwhelming good looks that could get her a place despite her grades.

The spotlight moves down the line, increasing the dampness on my palms.

A few girls stutter under the pressure. One even leaves in a fit of tears, crumpling with the weight of her failure. It's not pleasant for the rest of us to see, and I can feel the girls next to me – once proud and confident – tense anxiously.

By the time it reached me, I knew exactly what to say.

“Hello everyone, my name is Jada Michaels, although that probably means nothing to any of you, since I highly doubt you will be picking me for anything,” I exclaim, taking a confident step forward from my place.

There's a stunned silence.

“Now, as for my aspirations, I would say my biggest is to get as far away from this place. That's all.”

The silence stretches awkwardly. No one moves. No one scribbles with interest onto their clipboards. No family member leans over to whisper proudly to the other. They all just stare, unsure of how to act. I'm proud of that. I made my point, and now I'll be one of the few left, lingering around waiting to be collected by a prison representative.

The other girl beside me gapes at me, as the spotlight shifts to her. She swallows uncomfortably, before she nervously starts her speech. At least she can't do worse than me.

When the ceremony closed off, some girls went to meet with their families, others to pack their things, and some waited with their mistresses for news.

Not wanting to hear the overbearing excitement of girls finding out their dream school had accepted them, I trudge up to my room, to pack.

However, Mistress Cunningham cuts me off before I have the chance.

"My office," she snaps, "now."

Great. If I wasn't so exhausted after that whole debacle, I would have protested. I already know my fate, and a lecture for my behavior on stage is not something I'm excited for. If someone could make my day much worse, it's Mistress Cunningham.

She leads me to her office, which is unsurprisingly empty. She closes the door quickly behind me.

She's stressed, I can tell. Someone must have mentioned how uncomfortable my performance made them. And now she is left with an embarrassing liability on her hands. Maybe even the prisons won't want me to work for them. It won't be long until I'm a cellmate like the rest of them.

"Look, would a sorry suffice?" I ask the pacing Mistress, as I take my usual seat. She pauses, staring at me as if I just spoke badly against our perfect Alpha. "Honestly, you should have seen it coming."

She blinks a few times, then shakes her head. "That isn't my problem."

I'm surprised. Then why does she look so ruffled? Perhaps she found out that the prisons won't take me and she has to keep me for another year. There is a petrified expression on her face speaks volumes as she recalls the past several years of torment.

"Then what is?"

She takes a seat at her desk, before she buries her hands in her hair. I'm wary, unsure of why she is acting that way. She should be out there, smiling and greeting scouts, listening to them offer a space to some of the girls in her sect. Instead she sits her, staring at me like I'm a foreign alien.

“I was approached by someone who is interested in you. They are willing to give you an extremely rare opportunity,” she tells me, as if she can’t believe her words herself. “They are in relation to our Alpha, Jada. Do you understand that?”

I stare at her blankly, not saying a word. Is she pranking me?

“They called and someone from higher up is coming here to speak to you,” she tells me. She on her feet again, shuffling over to me. My mouth is agape while I try process the information.

“I don’t get it,” I breathe. “Why me?”

Mistress Cunningham attempts to straighten my uniform, brushing at my hair. I dismiss her, reeling back. This is overwhelming news, and I don’t need her trying to make me prettier for some stranger. I was so convinced I was going to be a prison wardens slave, so to hear this is...I barely know what to do with myself.

“Flutter your eyelashes, they are nice and long. Your eyes will have to be your selling point,” Cunningham tells me.

“I don’t think I can do this,” I tell her. Part of me is so sick with nerves I could throw up. The other half of me is curious, and wants to stay to figure out why they took interest in me.

Cunningham looks alarmed at my words.

She grabs my hands, the gentlest touch I have received in a long time. “Listen, Jada. I don’t understand why they are interested in you. I won’t lie to you. But this is the first time anyone in Alpha Kael’s management has ever taken interest in one of my students. You need to do this.”

“What do they want with me?” I ask. I’m attempting to ignore the fact that she is using me for her own gain.

“I’m not sure,” she says, steely eyes clouding over with confusion. “But it must be great if our Alpha is involved with it. Tell me you’ll take the opportunity.”

Before I can say anything, there is a knock on her office door.

We exchange glances, before Cunningham stands, moving to open the door. I turn to look over my shoulder, as a very prompt woman walks in the door. And I know for sure, the future I planned for myself may not what Fate had in mind.