

Justice McCray

Underneath it All

I

We were taught that the women live in a separate camp, but I know about the above world. To know that the world does not end at the height of high fluorescent lights is exhilarating. None of the other Theta males believe me, though their intellect vastly succeeds my own. They think me to be delusional, and rarely engage in my rants regarding the Golden World above. I often ponder over my placement, but with simple logic I am able to conclude that my body is not physically developed enough to be an Alpha, and Dod informed me that the Betas are deformities. I may be an outcast amongst my clan, however, my knowledge supersedes that of any non-Theta male.

I find high levels of stimulation amidst exchanging dialogue with Alpha 192. He is the only Alpha in our camp of laboratory jockeys. He does not understand his role among Thetas, and struggles to fit in. In this aspect, we are alike, and thusly close associates. Every work day we pair together to reach the innovation quota. His brute strength and muscular structure provide me with power and extra hands I need to develop large ideas. Our greatest collaborative endeavor resulted in my creation of the multi-matter holographic projector. We only developed the prototype, but I'm eager to discover its practical applications once the final product is brought back to camp. Most Thetas now work on tubular transportation models, which are futile considering the entire length of our compound is walkable within two timespheres. Often my inventions surpass the expectations of our circuit leader, Dod, which must be why she has taken such an interest in me.

Today, she is taking me off camp. It's breeding day, and I take no particular interest in splitting my genes with a Fe-male, in the attempt of fertilization through personal contact. Breeding Day has been a monthly ritual for the camp for as long as I remember. Never once have I seen any outcome from this endeavor, so I find it illogical to participate. This is the first month I am of age, but with the assistance of my superior, I will not be subject to the Pickening.

"Are you excited Thet?" Alpha 192 addresses me as *Thet*. It was an alias Dod conceived. I have given much thought to her name being an alias as well, but the subject has not presented itself in our shared dialogue.

"What fathomable reason could I possibly possess for increased levels of dopamine?"

"Translation please?" My intellectual superiority to the Alphas is a curse, should one take fancy in the beliefs of a supernatural existence among our own.

"What reason do I have for excitement?" I repeat.

"It's your first breeding day bro, you're gonna get picked, licked, and maybe even kicked." He laughed at the internal rhyme in his dialogue. Our morning walks to the camp's banquet hall tend to generate non sequitur discussion.

"Alpha 192, what if I told you I know a way to avoid breeding?"

"Bro, it's Alph," he said. "Why would you wanna do that? I promise you, it will be the most stimulating experience of your life."

He knows large words. Intriguing. "I'm leaving the Theta camp tonight."

"How are you gonna get passed the wall?"

"I have a confidant on the outside. You can embark with me if you'd like."

"Why would I want to leave? Life couldn't be more perfect here. I work, I get fed, I sleep, and I have fun."

“Which component of your dull existence would you consider fun.”

He nudges me and smiles. “Breeding day.”

“Rumor has it that you have failed to procreate with your pickener,” I said. “Are you not threatened by the thought of being transferred to the Beta camp?”

“Thet, what Cordell and I have is amazing. Her body is exactly like mine, but her hair is longer and her face is different.”

Alpha 192- Alph, has vast, protruding pectorals that may resemble a firmer, Fe-male bosom, however, he looks nothing like Dod. I am certain the Fe-male anatomy differs in multiple places, but Alph’s accomplished physique would be incomplete without a milligram of narcissism. I have no further desire to engage in this discussion.

We step in line at the banquet hall and wait for morning nourishment to be served. My meal is provided on a metal serving tray bearing a greater weight than usual. Proportionally, it seems the same, but upon further examination, today’s food content is significantly greater. Someone must be conspiring against me. Larger food intake is certain to make me lethargic, slowing down my attempt to escape. I refrain from consumption.

“Thet, why aren’t you eating?” Alph says. “You’re gonna need the extra calories today.”

“You fool.” I take his tray. “Can you not comprehend this intricate ploy to weaken us?”

“Give me my tray back.”

“Of course, your primitive brain cannot comprehend the inner workings of a conspiracy. I know you don’t understand, but I’m removing your daily sustenance for your safety.”

“Give me.” Alph squeezes his utensils. “Back.” He drops them and places his palms flat on the dining surface. “My breakfast.”

“How can I expect you to understand?” I chuckle, surprising myself with the humor of the situation. “I mean you are, after all, just an Alpha.”

Alph snatches his tray and with a pull back, I see the forward thrust of the chrome as it nears impact on my face. I watch my morning meal fly behind Alph, and into Theta 461. The platter strikes my cheek, colliding with the thin wire stems of my glasses, knocking them to the ground. I follow.

I hear the mumbles of the other Thetas as I attempt to alleviate the burning pain by softly massaging the impacted area. I can feel the rapid clack of heels getting closer. It halts. Above the presence baring boots, two leg, significantly similar to bamboo in their shape and strength, shot up into a light blue lab coat. Let the plan commence.

“Alpha 192, you are in violation of protocol and on very thin ice. You are to return to your chambers at once.” Dod’s timing is impeccably flawless. I am truly brilliant for calling on her as an ally.

“But I haven’t eaten. This is an outrage.”

“You have been dismissed Alpha.” Dod towers over childish man, and her slender body casts an authoritative shadow that makes him cower.

I cannot comprehend procreating with any such creature.

“Theta 229, I will personally escort you to the superior medical camp. They will assess your injuries and determine the proper punishment for this Alpha’s reckless behavior.” Dod pulls me up and lifts my arm over her shoulder. I dangle and limp as she walks on. “Thetas, resume your nutrition intake.”

We leave the banquet hall and get into her vehicle. She inputs a twenty-seven-digit code into the dashboard and we depart. I wonder what it would be like to navigate a vehicle. Perhaps with such knowledge, I would not need the assistance of a female at all.

“That was a brilliant performance,” I say.

“Thet, the adulation belongs solely to you. Instigating Alph was pure genius.”

My intentions were not to antagonize my cohort, but who am I to deny glorification?

“We’re going to leave tonight, Thet.” Her interest in my escape intrigues me.

I can see the camp wall. I do not The vehicle accelerates as we draw nearer. “Dod.”

“I was born in Florida. We moved to the Capitol when my mother was elected. Back then, presidential terms lasted only eight years at most. I was a child when she started her term. None of this existed.”

“Dod, I find it highly illogical to reminisce when a fatal collision is imminent.”

“Florida is still a free state you know. The Maternultimatum failed, due to the area’s geological structure.”

“Dod, you need to recoordinate the vehicle.”

“If we lived in Florida, we could be together.”

I shake the handle of the vehicle doors and throw my body against it. Dod looks at me, her eyes perspiring.

Calculated impact in six seconds.

“We’re going to be together.”

II

“Amathy, what did I tell you about drinking before five?” I wish Xenx wouldn’t yell.

“Ma, wine tasting doesn’t count as daytime drinking.” I take a sip of my sauvignon blanc and mother snatches the bottle from my hand.

Bitch.

“It does if you’re tasting the whole bottle.”

“Hey.” I burp. “I was drinking from that.”

“Honestly, Amathy, you’re an embarrassment.”

“Yeah, but I’m your embarrassment.” I reach for the bottle in her hand and fall over.

“That’s okay. I was done with that anyway.”

“Why can’t you be more like your sister?” she says for the zillionth time.

“I was like her, but you told me I need to be more well-rounded.”

“I didn’t mean literally.”

I play my belly drum and laugh. “Well it’s a little too late to fix that now, isn’t it mother?”

“Forgo the formalities. When we’re at home, call me Xenx.”

“Maybe I just won’t call you at all.” That’s right. Walk away.

I know I’m not the world’s greatest daughter. They ran out of mugs at the craft store. Still, I’ve got more in common with mother than she knows. She will know. I should probably get off the floor.

“Come over to the kitchen and help me slice the rest of this cheese. I’m going to the cellar to chill another bottle for your party tonight.”

My party?

“Your sister’s going to be here any minute.”

“Cordell’s coming over?”

Xenx is in the cellar already. She heard me, but she goes to the cellar whenever she’s done with me. She spends most of her time at home in the cellar.

I cut the cheese.

The house trembles and the living room coffee table flips over, exposing a pit in the floor. I spit the hair out of my mouth blown in by the draft. Smoke puffs out of the floor and a tube follows. I hate the new tube transportation system, but not have as much as it’s supposed inventor.

“Amathy.” Her.

“You don’t need to yell.” She’s not yelling, I may just be drunk.

“Amathy, you’re bleeding.”

I’m not sober.

“Dod.” Right on time, Xenx. “How’s my most successful child.”

“Mother, Amathy cut herself. We need to help her,” Dod says.

“Go clean yourself up.” Xenx takes my knife and lobs a dish towel at me. I go into the living room and the Golden Child stays in the kitchen to talk to Her Royal Highness. The table is still on its side and one of the legs is cracked.

“I don’t agree with your methods, Xenx,” says Dod.

“I just need to know which camp you have arranged for Amathy’s first Pickening.”

“Amathy’s been assigned to the Theta camp.”

“Excellent. Knowing her, she’d choose an Alpha to breed with and if we want the matriarchy to continue...”

I can't stand that Dad thinks she can control my life. She's so full of herself with her smarts and her wit. I'm going to knock her down a peg. Maybe I'll even knock her down a flight of stairs.

"Are you ready?" Dad touches my shoulder. "Mother is going to meet us afterwards."

"Sure. Whatever." She takes my hand and pulls me into the tube. We go down and slide too quickly, like an over packed elevator.

"Are you okay sis?"

"Of course I am, why wouldn't I be?"

"You smell intoxicated."

You smell intoxicated.

"Also, you just regurgitated onto your shoes."

There is barf on my feet. And in my mouth. I don't know how that got there.

"Can I tell you a secret?"

I have barf, on my shoes.

"I'm leaving tonight, during the Pickening. While you chose your specimen for procreation, I'm running away. I've found the love of my life, Thet, and he's perfect in every way."

"What's a Thet?" I ask. Why is there barf on my shoe?

"Theta 229."

"What if I picken Theta 229?"

"He won't be there to picken."

"Why is that?"

The tube spits us out into some sort of lab. Dod rolls and stands up as if nothing's happened. What a bitch. I lay on the floor and a man in a white lab coat stands in front of me. At least, I think it's a man. I've never seen one in person. If he's the best to picken from, I rather not breed. Dod helps me up.

"Amathy, I would like to pleasure you with the acquaintance of Theta 229."

Pass.

"You two kinda look alike," I say.

"I am not concerned with physical appearance, so any similarities we have are entirely insignificant." He talks like her too. No wonder she loves him. "So you're from the above world?"

"Born and raised. We call it Washington." Even when I'm drunk I'm smart.

"This tube, it's some sort of portal to Washington?" Do all Thetas talk this much?

"That's enough Thet," Dod says. "I need you to remain static while I prepare Amathy for her first Breeding day. Will you be alright?"

"My accommodations are adequate," Thet says. "If that will be all, you may leave."

There's no sky down here. It's all chrome, rock, and red light. Dod takes me to her aerocar and after twelve minutes of silent drift, we arrive at the Theta camp. We hover through the holowall projection and slow down to a line of men in white lab coats. We stop, and the men circle around the floating car. They are mostly short and pudgy. Xenx must've put Dod up to this. They walk around us, making no impression at all. None of these guys are even cute.

"Stop."

I get out of the car, and Dod follows. I've never seen muscles like the ones that stand before me. This is no ordinary Theta.

"Alpha 192," Dod says. "Approach."

"Look at you," I say. I look. Never has anything been so perfectly sculpted. He stands over me like a palm tree, and I want his coconuts. "Alpha 192, can I call you Alph?"

"Alph."

"Alright, Alph," I say. "I picken you"

"I object," Alph says.

"You can't object," I say. "He can't object, can he, Dod?"

"Dod," he says. "You know Cordell has already pickened me."

"Cordell? So you mean to tell me my sister has been down here breeding but she can't ever visit me and Mom?" I grab Dod's coat. "If you don't let me have this, I'll-"

"Amathy." Dod brushes me off like some sort of brush. "Cordell and Alph are happy together. Maybe you should let them be."

"You always have to be right, don't you?" I push her back and watch her stumble. "Well today is my Breeding Day. This is my Pickening, and I picken Alph!" I reach to grab the Alpha's shirt and he pulls back. Grabbing nothing but air, I fall forward and onto the ground.

The Thetas started to run, and a stampede of pudgy men trample my arm.

"Dodyxl Clintstein." Xenx. Her aerocar id twice the size of Dod's. She stops the car a few yards to my side and pulls out a tied up Thet. "You let a male into the Capitol. Into our dwelling?"

"Thet," Dod says. "I thought I told you to stay put?" He hands start shaking. "Xenx, I love him, and you should too."

“You love me?” said Thet. “That seems highly illogical. What force would possibly inspire such unrequited emotion?”

“Listen to the boy,” Xenx says.

“You do love me, Thet,” Dod says. “I know you do.”

“You find solace in our similarities,” Thet says.

“He doesn’t love you, Dod,” Xenx says. “Let this go.”

“Of course he loves me. He’s my son.”

“Sons are a menace to our society, Dod,” Xenx says.

“That’s easy for someone with no sons to say.”

“Are you really that naive? Of course I know what it’s like to have a son.” Xenx pulls out a kitchen knife and presses it against Thet’s neck. “But I also know what must be done for the greater good. Everything I do, I do for the sake of the Matriarchy. Even if it means losing a son.”

“How could you?”

“I really thought you were the smart one, darling.”

I feel a foot press against my head. The pressure between the ground and the shoe is dizzying.

“Stop.” It’s Alph’s foot. “Unless you’re willing to lose a daughter.”