

Back to the Beginning

Lisa sat down against the furthest wall and rested her head against her drawn up knees, as the others voiced the questions stewing in her mind. She was concerned by the words of the figure, and disturbed by why it decided now of all times to show itself. Then there was the matter of what the other one said about Porter and James bringing "it" with them. What was it? Why did he seem so worried about it, and why did he disappear? Nothing was adding up. Then there was the matter of her body-swap with the creature when Blondie was experimenting on the body. It was possible Blondie knew more than she was letting on, but judging by her confusion when the creature addressed her, Lisa couldn't help but doubt the assumption. Then there was that man who continued to show up suddenly. She had no doubt that he knew something, and that something might be the key to their survival.

"Well, we're not getting anywhere with this right now, and you said the monsters were gone so let's get some sleep. I'm exhausted." Porter said, looking at Blondie, who for once wasn't looking her put-together self.

"You said you lost your gun somewhere along the way, we'll only have mine if-"

Porter patted her hip confidently, "I still have my blade. More importantly, we need to figure out who this Sim guy is and why they addressed him with concern... especially since when we found him, they were about to dissect him."

Blondie looked at Porter in confusion, "They were going to dissect him?"

Porter shrugged and answered, "Sure look that way by the tools and such. We saved him and that's where this whole clusterfuck started for the kid and I."

"That's interesting..."

"That they were going to dissect him?"

"No. That he can be pinned down. That's something I'm going to have to puzzle that out for a little bit. Hopefully I'll have some ideas when it's light outside."

Porter nodded and sighed, looking around the room saw James slumped against the wall, sleeping fitfully, and Lisa drawn up around her knees, and resting as well. Porter knew that of all of them, the soldier was the biggest enigma. There'd been hints throughout the time she was with them that she wasn't an average human like her and James-aside from his skeletal supports. Lisa was completely different: unnatural strength, and having put herself back together after she'd been ripped apart were things Porter was positive were just some of her mysteries.

As these thoughts floated around her mind, Porter felt her exhaustion weighing on her, she went to sleep easily.

Special Assignment

Lisa dreamed of her home. She hadn't seen it, or her family in a year. The battlefield was where she'd been assigned, to protect them both. When the Special Forces called their soldiers, there was no excuse for staying. The memories ran through her mind like a slideshow, lingering on every image, with words, emotions, and thoughts.

Lisa and her group stayed hidden, waiting for the cover of night and surveilling the enemy camp's headquarters. It was simple enough. Go in and neutralize their command. That's it. Then their allies-the other countries could go and do what it was they did best. Take over the place.

"Major..." Lisa turned and saw her second-in-command gesturing for her attention, as the sun set on the sandy grounds. "We should pull back for today."

Lisa looked at him incredulously, "What the fuck for? If you're scared ge-"

"That's not it, ma'am. I noticed my mods started malfunctioning, just a moment ago when I did a final sweep of the area."

An aircraft flew overhead, and drowned out his voice, but Lisa got the gist of it. "Anyone else have malfunctions?" A few others answered affirmatively.

"Should I call it in then and tell them we have to withdraw?" He asked, as the whole group waited for her answer.

"We may not have until nightfall then, especially if they're intentionally doing this. It might mean either they know we're here. Or more likely, they have intel on our specific modifications. Let's move out, and get this over with as soon as possible. We'll call it in after we do what we came to do."

Creeping up on the camp, Lisa's forces spread out and began neutralizing any lookouts that could alert the others, sweeping through silently, like death itself. Their blades silently and violently spilling the blood of their enemies until the camp ran bruise red with it. Finishing her last target in the war room, Lisa took stock of her surroundings- other than the five bodies bleeding out on the floor, the room was scant except for a map, a table and some chairs. Cleaning off her blade, Lisa walked around searching, and spotted some documents of interest. The others should be doing the same thing right about now in.

Looking through the documents, Lisa sat down in a chair, laying her blade on the table and looked through the documents as a few of her subordinates came in, carrying some small items of interest along with them. "Major, we finished the sweep, there's no one else here. There was a small cache nearby, we found these there."

"Any guards?" Lisa asked, looking up from the documents she found. "Three, all eliminated." They answered, a slight twitch running through them at their malfunctioning mod. Folding up the documents and storing them away, she put her knife away as the other two stored away the other items in their packs.

"Good, send word to the higher-ups, the area is clean then. They can come and sor-"

Lisa stopped at the sound of something explode nearby. The others had heard it too, all of them rushed out and saw more aircraft flying over the area, and unloading bombs on the area.

What the fuck! They're not supposed to- fuck!

"Get everyone out, tell them to evacuate now!" She ordered, ushering her soldiers out.

Fucking traitors, they must have messed with our mods!

Making it out of the target one with only two soldiers lost in the explosions, Lisa growled in frustration.

Looking at her remaining subordinates, she called for an evacuation.

They were going to hear of this as soon as she returned.

Upon their return, Lisa was called into the commander's office and delivered a letter that would change her life. Opening it, Lisa read the contents and for a moment, forgot all about the near annihilation of her group.

"When did this happen, Sir?"

She asked, gripping the letter and trying to maintain her composure.

"The area was struck two days ago, we don't know the total number dead, but the schools were the closest to the impact and were destroyed before there was a chance to evacuate completely. Your son was one of the identified student casualties. There's still a lot of civilians missing in that mess, so we don't know more than that now. Is your second-in-command informed of the information you all collected at the site?"

Lisa nodded, still staring down at the letter, and the words from her commander that stuck to her mind.

"Then send him in to report. You've completed your assignment, so I'm putting you on leave to sort things out at home. They're ready to take you when you're prepared. I'm sorry Major, dismissed."

The Riddle

Shaking herself awake and muttering curses to herself in her native, Lisa looked around and saw that most of them were still asleep...all except Porter, who scrutinized her with her stare. The others were still asleep, and the man who disappeared had not returned, but neither had the monsters or, she probably wouldn't have fallen into the dream she had.

It was still dark when I woke up, and only a few minutes later, so did the soldier. She interested me too much to give up the opportunity to speak with her alone, plus it had been a while since I'd had any coffin nails to smoke. None of us knew anything about her, aside from what James found out speaking with her in her native language and the other bit. She was Polish, a soldier from the Gulf War, and supposedly on her way to bury her son. Besides that, she'd destroyed the only lead to the dark figures we' had in a while, and that was suspicious enough without finding out she'd survived being torn apart by those monsters. All questions I wasn't about to give up on getting answers to.

"So, you're still awake," She looked directly at me now. "I thought for sure the blonde would still be talking to her computer this late." Lisa said, scrutinizing me with her own gaze. "Just me for now. So, who are you?" I wanted to get right to it. Who knew when Blondie was going to wake up, and where she might steer the conversation.

Unexpectedly, Lisa climbed to her feet and walked towards the door, "Follow me." She said, though I didn't miss her glance towards Blondie. She probably had a similar thought to my own.

We walked until we came to a flight of stairs, several rooms away from where James and Blondie slept.

"The blonde woman with mods, who is she?" Lisa asked, descending the stairs until we were by the door where she saved James.

"Mods? You mean Blondie?" I asked, a bit surprised that Lisa knew about the mods herself.

"Yes, Blondie. Who is she? She's not like us, so why is she here?" She asked, though it sounded more like a statement.

It wasn't a question I expected, and for some reason, something I hadn't thought about before either.

"What do you mean, not like us? As in she doesn't die?"

Lisa nodded, and crossed her arms waiting for my response.

"I don't... know. I hadn't actually thought about whether she could or not. As for who she is, Blondie is an intelligence agent that works in a similar field to my own."

"She doesn't look like an assassin, but then again that's what would make her perfect for the position."

I couldn't help but let my jaw hinge on how accurate Lisa's deduction was of the both of us. I was sure neither of us told her, "Did James tell you?"

Lisa shook her head, "I figured that much out for myself that she was some sort of soldier, or at least had the training of one. Your movements are too quiet for someone untrained in that kind of work. Then there's the lack of fear from you two, that is always present in the boy with the metal limbs, and the tertiary hidden weapons you both carry besides the guns. Should I continue?" Lisa asked, she'd been studying them.

"So, you have us figured out, how about you tell me a bit about yourself then. I can tell you're a soldier by your CDUs, the shortened hair, and your physique. However, somehow you've managed to keep anything else about you a secret-aside from how you were on your way home to bury your son."

Hiding my surprise that she even knew about James' metal body replacements, I crossed my arms hoping not to give any more away to this perceptive soldier, I looked her in the eyes, tense.

"I see no reason to give you information that you could not pick up by instinct and deduction. However, I would rather exchange information with you, than the blonde woman. I don't like her, and I don't trust her." Lisa answered, shifting her eyes to the corner that rounded up to the stairwell.

I know that finding out someone is a spy isn't exactly good for trust, but what does Lisa have against Blondie that makes her distrustful. Whatever it was, promised to be damn interesting.

"What's your basis?" I asked, crossing my arms and studying Lisa back.

"When I was with my unit, we specialized in situations that required the use of mods. We all had them, different ones, but working together we complimented each other as a well-armed force. I noticed that Blondie has what seemed like similar mods as my unit, but it's nothing implanted. They're naturally part

of her body. She's hiding much more than you think. I punched her hard enough to break her neck, but all she did was complain that I broke some of her tech. One of my mods, allows me to scan for anything metal at close range-most mods have at least some in them. There wasn't a single bit of tech in her body."

"You punched her!?"

What the fuck? I know she can be annoying but, what the fuck?

"She pissed me off, and I wanted to test my hypothesis."

"What the hell! Hypothesis of what? If your MMA style physique could take off her head in one punch?"

"PSF actually. Polish Special Forces, we receive similar to those of Russian soldiers and then we are enhanced with the mods. We're made to be nearly unstoppable."

"I see,"

I had a hard time suppressing any surprise with anything but silence. I didn't say anything but, everything Lisa observed about Blondie was making me wary of what it could mean. It was true that we didn't know whether she actually could revive after being killed. Blondie always stayed out of the realm of possibility on that one, though she had told me she wanted a nice safe position to retire in. It was also true that we only had both Lisa *and* Blondie's word to go off of on whether they actually had the tech they claimed to. Made a hell of a lot more sense than thinking it was magic though.

"I see you're 'on the fence' about whether to believe me or not." Lisa spoke, and pulled out a miniature field knife, so fast it sent my body into autopilot and I had my own knife out before she could move further.

"You and I both know that these are useless against us, besides, this isn't for you," Lisa carved her arm open with precision and pulled back the layers above muscle and displayed the circuitry and implants that she spoke of. I admittedly felt a little sick after watching her cut into herself like it was nothing.

"Fuckin' gross, but I get the point. So, she might not have tech in her body... or at least that you can detect. What did you punching her have to do with i-" I stopped in my tracks realizing the answer.

"You said you hit her hard enough to knock her block off, and she shook it off like you just punched her in the jaw. Hit me. Come on, full power like with her."

I had to know if Lisa's hypothesis had been correct, since I now knew what it was and why she didn't want to say what it was even though we were alone.

Nodding and shifting herself, Lisa balled up a fist without hesitation and it was the last thing I saw coming at me.

Theory

Hiding around the corner, James kept his fear in check, and quieted himself as Porter's headless body crumpled to the ground, her head bouncing off to the adjacent wall, glassy-eyed. Lisa stood there for a

moment and stared at Porter's body, her fist smeared with blood, and her expression neutral. The space was silent for a few minutes, before Lisa walked over to where Porter's head was and grabbed it with care. Walking back towards Porter, she laid it next to her body. Just as Lisa's dismembered body pulled itself back together, Porter's body sent out the same tendrils and James watched in horror as it reattached her head.

"Holy fuck, that hurt." Porter griped, rubbing her neck as she sat up and got to her feet. "You hit me so hard, the pain literally followed me into my revival. "Shit. Did you really hit Blondie that hard?"

Lisa nodded, and glanced at the stairwell again. "Come out boy. We've both been aware of you hiding there for some time." She called.

I wasn't sure I should after watching Lisa take Porter's head off with a single punch, but she had revived and was on the same page as Lisa after that on whatever they were talking about.

"I thought Blondie was strong, but you definitely made me rethink that decision. So, the question now is what is Blondie? Am I correct? She's obviously not human if that punch couldn't do to her what it did to me. Should we test it on James, just to be sure?" Porter asked, gesturing towards me and drawing Lisa's attention and interest.

I didn't like the way either of them was looking at me and started to back away towards the stairs- everything went black.

"You bitches, I can't believe you actually used me to prove a theory." I was still rubbing my neck in pain, ten minutes after it reconnected to my body, and pissed as hell.

"Well, think of it this way. We may have just made an important discovery. My reset made Lisa's hypothesis a theory, and yours made it closer to fact. Anyways, what do we do for now? Blondie hasn't exactly done anything to harm us, that we know about."

"You should probably be talking to me about it. She wouldn't know." That familiar voice that grated both James' and Porter's nerves was suddenly heard.

"If it's you Sim, I swear to god I'm putting a bullet in you."

He scoffed, ignoring Porter's threat and pulling out a gun and looking it over. Porter fumbled to catch it, when he tossed it at her as soon as she turned around. "You'll probably need this, since I see you decided to ignore my warning, and didn't leave when I told you to."

"What thing are you talking about? We have anything to bring back to begin with." I jumped in, sick of the games Sim was playing.

"Oh really?" He answered, looking at me directly now.