

Dissection

As the sound of voices filled the room, Porter and James remained hidden in the crawlspace of the closet, listening and waiting for a chance to escape. Both injured and unwilling to draw attention to themselves after the last encounter with the monster that previously guarded the building, neither reset themselves.

The crawlspace was dark and cramped but, I didn't care. Cramped was fine compared to being hung on a hook like some carcass for carving. Just outside the closet, the footsteps were the loudest, echoing back and forth through the floor repetitively. Someone was pacing, and by the speed...nervously. There were several voices speaking at once, though it didn't sound like an argument. Watching Porter for signs of what to do next, I silently looked up at the covering of the crawlspace. With more distinct chatter now to be heard, and focusing on it acutely in the tense situation, I nearly jumped out of my skin at the sensation of my phone vibrating. Porter turned and glared at me, before sighing quietly relieved that the slight noise went unnoticed. Clapping my hands over my mouth I took in a deep breath to calm down.

What a time to get a text? Wait...text? How could I be getting a text, I got shot trying to get info on escaping when my phone didn't work. What's going on?

It was confusing, yet lent a spark of hope at the same time. If the phone was indeed working, then maybe we could call for help...or at least try GPS to find out where the hell we were.

Porter continued to listen intently to their chatter, I wasn't sure if she was getting something out of it or what considering all I heard was a garbled language that sounded like the ones who attacked me earlier.

What could she have been hearing that it was so important for her to focus on it and why couldn't I hear it? Was this some spy shit that she learned or something? Suddenly my interest in who Porter was outweighed my fear of the voices above.

The chatter slowed to a stop as did the pacing. The sound of a door opening could be heard but, instead of footsteps, I heard the loud thump of something hitting the floor. Looking at Porter again, I let out a tense silent sigh. Pulling out my phone, I looked at the message and paled at its contents. Pressing my lips together and breathing deep to prevent hyperventilating, I couldn't do more than stare at the words.

Experiment subject version 33 deceased, dissect for defect and cause of death.

"What the hell?" I wanted to say but, the words were stuck in my throat apparently along with my ability to breathe because I blacked out.

Unraveled

I listened for any distinction between voices, holding tight to my gun and the exaggerated scalpel I'd grabbed from the kitchen. By now I could tell that there were three of them, one that spoke in a quicker cadence than the other two. The second one had a nervous tinge to their voice, almost panicked. The last one was raspy and spoke slowly. I had no idea what the hell was going on in their conversation but, I

could tell they were talking about something that had to do with the room, or maybe the entire building.

It was where James said he'd seen all the bodies before. It wasn't my first choice but, the building and the room we were in was going to be necessary to search. Babysitting a college kid with barely discernable combat experience was going to make this a hell of a pain in the ass. I would've been more comfortable with the search if I'd brought 'Red' instead. At least the soldier could fight and was familiar with what a dead body looked like.

An unexpected stifled squeal had me tensed suddenly and looking back, I saw James clapping his hand over his mouth. Idiot.

Listening further and hearing the door open and the sudden clunk of something hitting the floor, it sounded like a deadweight drop so either a body was just brought in, or they have some seriously heavy equipment.

What are they doing up there? Weird mad scientist shit I bet, considering how they made us all freaks.

I didn't have much time to ponder the existential questions because a few seconds later, James lay slumped against me unconscious.

Great. Just perfect.

Sneering at him for a moment, I caught sight of his phone lit up in his hand. That made me curious, not going to lie.

What was he trying to do with his phone?

The question now became more important than our current situation. Maybe it actually had to do with our situation.

Checking his eyes, I assured myself of brain activity, and that he was still alive before taking his phone. Pressing the light back on, I looked over the phone's contents with scrutiny.

"What is this shit?" I mumbled to myself and quickly pulled out my own phone to compare it. Scrolling down my own text messages, I could see why James had fainted. In both of our phones, were dozens of texts of similar content, but then there was one from minutes ago sent to both of us. Out of character with the previous ones, it just said 'help me'.

I really miss when my life was as simple as just travel, kill, get paid. Now this bullshit.

My first question was how and the second was why. How had the phones been monitoring what I assumed was our deaths and resets, and why were they doing it in the first place? What was the point of knowing that in- wait, I have no physical proof that this is counting deaths and resets? There was one way to find out, and I already knew I wasn't going to like it. It was likely for the best though, we were both injured and needed to regain whatever our new bodies considered normal. Before that, I needed to ask James what he thought of the situation.

The voices above continued and the deadweight item they dragged sounded like it was dropped onto a hard surface. Listening to the chatter again, I was silent and - What the hell was that?

My hands were suddenly clapped over my ears at the most horrifying shriek I'd yet to hear, and I've heard some terrified shrieks before. Unable to fight my curiosity over what the goosebumps-inducing shriek was for, I lifted the crawspace cover just high enough to get a sliver of a glance.

As I suspected, there were three of them, all dark and featureless. No wait, there were four of them, the last one was on the dissection table they all surrounded now. It shrieked again and struggled to get up, barking in the same language as the others but in a higher pitch.

Is that one female? These things have genders? Shit is already weird, this is too much right now.

About to close the crawspace, something caught my eye, burned into my memory and nightmares. It sparked the one thought that fielded my next actions,

We needed to get the fuck out of here as soon as fucking possible. Out of this building, out of this city, and out of this experiment.

The dark figure on the table continued to squirm as the figure nearest to her took the familiar strange looking instrument like what I had and sliced open her face from chin to the scalp and exposed my worst fear within moments when the screaming continued but I could understand it now. The person inside was a male by the sound of his voice.

Blue Light

Staring at the man on the table as he swore and threatened each one of them, the dark figures seemed hesitant to continue with their task of dissection. He'd escaped before and caused monstrous havoc, but they were ordered to keep him alive despite the danger he posed to the experiment. He'd already successfully traversed several levels of their experiment realm, and it was a mystery how he'd done it. This specimen was unprecedented but, so was the female soldier they'd acquired. Believing her a failed experiment as well, it was surprising when her beacon hadn't gone out, and her vitals showed her still functioning. These two specimens went beyond the expectations of the research and needed further study. The female soldier was dangerous, having utterly destroyed two of them already, she would be difficult to subdue.

"Let me out of these damn restraints and I'll show you a failed experiment!"

Waking up on a dissection table with three faceless freaks staring down at me is not how I wanted to start the day. It was bad enough, I still hadn't gotten my other pursuers off my case and now here I was, captured by the other side of the coin. Now I'm not into making idle threats, seeing as I like to deliver on my promises, but these freaks were making it more difficult every time I escaped their "dissection and research". They brought me to a different place each time I was captured, at least when they thought they captured me. Yeah, a gamble I know...what if they decide to destroy whatever the hell this thing inside me is I am while I'm out cold. Well, lucky for me that's not an option. See, unlike the other blue lucky lottery winners trapped in this fucked experiment, I'm special and I'm not just saying that.

I'm the only one I've seen that doesn't have a blue light show inside me, not sure why yet but I'm hoping that one of these testing bubbles they take me to has more people in it so I can find out.

Hearing them speak to each other in that grating noise they called a language, each sound cringe-worthy, I could only hope these freaks were as stupid as the last set but, luck only lasts so long before skills are needed. Considering it looked like they were about to just keep me strapped to the table without any further action, I was pretty much stuck, at least until something interesting happened. Watching them closely, I was keenly aware of when one of them disappeared from immediate sight.

That made me a little nervous, but a little curious too.

Walking away from the table and towards a hanging body of a dark-haired woman, the dark figure looked back at me and I swear I could see them smiling in that abyss they called a face. Pulling it down, the figure's body seemed to slit open down the middle, and hang open as they stuffed the corpse inside them. A shudder and chill ran through me when I realized two things at that moment. One, I think I just witnessed the freak eating. Two, they were eating people...particularly the dead. It would certainly explain a lot about why I never found anyone, especially in the places I escaped that were overrun by these monsters. It made a hissing sound of satisfaction before its body contorted and its form began to stretch and moan. It grew and towered over the rest of us, now something akin to those creaky monsters I'd seen in the other world. Monstrous, huge, clawed and dangerous, with a black miasma drifting off of it.

The other two dark figures looked at the monster and backed away from the dissection table quickly as it approached and I didn't want to find out if it mattered whether they liked people alive as well.

Miasma

A beam of damp light squeezes in through the crawlspace as consciousness returns, and with the light comes an oppressive odor both suffocating and cold. The monster emanating from it draws closer to the table and Porter watches in silence before suddenly shutting the lid.

I blinked, once twice, and a few more times after squeezing my eyes shut, trying to wake myself up. Last I remembered, I must have had a panic attack or something, because the next I remember was Porter speaking to me in a quiet but urgent voice, "We have to get out of here...now." Confused as I was, Porter's expression said it all and I was ready to hear what she'd found out. "What's going on?"

"I think I found out where that monster from before came from." She whispered and pointed up to the crawlspace cover. I won't lie, it took more biting my tongue until it bled than the strength of will to not scream pathetically and that was after the crawlspace suddenly opened above us and a dark figure reached in and snatched Porter out by her hair, making her drop her gun. Stumbling backward and terrified of the dark figure, and the memories it called forward that until meeting Blondie and Porter, I'd locked away, I can't say for sure what happened. My vision went black, and I cringed at the thundering sound of gunfire suddenly going off so close I could feel the heat. Opening my eyes, I was surprised to find the dark figure was gone, and Porter was peeking into the crawlspace, looking much worse for wear than before.

"Thanks." She murmured, the sharp tool she grabbed before covered in something disgusting, seeing more of her, I declined her help in getting out of the crawlspace when I saw her completely covered in it and tried not to puke.

“Thought you said you couldn’t go another a rodeo.” Looking around the room, from the safety of the crawlspace, I spotted the dark figure laying on the ground, a man...well what was left of him anyways, and a monster soaked in his soup and slowly approaching. Wishing there were more bullets and hoping the dark figure didn’t get back up, I hobbled my way out of the crawlspace. It wasn’t until Porter hit the floor that I realized we were being suffocated and the monster was hazy with some sort of fog surrounding it. Perfect, this thing puts off a poisonous gas. Sidestepping the crawlspace, as the monster trained its sights on me, I glanced around for an exit and knelt beside Porter grabbing her before a voice stopped me. “Reset her, kid.” Now I don’t normally respond ‘kid’ but, considering the monster and I was the only two conscious breathers in the room currently, I definitely looked around for who was talking. Shockingly, it was the man the monster made soup out of.

“You’re alive!?”

Both the monster and I turned around.

“Wouldn’t call being something like a take on Prometheus’ curse exactly living, but sure.” ‘Man soup’ answered, before repeating what he said earlier. Looking back at the monster and then to ‘man soup’ I felt like I was the only person here worried about the monster. “She’s already dead, there’s nothing to reset.” My answer came with a cough that surprised even me, the room started to get hazy but I couldn’t shake it off. “Shit...” ‘man soup’ swore and somehow poured himself onto the floor before taking the form of a dark-haired man with light eyes that looked in his late thirties. It was like something out of a superhero cartoon. Before the monster could backtrack to him, the man shoved the dissection table into it and ran to the stove in the kitchen, as the monster tumbled into the crawlspace. “At least this prison has fire.” He commented to himself before taking in a large gulp of air and turning the burner to tick for the spark. A strike of heat and sound like the crackle of lightning, roll of thunder, and blown out glass coalesced as the room filled with flame, engulfing both the monster and the dark figure on the ground.

These Places

The sky lightened as three figures fell from the apartment window and sped towards the ground. A steady dual-location of curses and insults could be heard from James and Porter both, directed at the third person. The one who’d set the apartment on fire and defenestrated them both. Their mutual stream of cursing ended abruptly when they hit the ground and everything went black.

“You’re welcome.” ‘man soup’ boasted, as he finished resetting Porter and I. Dusting himself off and staring at the inferno the apartment building had become, he looked pleased with himself. “Don’t see what I’ve got to be grateful for, you threw us out of a window as you set the building on fire. It didn’t even reset and-”

“Who are you?” Porter asked suspiciously, cutting my list of complaints short. Looking at her in surprise that she was asking, ‘man soup’ chuckled a little as if it should be obvious. There are few people in existence I doubt would mess with a mercenary or whatever Porter was, but I imagine this guy didn’t know who she was because he obviously couldn’t see the “Tell me before I fucking kill you” in her eyes. After a few moments of waiting, Porter manifested a gun from I don’t know where considering she said

she was out of bullets and her gun was in the inferno with the bodies. As she readied it from safety, she trained it on him and made ready to shoot.

“Quick question, before you meet your maker and reset again...how did you do that with the fire?” The question had to be asked, considering if I’d known they were weak to fire I’d have been friendlier with my lighter.

Smirking at Porter, he answered her finally, “You can call me Sim, the fire doesn’t do anything if that miasma isn’t part of the equation. You can put your weapon down, and if you pick up your phone a minute, I’ll explain what’s going on, Teresa.” Mouthing a name that sounded like it didn’t even belong in the same reality as Porter, I ducked for cover just in time for her to open unrestrained fire on Sim.

Shaking her head, at the fact that he hadn’t dropped from her barrage of bullets, and didn’t have a single mark on him Porter glared and went for what I imagine was another clip before Sim spoke up. “It didn’t work just now, it won’t work in a few minutes. I’m made of the same thing those dark figures roasting in my little bonfire up there...well in a way. I’m Sim, the origin of your simulated prison here.”

“Simulated prison? What does that mean? If you made it, then why are you *in* it?” Porter demanded, looking Sim over as though she were just dying to shoot him again. My guess was that she must have really hated being called Teresa...it took a lot of balls to know Porter’s buttons and still want to push them. This guy had to be some sort of curious freak...or he just liked fucking with people. “Sim, what are those figures and why did you say you were similar?” I asked, curious to see if he’d answer that question.

Scrunching his face in thought, Sim cleared his throat as if waiting for something. I let out an annoyed growl before feeling around for my phone and practically throwing it at him. “Thank you. Teresa, if you’ll lower that useless item, we can continue this discussion.” “Call me Teresa again, and I’ll find a way to make you stay dead,” Porter said, confirming my suspicion that Sim really liked fucking with people.

“No,” Sim answered, confusing me and angering Porter before he continued. “No, I’m not in the simulated prison. I am the simulated prison or at least a copy of my mind is or was anyway before things got...messy. I am a simulacrum to maintain these places. Keeps the right information of its inhabitants, so on and so forth, and those figures-” Sim stopped speaking for a moment and tossing me back my phone, he stared at his hand with concern before suddenly vanishing and leaving me irritated and Porter with a simmering anger just beneath the surface.

Great, a pissed off Porter and a secretive simulacrum to whatever this bullshit is. This shit just keeps getting more complicated by the moment. I miss normal frustrations like social interactions and schoolwork.