

Specimen

A young man emerged from the derelict building, stretching and enjoying the peace that moment afforded him. Out from beneath the shadows of the building stepped two featureless figures. Dark as shadows and silent, they looked down at me like I was some sort of experiment. Muttering to each other about the failure I was, I felt my pitiable state drag me further into the depths of grief. I wasn't supposed to be here. Returning early from deployment, I should have been on my way to my boy, Raven's memorial after the incident at his school.

Instead I end up here, trapped in a nightmare and left for dead. I should be dead, seeing my body scattered and devoured before me...no use to me or anyone. Everything could have been taken already had been, except this life and it was because of those dark monsters. Whatever they did to me, I wanted it to end...I want to be with my son. Yet here I am, trapped in a body that won't die, waking up to find that those monsters had their way yet again. I will get them...I swear I'll get them back for keeping me away from my son.

Sound of a muffled shriek brought my attention back to the present. Looking up again, I saw the two dark figures performing their torturous exams on a young man, who couldn't have been much older than my son.

What can I do? I have to do something...he needs help!

The thoughts rushed through my head and then through my entire body...well the parts I could still feel were attached. It was as though it was responding to my desire to protect.

What is this?

My body seemed to be healing itself and even putting itself back together...I don't know how it was possible but my severed legs were once again part of me and I could stand. The dark figures continued to torture the boy, and it seemed like he was barely conscious at this point or at least in shock. Hopefully I could help him before it was too late.

Save him...we have to save him.

Pulling out the standard issue blade for my unit, I leaped at the dark figures in attack form.

No Blood

Startled awake by the sounds of incomprehensible screaming, Porter quickly drew her gun and looked around, ready to fire on the first enemy she saw. There was no one around, Blondie was still asleep and James was nowhere to be found. Standing up cautiously, Porter looked out the window at the sound of another scream and was shocked for the first time in a long time.

James fell to the ground limp and someone in strange military clothing pinned one of the dark and featureless freaks to the ground. It screamed incomprehensibly but, was drowned out by the screams of rage that the person made as they shredded them with what seemed to be a knife. The sound of a gunshot ringing in my ears suddenly released me, Blondie saw what I hadn't. She'd fired at what seemed to be a second one...why were there two of them here?

The second one was near James and must have been doing something, because they took something and disappeared...leaving the other one to the mercy of the mysterious soldier.

Both Blondie and I raced down the stairs, I was worried about why our featureless friends decided to pay him a visit. I was in for more than one shock at the bottom of the stairs.

Now in the alleyway, we found James lying on the ground in complete shock, his back having been ripped open to display blue light and veins encircling his spine and spreading through the rest of his body.

I'm no anatomist but, I'm sure that shouldn't look that clean...where's all the blood?

Turning my attention to the enraged screams of the person attacking the now motionless dark figure, I saw her take her knife and slash deep into its throat and actually behead it.

She panted with anger and exhaustion, pinning the dark figure to the ground and waiting for it to begin struggling again but, it didn't. It didn't disappear and remained completely motionless.

Did she actually just kill it? I thought that was impossible.

She looked at me and I could see her face for the first time. Her face was covered in tears despite the expression of rage it held. Vibrant green eyes and short, messy red hair that barely touched her ears went along with the military uniform she wore.

“Is the boy alright?” She suddenly demanded, looking beyond me and speaking to Blondie who tended James. Blondie stared in confusion at James’ condition, as I turned back to see him again. Neither of us were doctors and even if we were, this was practically alien medical territory. He wasn’t even human inside anymore...the veins around his spine glowed the same blue and were creeping towards the glowing parts Blondie found in the both of us.

Approaching, the red-haired woman knelt beside Blondie and inspected James’ body, suspiciously. A few minutes went by and we all noticed the same thing...he wasn’t regenerating like what had become normal to us. His breathing remained shallow and he remained in shock from the pain that he must have still been enduring.

I reached for my gun to reset James as we’d learned death would, but the woman grabbed my arm and held it tight. “What are you doing? I might be able to save him.” She demanded, glaring at me. Her grip was strong, and her accent was strange but, that wasn’t all.

“Porter, leave him be. We need to get back inside where its safe. This new development may affect you both, and I need tests on his state *before* you reset him.”

“Blondie, you better not be this as an excuse to play ‘doctor’ and experiment on him.”

“Do you want to find out what’s going on or not?” She demanded, her eyes icy as her words.

What kind of a stupid question is that, bitch?

“I get it, okay? Do what you have to do then, just try not to enjoy yourself too much.”

Looking around the woman to the motionless body of the dark figure, she was relieved that it was still there. “Hey *Red*, go bring the dead thing over there and come with us. Porter you grab James, let’s go back inside.” Blondie directed, standing and opening the back door to the building we were hiding in. I

didn't know if we'd have to move again, but one thing was certain...we finally had a lead to what the hell was going on here. That was more than enough reason to let Blondie test him.

Reset

Porter and Red stood off to the side watching as Blondie ran her tests and collected images, from James as he groaned in agony but remained unconscious. She was keenly aware of his pain, and worked as quickly as she could to gain what she figured was enough material to begin to form a theory. Her eyes glowed the same color as her tattoos had earlier...she must have been taking in readings for her computer. It was becoming more and more useful to have a cyborg along for the ride.

Closing her laptop, Blondie leaned over James and whispered, “Hang tight, you’ll feel better in a few moments.” Before the others had a chance to react, she snapped James’ neck and he stopped breathing. James’ body went limp on the table and a moment later, Blondie hit the floor from a fierce punch Red delivered. Blondie rubbed the side of her face, and groaned in pain as she spit out blood.

“What the fuck is the matter with you?! I could have saved him!” Red shouted angrily, but Blondie just stared at her blankly like she didn’t understand the language she was speaking.

“She did the best thing we could for him.” Porter answered, before pointing to James who slowly healed and reset to before the attack.

“Holy shit! What are those fists made of? Iron? I think you broke some of my hardware.” Blondie groaned, finally coordinated enough to reach for the edge of the table to pull herself up. It felt like something had been ruptured in her head and she nearly swooned from dizziness, but managed to stay conscious and move her laptop, just as James began squirming in agony at the reset of his heartbeat.

“What is this?” Red asked, confused by James’ sudden revival to perfect health. She was apparently new to the concept, but there had to be something that made her appropriate for the setting.

“There’s some sort of technology embedded in their organs that resets their bodies whenever they are killed. For example...” Blondie’s voice faded out and she fired off a shot at Porter, dropping her to the ground dead.

Red watched in complete surprise as Porter cringed in agony for a moment before climbing back to her feet, pissed.

“You’ve probably experienced it as well. After all, there was a dead body in the alleyway last night that wasn’t there this morning-or whatever the hell it is, when we met.” Blondie spoke up, maintaining a distance greater than *Red*’s arms.

Thinking for a moment, *Red* answered the question calmly, “I was running from monsters and they ripped me apart last night. The dark figures came and inspected me, called me a failed experiment, and right after that, I heard the boy scream. I pulled myself together again and attacked.” Looking over to James, she studied him and smiled a little. Reciprocating, James spoke to *Red* in a different language before she responded.

“What? You speak other languages now, brat?” Blondie asked, surprised to see James show any talent at all. “I can do lots of things you don’t know about Blondie...and I speak three other than English.” James quipped back, before continuing to speak with *Red*, pointing to Blondie and then to Porter as though he were explaining something.

“Lisetta, Lisa for short.” *Red* introduced suddenly, looking at both Porter and Blondie expectantly. “So where is it you came from Lisa? We all ended up here from somewhere, and what do you mean you pulled yourself back together again?” Porter asked, watching Lisa for any strange reaction.

“Well I was on a return plane from deployment to my home city, Fog. I got off the plane and leaving the airport, ended up here. I’m not certain how exactly I pulled myself together, I just remember really wanting to save James here, and the sensation of wires pulling me back together. I can’t really give you more than that.” Lisa explained, her story pretty much the same as the rest of them. She had space warped around her as well.

“I saw you crying earlier after killing the dark figure over there.” Porter spoke again, gesturing to the dead one in the corner that Blondie got ready to drag to the table for examination...with a creepy amount of glee in her job.

“I was returning home...on leave from assignment in Saudi Arabia to bury my son. It’s pretty obvious I’m not going to make it to the funeral now though.” Lisa answered, a heavy sigh in her voice. Porter thought about what Lisa said for a moment and it didn’t add up. There was no specific altercation going on with Saudi Arabia at the time, that she was aware of...she would know.

“What assignment were you on? What war are you talking about?” Porter asked, more confused about the answer.

“The Gulf war, what war did you think I was talking about?”

“That war happened almost thirty years ago...that doesn’t make sense.” Porter answered, confused by what she might be approaching as an answer.

“James, what year is it?” She asked, looking at him as Lisa calculated the time mentally of how long she’d been gone. Her eyes fell at the thought of her husband thinking she was missing or possibly dead for the last thirty years.

“Uh, 1998. Why?” He answered, looking suspicious of her motives.

“Blondie?”

“2005. Why is it relevant what year any of us are here from Porter?” Blondie answered, as she continued to dissect the dark figure and put things near her computer for analysis. James sat nearby and watched in interest.

It didn't quite add up, what could have made them the prime decisions for whatever the hell this experiment was? There had to be some sort of connection...with the other two having some sort of crisis during the time they appeared, there had to be something these dark figures were actually studying.

Was it really trauma they were studying? If so, where did the fact that James had no blood left come in? How had Lisa reattached her body, when James told them about the bodies he saw of others like them that seemed to be dead. Maybe they should go find these dead ones and see if there were differences. First thing was first though, confirm the trauma theory.

“James, was there anything that happened to you recently before showing up?” Porter asked, betting that something had.

Looking her in the eyes, James went pale and drew in a shaky breath. He wanted to tell her ‘no’ but, if it was important to finding out why they were stuck in that nightmare and might get them out...he had to share it.

“I broke up with my girlfriend of two years, for my own safety over the winter holiday. It wasn’t a week before she broke into my dorm, and assaulted me. She stabbed me and I had to escape through the second story to get away from her. I went to stay at a friend’s house outside of the college district, and had the police on alert after the second incident.”

Porter, Blondie, and Lisa all stared at James in horror as he recited the incident, stopping occasionally to take a breath and calm himself.

“Second incident? Something like that happened before?” Blondie asked, shocked at what she was hearing.

James nodded and answered, “It’s the reason we broke up. In any case, somehow she found me, and came in while I was asleep. She killed my friend’s dog, and I have no idea how she managed it but, she hung herself right over my bed. You can imagine the therapy bills after waking up to that sort of nightmare. She was nuts.”

The room shared silence after hearing what James had to say. There was nothing any of them could think of to say. The only thing to do was to agree that the young woman was seriously twisted in the head.

“Wow, that’s fucked up. Blondie, whatever this is most likely has to do with trauma of some sort. James come show me where you found those bodies. We’re bringing one back to check out.” Porter directed, thinking about the situation.

“Isn’t that dangerous? It could get dark soon.” James reminded, looking out the window and shivering at the memory of the attack from the dark figures.

“Not if we work fast. Let’s go.”