

Stranger

In a dank and damp stairwell, James, Porter, and Lisa discuss their discovery and the concerns it raised about their other companion, Blondie. Listening more than speaking now, Porter realizes that the more she listens, the less she feels like she actually knows Blondie, and the more questions she has about the prison they're trying to escape-alive.

Lisa and James hung back in the stairwell landing, while I went back to check up on our suspicions with Blondie.

Did we know what was going on with her?

Nope, not a clue but at the moment it wasn't a stretch to assume that she wasn't secretly allied with our captors. It didn't help that she'd been openly interested in studying us from the start...that definitely didn't look good. Blondie's not the most endearing person, sure she's easy...but not when it comes to getting to know her. I thought I'd penetrated some of that though. I'd known her longer than any of our mutual co-workers had known either of us.

Something here didn't fit, who is Blondie? I should know the answer to this. What I wouldn't give right now for this to be as simple as 'put a bullet in the target, make sure they don't get back up, and go get coffee'.

Watching Blondie from the door now, I felt conflicted about her and what we were suspicious of. Not just on a surface level, but to the point that I questioned my own ethics for the first time. Being a career spy/assassin doesn't qualify me to be anyone's spiritual advisor, but the possibility of maybe having to murder my ex to free us from this shitstorm, wasn't going to be my first choice either.

James and Lisa were still talking when I came back down the stairs, and surprisingly it wasn't about Blondie. Coming in on the tail-end of a concern that we'd been hiding in the same place for so long, before a new and more interesting conversation began.

I have to admit, I was pretty concerned about this as well, considering the possibility that if any of the creatures from the hellscape might have found us and just lay in wait for the next time we left. I parked myself nearby, and listened to the conversation unfold.

Complicated

“So, what was it like while you and Blondie were stuck here, Lisa?” I asked, interested in what might have happened while Porter and I were out exploring and surviving a hellscape. She gave me a knowing look, but remained quiet and watched Lisa curiously. Crossing her arms, Lisa looked at both of us and thought about the question for a moment.

Lisa went through a lot of different facial expressions in the two minutes of silence she gave us. Now I was really curious about what the hell happened between them. Now I don't know Blondie too well other than knowing she's got some serious cybernetic upgrades and that she and Porter have history-redacted and black-marker style history...but history just the same. It was a while before Lisa gave her answer, and I could see Porter was just as interested in the answer as I was.

That felt a little off, for Porter to seem so interested. Maybe it's nothing I convinced myself. Maybe she just wants to see what impression Blondie left her with. Besides the bullet she put in my skull, I'd personally had exactly no interactions with her that could give me any clues as to who she even was. Blondie was like the ghost-type spies you see in the movies...like the kind that could disappear into thin air while you were watching her. Porter I got...sort of. Blondie however, was the biggest mystery I'd ever encountered. I couldn't help but wonder what Porter thought of this, and if she maybe knew more?

Lisa broke her silence, clearing her throat and speaking cautiously. “She didn't seem all that outstanding, aside from her cybernetic amendments. However, as a soldier, that's strategic...not standing out, I mean. However, her durability and strength are worthy of note. I assumed it has to do with that, but I can't be sure.”

Her durability? What does that mean? Why would Lisa mention Blondie's durability as unusual? Seemed pretty normal for the company she was in.

I looked at Porter for an answer to this, she simply listened in silence.

Up to me, I guess. Secret Intelligence experts my ass.

“What do you mean by durability and strength? I mean I've seen her pull a door off its hinges like it was paper but, you weren't there for that. Did something else happen?”

Lisa shrugged, “I punched her.”

I'm normally opposed to violence, what with my own history and all, and I can easily think of a myriad of valid reasons Lisa might have to do this. I really wanted to know what she did though.

"I was unaware of the reset factor we share at the time, but I thought she'd executed you for some sick reason. She seemed to be giving you medical attention at the time."

I was definitely surprised that Lisa hit her so early on, but, the real question was why *she* was so surprised that it barely hurt her. I'd wager Blondie had been hit by plenty of soldiers or supped up personnel before, I'd been convinced for a while now, that the only thin human about Blondie were her looks.

I opened my mouth to speak, but Porter beat me to it, "Lisa, what modification series do you have? From your time in the service?"

"The original series two, three, and basic commitment- series four. Series four is mandatory for all soldiers and law enforcement, as you know."

"Modifications?" I asked, immediately more curious about that.

Porter glanced at me for a moment and continued on. "So green series? Blondie originally had red series seven modifications from my time knowing her, but whatever extra additions she got while serving in Redaction City, are unknown even to our intelligence. And she won't talk about them."

Voices

I knew I was hanging out with spies but, I didn't think shit was this serious with them. No one's telling me anything now, and this was starting to sound more like something out of a steampunk horror, than a crime novel now. From how it was sounding, we were all carrying some modification goodies. Hell, maybe even Porter had some, though for some reason I didn't think so. She kind of struck me as au naturelle.

Porter saw the look of frustration on Lisa's face and added, "As long as I've known Blondie, she's been complicated. With more redactions on her file than even a Spec Ops veteran, it's impossible to know much of anything meaningful about her. We should focus on the present and what we're going to do now. We've established she's got a durability and strength factor, which most of us knew about."

Now we need to know if she has a reset factor, we didn't know about.

Looking up, I froze when Porter made eye contact with me. I must have said that out loud

“That’s the big question we’ve all been too distracted to find out.”

“I thought she needed to study us, because she didn’t have it, Porter.”

Why did I have to sound so naïve right then?

Porter and Lisa did exactly what I expected them to do, and looked at me like I must believe in the Easter Bunny and Santa as well.

“If she told you that James,” Porter reached out with a condescending tone, and patted me on the shoulder as Lisa continued, “She was lying.”

“James, she’s intelligence, and will never give you more information than you gave her. Still, you are right. We need to know if she’s one of us, or something else.” Lisa said, sounding less condescending about it, but I could still hear her calling me an idiot.

“So, what’s the next step? Put a bullet in her and see if she revives?” I guessed, as a few echoed rustles from upstairs were heard.

“It’ll take more than just one bullet; I know that much...but yes. That’s pretty much the-”

The sound of voices and rustling caught our attention, and we all listened as hard as we could.

“Who is she talking to?” Porter mumbled, as she and Lisa both cocked an ear to hear better.

“Sym maybe?” I suggested, and apparently was right on the nuts for what Porter must have been thinking.

“She had better be. I’ll go see what they’re talking about, before I find out if she revives.” Porter answered, looking at us before she ascended the stairs, and disappeared down the hall and towards Blondie.

“What if it is one of those faceless freaks? The monsters already stopped coming a while ago for whatever reason, but we’re still no closer to finding our way out of here.” I said aloud, hoping the walls could answer me.

“Well, we aren’t going to get any answers in this stairwell. I have a feeling Porter is going to be away for a while. We should investigate our perimeter, and see if there are new clues to help us escape.” Lisa answered, looking down the flight that led to the door.

Splitting up again, and this time with no leads outside of Blondie being a potential traitor.

What were we going to do if she was? I couldn't be the only one left in the dark about what was going on.

"Lisa, tell me about these modifications you and Porter were talking about."