

Injected

By Kaelin Caporicci

I awoke to a blood curdling scream, only to realize I was the one making the agonizing sound. My body writhed in intense pain and a burning feeling plagued my right arm. I bit my tongue trying to hold back another scream. Blood erupted from my tongue, but it didn't taste metallic, instead like water. My head throbbed as sharp pains shot through my brain.

Where was I? I hadn't the slightest clue. The ground beneath my aching body was firm, and something scratched at my arm. I took a strenuous breath. The air was unnaturally moist, and seemed to stick to my lungs. I realized then that I was sweating profusely and the air around me was scorching. My eyes felt like they were being weighed down by lead weights as I slowly tried to open them. I found myself engulfed in a thick fog that drifted like a ghost. Through the fog, trees stood crooked and damaged.

All of a sudden, a greater problem burrowed its way through my head. Who was I? I had no memory of a life before this moment. A sense of panic raced through me. I didn't know my name, or how old I was. Nothing. The harder I tried to remember something, anything about my life, the burning sensation in my arm increased immeasurably.

That's when a hissing sound emanated from the edge of the fog, and as I tried to stand up, I realized my body was paralyzed. A snake emerged from the fog, slithering towards me with purpose. His tongue flitted in and out of his mouth as he crept closer. He seemed to smell my fear, which gave him the confidence to pursue me. I thrashed about, my teeth gritted, but I could not move out of the path of the dangerous creature. I was living a nightmare, I determined, as the snake meandered closer, each hiss more horrifying than the last. Before I knew it, the snake had curled itself around my throat, squeezing every last breath out of me. He turned his head to look at me, opening his mouth to show off his poisonous fangs.

In a second, I felt his mouth close over my neck, puncturing my skin and releasing his poisons. I was welcomed by the darkness in an instant.

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The coldness grabbed hold of every part of my body with its icy hands and wouldn't let me go. I found myself buried under a pile of snow and I was suffocating, my breathing coming in short gasps. My body was no longer paralyzed, but it was extremely shaky. I fought my way out of the snow, mustering up all the strength I could.

Once I surfaced, memories of the snake attack flooded my head and I quickly touched my neck, but there was no bite mark.

If I had any chance of survival, I had to find shelter and a place to get warm. I pressed my weak body forward, even as it protested. The blizzard raged on, making my face feel numb as my feet sunk deeper and deeper into the snow. Keep going, I reminded myself. The wind picked up speed and was now racing at a dangerous rate. I felt myself being blown astray by the wind, unable to fight back against the icy gusts.

My foot made contact with something hard, and I thought I had finally reached an area with less snow. I put my entire weight on the hard surface, which I quickly learned was a disastrous mistake. The surface made an ear-splitting cracking noise, drawing my eyes downwards and that's when I noticed the snow had concealed the frozen waters below. I hastily scrambled away from the ice, somehow managing to slip in the process. I fell with all of my weight on the cracked ice, and that was enough for it to shatter completely.

The shock of the frigid water left me unable to breathe. I could feel my heart rate accelerate along with my panic. For what seemed like an eternity, I was in complete shock as the numbing waters seeped into my body. I continued to gasp for air, worried I might go under at any minute, but I found myself spluttering as I took on

more water than air. My body had succumbed to the cold. I flailed around in a futile attempt to escape the clutches of death. More time elapsed, and my body grew stiff and exhausted. I felt myself losing consciousness, and shortly thereafter my body was fully immersed in the unforgiving waters.

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Burning. Something was burning. Orange flames licked up the trees, destroying them with no remorse. The crackling sound was the only sound present in the smoldering forest, as the fire continued to attack the helpless trees and surrounding brush. My head whipped around frantically, searching for a clearing. The acrid smoke was thick and dark, blocking any possible exits as well as clouding my vision. My breathing was ragged and irregular and my throat felt scratchy as it became coated in smoke. I couldn't satisfy my need for air, only receiving lungful after lungful of smoke. The forest was sweltering as the flames closed in on me. I didn't know what else to do, so I ran. Twigs snapped beneath my feet as I sprinted as fast as my body allowed me. My attempted flight seemed to aggravate the flames, and they raged higher, burning with more intensity. My adrenaline was pulsing rapidly through my veins, and I ran faster, powered by the fear of being swallowed by the fire. What was happening to me? What did I do to deserve this torture? I couldn't answer that question. I had no air left in me, and I collapsed to the ground in exhaustion. Whatever this nightmare was, I was done living it. "You can have me," I shrieked, my voice hoarse. "I don't want to fight anymore," and as if answering my plea, a charred branch fell directly on my head, erasing the image of the burning forest.

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I could tell that the room was exceptionally bright even though my eyes were closed. My head pounded, as if someone were banging it with a mallet. I attempted to massage my temples, only to find that my hands were tied to a chair with steel chains. I looked over my body and I had no snakebites or burn marks. My body was pristine except for the sweat that had collected on my forehead. The room was sterile and there was a table loaded with medical equipment. My right arm still had

a dull ache, and I noticed there was an empty syringe still embedded in it. I was pulled from my thoughts when I heard footsteps advancing towards me. A team of men dressed in white coats entered the room. They all kept their distance from me, like I was some sort of rabid animal, except for the one man with circular glasses who stepped forward. "How are you feeling?" He sounded sinister as he spoke, and I immediately didn't trust him.

His face was vaguely familiar to me but I couldn't quite place it. My head was spinning.

"Who are you? Why am I still in this room?" I demanded.

"I'm sorry," he said calmly walking ever closer towards me, "but I can't tell you that." He paused as he circled me like a shark, then continued to speak. "I see the first dose of the memory-erasing serum has worn off."

My thoughts were hazy as my brain struggled to process the words that had just been spoken.

"The snake, the ice water, the fire," I stammered in a shaky, unsteady voice.

The white-coated man's pacing abruptly halted. "Yes, I do apologize for the hallucinations, just a side-effect of the serum. It clearly needs more testing," he said with an evil look in his eyes.

I found myself rocking from side to side, trying to escape the chair. I had to get out of here. Now.

With the snap of his fingers, the men in the white coats had surrounded me. I panicked and thrashed some more, and that's when I felt another needle being thrust into my arm. I instantly began to grow weary and my eyelids drooped.

"I'm sorry honey, but it was too bad you were caught snooping around here. You know too much about the organization. You clearly pose a threat, and so all knowledge of our operations must be erased from your memory forever."

The last thing I remembered before I was returned to the torment was the white-coated man's frightening grin.