

Creative Sample – Excerpt

Content Warnings: Medical, human experimentation, implied homicide.

More than the black, she felt the weight of the silence. Her eyes opened slowly, cautiously, lashes clinging to one another with the burden of a long sleep as she greeted the fathomless abyss. A few more seconds passed and she remembered her body, her limbs sluggish and unwilling to respond, fingers stretching to life like a dying alternator with the knuckles flexing and slacking erratically. As she breathed, a process that need not rely on her empty mind, her lungs filled with a burning, too-sweet air, her lips trembling on the edge of each labored gasp.

Slowly, for everything she was at that moment was languid and suppressed, she became aware that she was floating. Her skin was engulfed in isotonic warmth and she felt, though some part of her knew it could not be true, as if she were suspended in infinite space.

She should be afraid, or concerned, or anything but what she was: blank. Silent. Lacking the gumption and energy to do more than acknowledge her strange surroundings as her reality.

Grey thoughts rose in the place of fear, tumbling over one another, broken images staggering through decimated pools, her memories – gone, but their traces there. Scents, pictures, faces without names, names without faces – did she have a name?

--Yes, she did, but what was it? Where was it? It was missing yet felt, its presence like an errant note saying 'went to lunch – back in ten'. Except whoever had left that note was long gone and there wasn't a clock in sight, just the mute darkness seething in eternal stillness.

First, she remembered home. The laboratory she had spent every sentient moment in, though again 'laboratory' was a name she did not know, so purposefully sheltered from the reality. Sharp nostalgia filled her nose, the scents of acid and formalin, of alcohol and liquor, the second smelled on the breath of a looming, faceless figure who seemed to haunt every corner of her thoughts like a dark blur waiting at the peripheral.

Yet no matter what she recalled—the red-soaked pictures, the visceral urges that had pulsed through her mercilessly—none of them had any sound. Every broken scrap of memory was clothed in silence and dressed in preternatural stillness.

All save the last surviving fragment, its gravity weighing down on her tongue, making her aware of a heaviness in her teeth, a trap in her lungs.

She choked against the respirator, but she didn't care. The only thing that mattered to the nameless girl was the *sound*, the only sound she could ever remember hearing.

His voice.

"Celeste."

Why do you

Is it because

Being it is bad?

More thoughts tumbled forward, faster and chaotic, phantoms of the past racing through her mind and leaving but traces for her to follow.

Her lips pulled back in a smile, contorting her otherwise placid face with sharpness as details drifted back to her in distorted snapshots. They had played the most wonderful game. *Tag*. It was a game she was very good at, better than all the others—their bodies had been too slow, their movements too lumbering. Even when the big ones rushed in with their white coats and their snarling toys, they too had felt so very weak and slow under her hands.

"Can you salvage for parts?" the same voice asked in her memories, faraway.

Dark ones had followed after the big ones fell. They were smaller, quicker figures, blue sparks around their hands. Then—

"Save as much as you can."

Then everything had coalesced and she had danced, laughing, faster and faster, colors sharp and crisp, alive, dynamic shapes twisting up space into an ethereal, vicious montage.

You're it! You're it!

"Celestine."

Light ripped the darkness apart, splitting it down the middle and rebounding off the circular, chrome walls surrounding her, far-off rotaries and levers coming to life, mechanical motion rumbling the metal shell.

"Can you hear me, Celestine?"

Yes, she thought, growing increasingly panicked the longer her voice refused to work around the plastic column in her throat, *I hear you — only you, I can only hear you.*

—Yellows. She remembered impossible yellow, touched with orange, a flaxen glow—

"I'm going to let you out," the man said, the man she knew but didn't, repeating that strange word with an unsettling cool, "Do you want to come out, Celestine? If you do, you have to start breathing on your own."

What, she wondered, is a Celestine?