

Infiltrated

Government officials had spent painstaking hours determining the easiest way to attempt to save the human race, only to find the same solution recurring. Evacuation. There was to be no risk taken, no opportunity for an infiltrated being to escape with the remaining healthy species. There was to be a minimum evacuation capacity to minimize the risk of further infiltration in the new colony and to maximize the productivity and success in the new colony. Each nation was to have its own new colony, with an allotted space for 600 healthy members to pioneer the new life. Children of age's seven to eleven and fertile adults of ages twenty one to thirty were the prime specimen for the evacuation.

Every night on the news, counts of current members accepted flashed across the screen providing hope and reluctance simultaneously. Twenty four hours a day crowds of people pressed up against each other, breathing warm and possibly tainted breath down each other's necks. At this point it was near impossible to tell who was infiltrated and who was not. The crowd of people stretched to the horizon and beyond, a seemingly endless line for many. By the third week, the first two shuttles had left. Twenty spots remained on the final shuttle, and the majority of the remaining population was infiltrated. The streets were unsafe to walk without proper precautions and protection. Infiltrators were not only out to infect but to kill in other scenarios. There was only so long that one could live without leaving the confinements of their house, also assuming that an infiltrated did not get in. It was no longer about life on earth for humans, but was about when death would pleasure them and end the nightmare

When twelve hours before the final shuttle would leave was when I discovered that Collin had been infiltrated. He laid still and lifeless on the sofa. His chest did not rise and fall with shallow breaths as usual. I approached him cautiously with silent footsteps, not wanting to draw attention. Even from a distance I knew he was gone, that it was too late for him. The thin slits on his neck rippled with movement with the intake of air and a slick inky blue tongue flicked out between his cracked lips. My lip trembled as I saw the man that I loved like this. He was gone. This was no longer him but only the remains of his shell. His head rolled to the side to face me and his eyes snapped open. No colour or pupils adorned the centre, as if all colour was removed completely. Blankly Collin stared at me with eye sockets that had the resemblance of being filled with cold milk.

This was when I knew we had to leave.

The afternoon sun hung high in the sky at the moment we left. I carried Maria in my arms, stroking her chestnut ringlets as I moved swiftly down the eerily empty streets. As I picked up my pace and closed the distance between my current position and the meadow where the final shuttle awaited, I could feel their presence. Slowly they crept from shadows of houses and crawled from the underbellies of vehicles. Their limbs swung wildly and limply as they hobbled down the street after me with inky tongues flicking in and out and their eyes of cold milk locked

onto me. They exuded a scent similar to rotting fish and whiskey and their skin ranged in a variety shade of grey depending on when they were first infiltrated. I was their prey and Maria just a sweet tidbit on top of it all. I closed in on the final few metres dividing me between life and death at this moment. Time seemed to slow as I came down upon the final strides and I could hear the sloppy steps of the infiltrators getting closer behind me. I threw myself into the meadow, shielding Maria with my torso in these final moments. The shuttle coordinators surrounded us the second we hit the ground.

The leather clad hand grasped my chin as the small penlight was shone into both my eyes and the side of my neck was inspected time and time again.

“Healthy.”, the inspector said dryly as a coordinator led us off towards the shuttle. “First-aid treatment for the mother”

I sat on the shiny chrome table patiently as the latex coated hand gingerly stroked the bump forming on the side of my head. The doctor’s eyes darted across the clipboard covered with my basic test results.

“Well. You seem to be okay, even after that nasty fall. You were leaving it rather close there weren’t you, Allison?” he said calmly as he removed his gloves, “And I’d like to congratulate you on being the mother of the first new born to be born on the colony.”

“Excuse me?” I whispered, still feeling slightly dazed after all of the events today.

“Allison. You’re pregnant.” the doctor said with a slight smile before leaving.

I grasped my stomach as I leaned forward and emptied the contents of my stomach onto my shoes and the spotless floor.

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I think that approximately one thousand, four hundred and fifty three days have passed since evacuating earth and boarding the colony. I want to believe that one thousand, four hundred and fifty three days have passed but at times I struggle to comprehend the passing of time. Without the natural set cycle of natural light determining when one day ends, and another begins, I refuse to believe that one thousand, four hundred and fifty three days have passed. The moderator of light hours on the colony was clearly just screwing with the whole population by shortening and lengthening days as he pleased. At least, that’s what I told myself in order to believe. I want to believe that it’s been more than one thousand, four hundred and fifty two nights of sleepless nights and dreams tainted with the faces of infiltrators.

Proof assuring that one thousand, four hundred and fifty three days have passed was the size of Connor. He was born three months into living on the colony. He was born five months too early while my clothes had only begun to tighten in the slight abdominal protuberance that

was growing in the depths of me. Doctors said he wouldn't survive, as his weight barely pushed past the two pound mark on the shiny chrome scale. Connor was the first baby to be born on the colony. He was also the first to survive. Newborns had a low chance of survival aboard the colony. Most members of the society were pumped full of information on small children being unable to cope with the environmental issues of the colony including high altitude levels causing their hearts and brains to malfunction and the air quality being so processed that a child's trachea would close over after leaving the mother's womb, causing suffocation. The public believed this information. It sounded accurate and reasonable, especially when everyone just wanted to believe that life was continuing. However, I knew differently.

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I used to think that I hated Mondays, wet socks and pigeons. Although I still do not feel a strong attraction for any of these listed articles, my perspective on the concept of *hate* had taken a full eighty-eight point five degree turn since life aboard the colony had commenced.

I could see them, though they could not see me. Five days of my week were spent peering into the lives of strangers that were brought into the gleaming white hospital room. I watched as nurses donned in powder blue garments pattered around the room, waiting for our signal. I watched as Dr. Jennings positioned himself between the thin ankles of a young woman with purple latex covered hands beckoning the unborn creature towards the light of the world. I watched as the young woman dug her long fingers into the sides of the hospital bed and saw her face contort to positions that one would not believe a human would have the capability of forming. This was my job. Watching, peering into the lives of oblivious humans.

Action increased suddenly in the delivery room as the small lump of flesh and limbs plopped out into the hands of Dr. Jennings. The cord was snipped in a flash, and the child was ladled in a white cloth and rushed from the room in the arms of an awaiting nurse. I could re-enact the next scene from watching and experiencing it on a near daily basis.

The new mother looked around the room with panic, pain, relief and sweat plastered over her face simultaneously. Dr. Jennings placed a weathered hand on her forearm as he removed his surgical mask, attempting to look grief-stricken.

"I'm sorry. He didn't survive..." Dr. Jennings said sympathetically. I didn't need to hear the words leave his mouth. It was always the same. The same words engraved into my mind, that my lips moved subconsciously mouthing the same words.

"But... how?" the new mother whispered, as the first tear rolled down her cheek and her clenched fist snapped to her trembling mouth.

"Suffocation. His respiratory system just couldn't handle the processed air quality." Dr. Jennings explained, "It is a common occurrence with new born children aboard the colony."

The door swung open to the room I was watching from. The nurse carrying the newborn child rushed in and left him in the incubator before she scurried out, refusing to make any eye contact with me. This was my cue, my place of action.

The baby's small hands formed clenched fists reaching towards the plastic roof of the incubator. He looked so innocent. Doughy limbs flailing and fine black hair gracing the top of his head. This was what I hated. The child flinched slightly as the tip of the syringe poked into his plump arm.

A mixture of rabies, piranha DNA and scurvy all inserted into the small child's system in a matter of seconds. This was the closest that anyone was able to replicate the infiltrator virus. The infiltrator virus had no known source or cure to this point. This was the only way that progress could be made for the safety of future humans. At least that's what I told myself.

As the child thrashed about in its confinement, I selected the next vial of possible antidote. *Antidote #2653*. Two thousand, six hundred and fifty two innocent lives had been terminated before this trial. Two thousand, six hundred and fifty two lives had fallen victim to my purple latex hands. Two thousand, six hundred and fifty two sets of parents mourned the loss of their first, second or third child. It was my fault. I could not deny it. My hands were stained with innocent fresh blood of newborn children, with no progress to show. I used to pray that the day would come when Antidote #n would be successful or when the research and my job would end. Now however I find myself saying prayers that the neck would snap easier and silently or that the child would not thrash about as my hand clamped over its wailing mouth.

The child's skin no longer emitted the glow of fresh baby, and its pupils were dilated and erased all colour of the iris. Its breathing was abnormal, switching from rapid to shallow breaths with no warning. Cautiously I injected the child with the antidote, watching for possible improvement in the child's condition. It appeared calmer, relaxed and possibly recovering after injection. From its peaceful state its head snapped to face me. Large black eyes stared into mine, a discoloured tongue flickered out and a small hand scraped against the plastic side. I placed a firm hand on the child's forehead and quickly twisted its neck to an angle an owl would find comfortable. The bones cracked satisfactorily, sounding similar to potato chip prey being consumed by predator.

Antidote #2653: Failure.

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Returning to the rooms that I called home was the only thing that could really calm me after a day's work. After approximately seventeen barely initiated lives were ended under the power of my hands. One problem that still proved to be unsolvable aboard the colony was the space for living. From knowledge of constant population growth, each family was allotted a small room for sleeping quarters only. For some this meant sharing the room that measured 15'

by 8' with two; while to others it meant sharing with six. The small living space comforted me. I always knew that Maria and Connor were to be safe. Always.

As I walked down the corridor to my living compartment, I saw the small figure curled up outside the door. With her knees pressed to her forehead, her chestnut ringlets cascaded downwards and bounced as she shook silently.

“Mommy!” Maria cried as she registered the clicking of my shoes for my footsteps. I held her close, stroking her hair and attempting to subdue her trembling.

“Maria...what’s wrong...” I said holding her face between my hands, gazing deep into her jade eyes searching out the truth inside, in case that lies would slip between her thin lips.

“C-C-Connor...he’s not well...” the child whispered as her eyes darted towards the door to our room.

Although Maria stood rigidly in the hallway trembling from fear, I bolted into our room. He laid on the mattress silently, his small hand grazing the floor. Possible ailments ran through my head as I approached the bed where he laid. Flu, common cold, food poisoning, strep throat, nasal infection. With each step closer the list narrowed down. I watched as his chest failed to rise and fall with each movement. I saw the red welts on his neck where the skin had separated, and where the slits rippled with the intake of air. His head flopped to the side carefree and the lids of his eyes lifted, unveiling the cold milk filled sockets. Infiltrated. Connor was gone, it was too late. No cure was known except one. Death.

I grabbed a pillow from my bed, taking silent steps across the room towards the sleeping, empty shell that was my son. I plunged the pillow down sharply over the cracked lips of the empty child and covered the freshly formed gills on the side of his neck. His body convulsed and twisted as the air supply to his brain was slowly removed.

“Mommy! No! You’re killing him!” Maria sobbed from the door way as she fell to her knees sobbing.

Alerted from the piercing screams of Maria, security officials rushed into the room. What would be believed to be Connor was dying. The movements and struggle for air became more violent as the need of air increased and panic took over his body. Maria’s scream still filled the room and tears stained her round face. Security officials proceeded closer to me with caution, unsure of what to think of the scenario they were witnessing. Connor’s body grew limp and lifeless. I removed the pillow to be faced with the cold milk eyes staring blankly into me and an inky blue tongue stuck out the edge of his parched lips.

“Ma’am, step away from the child. Immediately.”, one of the security officials said as he slowly closed the distance between us. I noticed that the other two had their guns locked onto me, as if I was the one that was in the wrong.

“She killed Connor!” Maria sobbed before a security official stepped in front of her to provide the protection they believed the child to need.

“No...no...no...He was infiltrated. The infiltrators. They’re here...”I whispered as my fingers released their grip on the pillow letting it fall to the floor.

“Ma’am. Please. The infiltrator virus was left behind when we left.” He said as he continued to close the distance between us.

“No...it must have been dormant. Four years. It could be everywhere by now. It could be too late!” I yelled, slowly realizing that the gene in Connor must have been passed on during conception.

“Ma’am. Please. Just come with us. Now.” He said, placing a firm grip on my hand and slowly leading me out of the small room. I saw Maria’s tear stained face and her twisted mouth as she wailed again. I also saw the quick flash of the slick inky blue tongue between her dainty pearl like teeth.

“She’s gone! Kill it! Infiltrator!” I screamed as I lunged towards Maria’s neck, praying for a quick potato chip snacking snap.

Although my prayers of a quick potato chip snack snap were not answered, my old prayers were. I saw the quick movement of the finger on trigger as the gun was fired. I felt the bullets enter me but felt no pain. I was free. Free from the job that had stained my hands and tainted my mind forever. As I fell to the ground, blood evacuating my system at an uncomfortably fast speed, I saw one last fuzzy image.

Maria, staring at my crumpled body on the floor. The shells of the security officials convulsed and twisted as the infiltrator virus entered their systems. Slowly Maria lowered herself down to floor level, staring intently into my glazed eyes with her cold milk filled socket eyes. Gently the slick, inky blue tongue slid down my forearm; sending a strange tingle up my spine.

“Mother dearest. I never knew that you would taste so fine.” She hissed before the world I knew was wiped from my eyes forever.