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M.O.D

When Tehar received the message, she didn't know how to feel. She had been chosen to participate in the program which was the talk of the whole System: M.O.D. No one really knew what it was about, but everyone was obsessed with it. Thousands of millions of advertisements were cast off to reach every crevice of the System. Even the humblest family living under the smallest rock would dream of a day where they could see M.O.D. Or feel its effects. Or talk to it? Either way, it had become one of the greatest mysteries of the millennia.

Tehar saved the message and averted her eyes from the small screen; rubbing her stiff face. She had been staring in front of the same black words for at least 0030 minutes, reaching no conclusion. Just then she heard Clasia call her.

"Tehar, luv! What's taking you so long? We should be on our way now!" Clasia appeared on the door, perfectly dressed and putting on her earrings. "Are you still working? I've told you... are you alright?" something must have been off on Tehar's expression, Clasia went over to her and took her face in her hands, inspecting her features.

"I'm not sure I should go, Clas. I'm not feeling very well".

"Hmm. You do have a tinge of green. Has something happened?"

"I suppose. Not sure I should tell you, don't want you to worry. I'm just overreacting." Tehar tried to get up from her chair, to get past Clasia and her inquisitive gaze, but her

fiancé put her foot down. She looked into Tehar's eyes: "You can tell me anything. You're not overreacting, I'm sure".

They moved to the couch, where they sat long and talked out all of Tehar's feelings. She was excited to have been chosen; surprised, as no one she knew was involved with M.O.D.; equal parts intrigued and suspicious of the program itself; and absolutely terrified to go. She couldn't shake the ominous feeling of dread; how could she be expected to enter the unknown?

Clasia listened and rubbed Tehar's back, the only comfort she could muster up. "I think you should do it. If they have chosen you, it must be because of something, right? I will support you no matter what, but if I were you I wouldn't think twice about it. Also, I'm sure everything would be regulated, they wouldn't put you in danger!"

"That's true I guess..."

And thus, it was decided. They didn't go to the party, instead they cosied up in their flat, Tehar calming down and Clasia helping her to do so. The next day, Tehar packed a bag with some essentials; completed with inessentials by Clasia. Accepting the recruitment meant that Tehar would be gone for an average of two months. She still couldn't believe she had agreed to this, but at the same time the curiosity was clawing her insides.

Tehar and Clasia hugged hard, squeezing each other, and as they separated Clasia leaned in and softly kissed Tehar. Tehar's nervous anxiety deflated slightly. "Enjoy your time in M.O.D, I wish I could go with you." "Yeah, I wish you could go too, I'm going to be miserable without you!". "Hey, it's alright, luv. Cheer up! I`m not going but you are! And I want you to tell me everything when you come back!" after another goodbye kiss, they finally separated and went opposite ways.

* * *

When Tehar arrived at the direction the message provided, she was surprised it wasn't the big M.O.D. building that overlooked most of the city. Instead, she was standing in front of a tattered down three storied antique house. Her anxiety began to flare up again, but she straightened up and dialled up the interface where she had to enter the code she was given. Beneath her feet, direction arrows lighted up; the white blinking lights urging her to enter the house.

Inside, she was met with a group of twenty or so people, all in their day clothes, like her. They were whispering loudly, but quieted upon her arrival. A short man with green hair and big black-rimmed glasses, dressed in something akin to a nightgown, entered the room and spoke to the group.

"Hello and welcome to M.O.D. My name is Dr. Prance, and I will be in charge of monitoring your progress throughout this experiment. Should you have any inquiries, as I am sure you do; please do ask me, I will do my best to inform you of what I can. However, may I remind you that you may not disclose anything of what you will see or experience here, as this is a highly confidential study, which will be revealed to the public in its due time".

Dr. Prance was speaking with a warm smile, but Tehar wasn't entirely on board with all of that. When he was asked about the study, he responded something vague about emotions and progress and whatever, she wasn't really listening. What difference would it make for her to know it if he wouldn't explain it properly?

The group was led through a side door, and on towards a steep staircase. They arrived at a much larger room and were instructed to wait there. nobody was speaking, a stark contrast to before. There was a communal sentiment of wonderment tinged with cautiousness as they all dispersed around the room. Tehar went walked towards what appeared to be a window, but upon inspection seemed more like a weird glass, but she couldn't see her reflection. Suddenly, her mind went haywire, swirls of thoughts and feelings clashing inside her; doubt, wariness, fear. She felt dizzy and weak, and the last thing she saw was Dr. Prance's smile above her.

* * *

A loud whirring noise woke Tehar up. She opened her eyes slowly, at the same time that a young boy spoke to her.

"Good morning... Tehar, is it?" She quickly sat up and nodded. "Well, I believe you missed your renaming yesterday, but don't worry; we've arranged a room and a number for you. From now on you'll be addressed as N^o 1768; also the name of your cell. You will spend all your time here, unless you are requested onto the common room".

"Did... did I sleep for a whole day? I don't remember much of yesterday".

"Yes, you fainted due to hyperfeel. Don't worry, you were well taken care of".

And with that, he turned around and just. Disappeared. Tehar blinked slowly a few times, making sure she hadn't hallucinated the boy. After a few minutes, as it seemed he wouldn't return, Tehar lay down in her bed again. She still felt drained of energy so she allowed a few more minutes to rest. She didn't have anything else to do anyway.

After what could have been a few hours, she felt a bit more like herself again, and got out of the bed. Her room was very modern, but also cosy; with a giant led screen and a big armchair next to it, where her bag rested. To her right, a door led to a decent sized bathroom. Upon finding out all of this, Tehar calmed a little. She had expected a care room, all white and blue and antiseptic, so it was nice to have been placed in a homelier place. She became excited all of a sudden; despite her initial reluctance, and the fainting incident, she now found a renewed optimism towards this thing she was now a part of.

* * *

Over the next few months, Tehar endured a mind-numbing routine inside the house. She had scheduled physical activity, scheduled human interaction time (with other inters, never having outside contact), scheduled tests performed on her, and scheduled reports she had to give to her carers. At first, she couldn't quite find her pace. One moment she was doing alright, the next she was overcome with anxiety. She had many breakdowns, some of them

because of her isolating cell; although most were caused by the jarring tests she was subjected to.

The first time she was monitored was particularly traumatising, as it came without warning. It was a couple of days after she was admitted, and she was bored out of her mind. She had thoroughly inspected her room and bathroom, and she had already checked the whole 4 channels the TV displayed (no recent news or live events, of course, only re-runs). Nevertheless, she thought that having a boring old TV quiz was better than nothing. But when she turned on the TV, she found herself staring at a small flame. Was it the beginning of a film? But no; she stared and stared and the fire persisted, getting slowly but surely bigger. She was mesmerised, unable to turn her eyes away from the fire. The more she focused on it, the more the room began to blend towards blackness. Only, it wasn't in the screen anymore; she could feel herself getting hotter and hotter, it was burning, she was sweating. Panicked, she tried screaming, turning away, going to the door to call someone, anything. She was paralysed. The flames were flaring up; crackling sounds and a burnt smell and a deep sense of fear were the only things in the room. Tehar was consumed by it. She tried to block them out, they weren't real, they weren't real, they weren't real, ...

When the carers entered the room, they found Tehar curled up on the end of her bed, facing the TV, a loud obnoxious host announcing the winner of the show.

Later, the boy she had first met, her principal carer, explained a bit of what had happened. She had to be exposed to terrifying things in a controlled environment, in order for the carers to gauge her reactions and to prepare the tests she would have to take afterwards.

"Will they all be like that? It was horrible, I felt a lot, and nothing at all"

"Don't worry, N°1768" he tried for a warm smile, felt more like a grimace "the carers won't do you any harm. Everything is under control and well monitored".

Tehar had to learn to take it in her stride. Each test was worse than the previous one. All of them were jarring and exhausting. She fainted quite a few times, again given the same reason by her carers: hyperfeel. That didn't sound good to her. She was quite in tune with her emotions, thank you very much. How could she be fainting from feeling too much? And why would they "test" her that way? It made no sense. Tehar bowed to endure what they threw at her; she couldn't do much to get away after all ...

Clasia was almost always on her mind. As she spent more time in the house, she became more isolated, both by imposition and by choice, not that the other inters were very amicable either. That left reminiscing about her love.

Tehar entertained herself by thinking about her mundane life. What would she be doing that day? Was she eating well? Would she have gotten the promotion she deserved? Oh how she wanted to see her again, to run her hands through her red hair and to hold her close. Tehar couldn't wait to get out and see her, it had been the longest she had gone without at least speaking to her. Most of the times, she gained energy, decisiveness; from remembering Clasia; she wanted to get out.

One distinct time, however, her thoughts turned awry. Tehar felt the poignant melancholy of loneliness, the despair of not knowing when she would next see her. She bawled her eyes out, screaming and kicking around the room. She was so immersed in her own head, that

she didn't realise when two pairs of arms grabbed her and pulled her out of her room and into another one, until she saw the thousands of eyes watching her from over the bathrobes. She shouted as a sharp cold zip went through her spine, then collapsed and slept.

* * *

They had declared her fit to go sometime soon after the incident. Dr. Prance came to see her out himself. "You have been of immeasurable value to our research, I hope you realise. In a few years everyone will improve their life, and all thanks to extraordinary people like you. I wish you well, Nº 1768".

She was escorted to her house by her carer boy, who only left when he saw her enter through her door. Clasia hadn't been told she was coming, and when she saw Tehar she ran to her shrieking in surprise. She was not met with the same enthusiasm.

"I missed you so much! You have to tell me everything, I didn't even know you'd be home! How are you, was it ok? What did you do there?" Clasia bubbled.

"I'm tired, may I go to bed"

"O-of course, yes... you don't have to ... ask permission, though". She was dumfounded, and a little hurt. Showing a bit of excitement after years of not knowing from each other wasn't much to ask, was it? With an increasing sense of guilt, she led Tehar to their bed and tucked her in, then she left her alone to rest. What a day.

Tehar's temperament remained slow and pensive since she returned from M.O.D. Clasia was desperate, she couldn't do anything to awake her breathing corpse of a girlfriend, and it was starting to make her very suspicious, and very, very guilty. She was the one that encouraged Tehar to go do that damned study. How could she have been so naïve, and so dismissive of Tehar's insecurities? She was right after all, something was amiss with the company. But what? They were so careful, so secretive.

When she saw the new adverts that plagued every media interface of the System, Clasia finally understood:

"Be your best self by enhancing your best mood! M.O.D. presents: mood switching bracelets."

"Get you out of your funk with the M.O.D. bracelets, you won't go back to feeling blue!"

"Choose to be happy: for yourself, for your community; Choose M.O.D. bracelets"

Bioprofile of the author

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