

The Subject

By

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## Day 1

It's white, nearly all white. I look just like a patient, but I ain't worn clothes as clean as this for months. A bed, table, chair, with a shower and toilet in one of the four corners more or less completes my all white, all bland, but liveable temporary home. Nowhere do I run my finger and pick up dust.

No windows for 24 days in this cell worries me, but at least in this place I'm not landlord dodging. It appears the only way I'm gonna get a glimpse of the outside world is through the flap at the bottom of that locked door. I lean back in the metal chair and see one naked light bulb and a speaker in the top corner of the wall with the door. I look back at the table and catch my reflection in the mirror on the wall front of me. It don't take a genius to guess that it's two-way. I doff an imaginary cap at whoever may or may not be watching, and grin.

On the table is a dictaphone resting on a letter. I reach for the note titled, 'Read Me Into Dictaphone.' My bare toes tap against the white lino as I struggle to find the god damn record button on this big hunk-a-junk. Once found, I get a sudden dose of stage fright, 'Umm, hi. I see ya'll want me to read this paper, so here goes.'

I touch the rim of my glasses to double check they're in line – habit.

'I, 33b, hereby claim absolute responsibility for any eventuality in the course of this 24 day clinical trial, and for the foreseeable future. By reading

this out in full, I hereby declare myself in a contractual agreement with the company who will pay me on completion of the course. Well, there it is guys, money, money, money!

The flap opens and a tray of food is slipped through. I rush to see any life outside the door. No one there, 'Thank y'all' I call. No response. I dig in to the simple dish at the desk. A glass of water and syringe sit on a piece of paper next to my meal. It instructs me to inject the syringe into my thigh, then drink the water 'To ensure I stay hydrated from the shock of the needle.' To try and look cool, I do that thing they do in the movies when they flick the syringe. I sink it into my skin and watch the serum squeeze into my body. The sting is slight and quickly over. I toast towards the mirror and take a drink.

## Day 2

I hold the dictaphone to my mouth like I'm about to announce Glenn Miller onto the stage, 'I'm startin' to adapt to the light. Last night's sleep weren't the easiest, nothing to do with the drugs or the bed, but the booze. I ain't gone to bed this dry in a long time. I'm keepin' busy, exercise, naps, deep thinkin' an' all that. I get three meals a day, I guess I've been usin' that to tell the time. I ain't felt no effect from the serum. Perhaps it takes a while to feel somethin', or perhaps it ain't working on me at all. I dunno.'

#### Day 4

10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. The flap distracts my quick flow. More food, 'Thank y'all,' no response, as usual. Something distracts me once again from my press ups. It's faint, real faint. I stand and listen. It's coming from the speaker. I stand on the chair for closer inspection. I see a volume knob around the back of it, on 1. I try to turn it up but it's locked. I put my ear against it and hear the very faint sound of a song, I can't name it out though. Then it stops, just like that.

#### Day 8

The familiar sound of the door flap opens, but an unfamiliar sound comes with it. It's a buzz, a buzz that can only come from a fly. I slide myself back up against a wall and catch sight of it.

'Hi there. Perhaps we should introduce ourselves. In here I'm 33b, but you can call me Patrick,' I bashfully share, 'huh? Oh, well that's a lovely name. I feel pretty pumped for a work out, do I look pumped to you, Sarah?' The fly rests on the table. 'You hear that? That music? That means it's time to work out. You just stay there and watch the show. Press ups, yeah, press ups should do it.' 1, 2, 3...

...456, 457, 458. 'Holy fuck!' I grab the edges of the table and prepare to do some table curls. 'You might wanna move, Sarah, don't wanna hurt ya.' I pull and the table lifts, with ease. 1,2,3,4,5, no problem...

...50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55! I throw the table down and it slams the mirror hard, my face distorts in the reflection. Veins pulsate through my thin skin like eels



sum of one million dollars I understand that the nature of this clinical trial is extremely confidential by speaking this verbal contract I agree to keep any information of my experience absolutely confidential under any circumstances.' I breathe.

'Just keep feeding it to me boys and I'll do anything you like!' I scramble towards the tray with the serum and glass of water; I inject and drink like an addict.

#### Day 11

The bed I'm balancing on the base of my feet is as light as the dictaphone I'm holding. Up, down, up down. 'That song's playing again, Sarah. You hear it?' I say into the dictaphone as I continue to work out, 'But I still can't name it. Sounds like a bunch of women singing about rum and coke or cola or whatever. You know it, Sarah? In fact, I been thinkin', how about when we get outta here I take you to a bar, get you a nice, ice-cold rum and cola? You can just park your butt on the edge of the glass or somethin', and I'll tell ya what, I'll sip from the other side. People'll think I'm god damn crazy! Sharing rum with a fly! They won't believe their eyes! Ha! On another note, I'm feeling a bit stiff all of a sudden. You feelin' that girl? What's that all about? I felt fine a minute ago.'

#### Day 12

'It's beautiful. I'm seeing things humans can't, shouldn't, whatever, see. Every dip, sudden change of direction, its eyes, its legs, the mucus around the

microscopic spikes on its face, the flutter of its wings, it's all so clear. I can see it all, an' it's fascinatin'. She's truly fascinatin'.' Another tray of food, the serum glistens at me,

'Thank y'all!' I crawl towards it slowly, not wanting to disturb my friend. I inject, take the water, leave the food.

#### Day 14

'The fuckin' song! I wanna dance an' boogie and SHIT! But I can't move to it it it it just freezes me my jaw goes stiff an' hard and FUCK! PLEASE FUCK! Please say I can dance, PLEASE! Sorry. FUCK. Sorry. LOOK! Sorry. Shit. My, uh, skin. My skin is strong but tight I'm growing out of it it's like my muscles are growin' too fast for my skin look. Sarah says I look like shit, she ain't half wrong. She's seen me lookin' better. Don't you fly off lookin' for another man I tell ya. You hear me! Bitch! Damn, it hurts to smile.' Another sheet of paper on the table, 'Looks like I gotta read this fuckin' bullshit shit! Enhancement drug designed for the army to improve soldiers' performances in the field of conflict by partaking in this clinical trial I 33b am supporting the need for performance enhancement in the U.S Army there you go guys it's done it's done it's done it's done istun istun stun stunstunstunstun.' Another syringe sinks in. I pick up the water, 'Sarah, to us,' I drink.

#### Day 15

'My leg's shaking and my teeth are grindin' on each other. The buzzing's gettin' louder and louder and louder I gotta twitch in my eye my heart fuckin'

kills that god damn buzzin! That god damn buzzin!' In one swift move I catch Sarah's wing in a vice-like grip. I slam it on the table and punch it, and punch it, and punch it, and punch it and stand up and punch it and punch it and punch it. I pound my fist onto the mess. Slowly, I remove my hand to show remnants of what used to be Sarah. The carcass lies in a huge dent wedged into the steel table.

I pick up the dictaphone, 'Today. I killed her. I never thought I could kill.'

The music begins to play and I'm stuck. Completely stuck. I wanna cover my ears but my arms refuse to move. It ends and I unlock, I head to the controls; still set at volume 1. I push my hands through my hair; some of it comes off my scalp and into my hands.

#### Day 16

The tape and cogs inside the machine are crystal clear, 'Update; bits of my skin are coming off on my fingernails my nails are red raw from the scratching my hair is fallin' out from the scratching I'm scratching. It's like a domino effect of rottin', am I rottin'? My lips are cracked, I need this wall to hold me up.' Skin peels off my lips and lands on my cracked, dry tongue, a metal taste hits my buds. 'My joints need oiling, it's easier to not move.' I wait. 'I can't close my eyes. I haven't closed them for...days, the lights are too bright.' I wait.

'Now.'

'Thank y'all.' I call once again.



### Day 18

'I don't wanna to do this any more,' I whisper into the dictaphone. 'I need to get control of this. It's not worth it, I'm sorry I wanna to leave. Fuck the money, fuck the serum, and fuck 33b. I ain't no number, I'm Patrick Roberts. Patrick Roberts. I ain't doin' it no more, go fuck yourselves you lying son's of bitches. Go fuck yourselves! I'm Patrick Roberts, you hear that!' I smile. In fact, I can't stop smiling, to the point where I can't hold in a laughter that's desperate to unleash. I'm hysterical, I can't stop. The more I laugh, the more I stretch my lips which cut and tear. I feel them get wet with blood; I wipe it off my lips but just smudge it over my face. It burns, it burns so much.

Then I stop. And I have absolute control. I take a drink of water, 'I'm stoppin', and there ain't nothin' you can do.'

### Day 21

'You alone there you alone there you you you you youyouyouyouyou but then you won't get your money that's what you want isn't it it's money for your little wife and daughter you love them don't you and they want money for the fuckin'...fuckin'...Sarah! Sarah! Fuck!'

A paper I haven't read yet. My ankle joints squelch and give way under my weight so I have to drag my body to the paper then the chair. My finger joints bruise as I pull myself up, bent ankles dragging behind me. I straighten out the crumpled paper but stain it with peeled skin and blood. My thumb nearly buckles trying to press the record button, 'The nature of the serum is not completely known the product is DNA from a

classified source some of the strands show signs of  
bein' attached to human DNA in order to work together  
this helps enhance performance in the early stages  
of experimentation ... is difficult ... balance  
levels of consumption leading to physical ...  
psychological change in the subject as a paid  
volunteer I 33...aaaaaaaagggggg!

I wipe my vomit off the paper, I need to finish.

'No, Patrick Ro...Patrick...Ro...accept the affects  
of the serum I have willingly injected into myself.'

I lie in my sick, 'I stopped takin' that shit, I should be gettin' bedda, why ain't  
I gettin' bedda?' The music plays and it's loud; too loud. The familiar locking  
of my body happens again, 'Get off me!' I scream into my vomit, and the  
strength of my distorted yell spreads it all over the table. The music stops and  
I jump up, terrified. I catapult my chair at the speaker, I grab my bed and  
launch it, I smash the table against the wall, screaming and kicking and  
shouting. I make dents up the walls and screech like a monster, then collapse  
in a pile of mess next to the door. Breathless, I'm a mess, 'I don't know me no  
more.'

### Day 23

Coated in vomit, blood and piss, I haven't moved for two days.

'Now.'

The flap opens and I snatch the drink, 'Thank y'all', I gargle through blood. I down it. There's another note that I just read from the tray, 'Previous tests discovered that all patients ... extremely quick reaction to the serum they feel faster stronger ... more intelligent, I, 33...no...Pat..Pa..Pa...shit...33b, am trying to expand this research. Currently the subject ... feels the desired affects for one ... five days before rapidly deter...deteri...deterio, so the patient must ... aware of the methods of intake of the serum the serum the serum the serum is in the drink not ... syringe. This ... to ensure that if patients decide ... stop injecting ... serum, they would continue to drink the water, thus continuing ... experiment ... patient ... made aware of this.'

'You fucks!' Blood pours out of my mouth as I hurl abuse at nothing. Then a noise. Different. Human. It's faint, but it's a scream, a man's scream. Through my vomit, I drag myself to the wall and press my ear up against it. It's still there, the faintest of cries.

'Hey, hey, I hear ya, hey!' I squeeze up against the wall and listen for more noise, but something ain't right, 'fuck, fuck, fuck!' I throw myself back and hit the floor.

'What have you done to me! I'm floatin' I'm fuckin' floatin' you fuckers! What is this? Heeeeellpp, help, help, I want out! I'm out I'm out I'm a person not a fuckin' rat! I'm a name! I'm, I'm, I'm...what is it? I'm, I'm...33b.'

## Day 24

Through the music - on full blast, piercing my eardrums - I hear a tip tap tip tap tip tap in the distance. My eyes are too painful to open and it's impossible to move my joints. 'Tiptaptiptaptiptaptiptap,' I whisper. It gets nearer my door, 'Tiptaptiptaptiptaptiptap,' I get louder and faster, 'tiptaptiptaptiptatiptaptiptap!' the door swings open, forcing my burning eyes ajar. Boiler suits pour in and pull me down from floating in the middle of the room, I can't resist, I don't want to resist. They dump me on a bed and push me down a corridor. My arms and legs are clamped, 'Tiptaptiptaptiptaptiptaptiptap!' I groan. The only thing breaking up the pure white boiler suits are the big words sewn into the shoulder, 'PROPERTY OF THE STATE – NEW MEXICO'. I pass an infinite row of doors just like mine; a few are open. One looks brand new, just as mine was. Another room is trashed, blood up the walls and the overwhelming stench of piss and sweat everywhere.

Pipes and machines and buttons and silver tools surround me. A body under a sheet lies next to me as I get locked into the bed. A pipe is pulled from under the sheet, they join the free end to a syringe and take no time in shoving it into me. A green liquid crawls its way through the pipe towards my veins and as the juice squeezes into me, I seize up in a failed attempt to reject it. Even the strength I thought I had is no match for these clamps. The ooze invades me, stretching my veins and arteries to the limit, they tear. But nothing matters, not when the sheet is removed...

Its head is huge, hosting a monstrous brain. Its eyes are grey but about 20 times the size. The thin membrane over its body glistens from the shine of scalpels the surgeons hold above it. Its skin stretches over the bony frame of its fingers and arms. Without request, it begins to turn its head towards me. Its lifeless grey eyes stare right through me. Its mouth, no bigger than the tip of my little finger. The thing looks as close to death as I am. From nowhere two giant, thick lids close up its big fly-like eyes. It's losing blood, I should know, it's bein' pumped into me. I notice a label on the monster's finger, drooping over the edge of the bed, it reads, SPECIMEN 33a, AREA 51, ROSWELL, JUNE, 1947. As I read, I feel something slip onto my own finger, an identical label.

I'm not dead, I know that much. My senses ain't mine – more like something growing inside-out of me. I can't move, all my joints are locked and my bone dry skin is as taut as it can stretch. It's been getting tighter ever since I was linked up to that...thing. The coffin I'm being wheeled in lets me see out of a glass pane. I take in these alien surroundings but then I notice something else, I ain't breathing. But I'm alive. I panic and I try to break loose, but I'm locked, then notice that fucking' song playing over and over. It's got me, so I just scream instead, but nothing comes out. I have no voice! My eyes zone in on the glass four inches from my face, and I can just about make out a reflection I don't recognise. My bald skull has expanded, no wonder my head feels so heavy. Grey skin stretches over the bones and ligaments of my morphed face as the final layers of old skin peel off; I'm shedding. Lips shrunk. I'm not human. I'm one of those things. My eyes remain the only part of myself I remember, when I was, when I was...not 33b.

I get wheeled into a room with similar 'coffins', all lined up against the circular wall. I can just about make out faces through each glass panel of the other coffins. Human faces, but mutilated, disfigured, broken. Some look up at me, others look dead. Volunteers too? I'm reversed back to a wall and locked into some kind of chamber. The boiler suits link my coffin up to some pipes and tubes, then they stand back and admire their work, I'm like a god damn rat in a lab. I have a name. It's 33b.