

Test Subject by Tami

A New Life

Book 1: Test Subject #1

Carefully, I reach for the little frog I'm supposed to euthanize before my next test. He squirms and evades my grasp, like every other frog I've worked with.

Sadly, as a xenobiologist, this is a big part of my job, even if I don't like it. I have to kill this poor bugger to get rid of him, because from a very objective point of view—all my research will never lead to anything important.

Sighing, I try again to catch the slippery fellow, and then suddenly he jumps directly onto the top of my hand. I freeze for a second. He's looking at me directly, as if he understands what I'm going to do.

Gently, I turn my hand. The frog wanders along my palm, always looking at me.

"Hey, little guy," I whisper, gently patting his tiny head. "I really don't want to do this."

Obviously, there's no answer other than a croak. But it sounds so... pleading? I look over both my shoulders to see if anybody is watching. I'm alone.

I take out a box from a cupboard and cut some holes into the top, then put the little guy inside.

"I'm going to save you. You're lucky, tiny one! You're a local, so it's fine," I tell the green frog. He responds with another croak. "We wouldn't want an invasive species. But it's your lucky day."

During my lunch break—after successfully smuggling the frog out of the office into the park a few blocks away and giving him his freedom back—I sit with a few fellow xenobiologists.

They won't shut up about all their "great success" with their own latest experiments. Urgh.

"What about you, Catherine? Had any big breakthroughs lately?" asks Sam, a young colleague.

“Nah,” I say. He looks puzzled, like it’s unfathomable that anyone wouldn’t want to brag about euthanizing frogs. “I’ve been bored lately,” I explain. “It feels like I’m not going anywhere with my work.”

“Well, maybe you’re just not catching management’s attention,” says another colleague, Jasmine. “Unlike Rachel. She was a striking beauty, and she got so much attention, it won her some super-secret promotion.”

“Rachel? I didn’t know her. What happened?” I inquire.

Jasmine shrugs. “She said something about being asked to join the lower levels for the *real* work. I guess she took the job, because she never returned.”

“What’s on the lower levels?” Sam asks, looking just as confused as I feel. I didn’t even know this office *had* any lower levels.

“Nobody knows. But apparently, the big bosses are really putting their money into those projects.”

Jasmine changes the subject quickly, but I can’t stop thinking about those lower levels. What’s down there? And how can I make myself more—how did she put it—striking, to get myself invited into the *real* work?

I’m just finishing my shift when I hear my phone buzz.

Unknown

Last night was AMAZING! Can’t wait to fuck you again. You’re one sick chick, I tell you that! SO HOT.

I sigh and delete the message. It was a one-night stand, but the guy didn’t understand. I’m not into relationships, or even friends with benefits.

At this point I’m starting to think I might be asexual—don’t get me wrong, I’m very interested in sex, but I never feel any pleasure doing it. Last night was no exception.

I keep looking for a guy who can fill me up for real. But I keep falling asleep still *hungry*. The only orgasms I’ve ever had have been from my own hands.

I pack up my things, put away my lab coat, and head toward the elevator out of the building.

The office is quiet; most of the other workers have already left, but since I have no family, no attachments, and no responsibilities outside my job, I’m working overtime as usual.

My heels echo through the empty halls, and I look around curiously. Maybe if there's nobody around, I can sneak into the mysterious lower levels? But...if they're secret, how do I get there?

"Miss Woods?"

I flinch when I hear a booming voice behind me. I turn around and see a security guy, wearing sunglasses—even though it's dark outside—and a communication device in his ear.

"Yes?" I ask cautiously.

"Mr. Sire wants to talk to you," he says, and points to a different elevator than the one I usually take. Mr. Sire? What kind of stupid name is that?

There's no reason to refuse the guy, even if he is a little creepy, so I nod and follow him to the elevator.

We start descending, and I feel a jolt of excitement. Looks like I'll get to see those lower levels after all. Then excitement turns to dread. Why me? Why now? Am I in trouble?

"So...who's Mr. Sire?" I quietly ask.

The security guy looks at me in confusion. "Your boss," he replies.

I widen my eyes. I have never heard of any "Mr. Sire," and he's certainly not my boss! My boss is Mr. Rudens. But I guess, maybe...Mr. Sire is Mr. Rudens's boss?

Seriously, am I in trouble? I don't think I've done anything to piss off the big boss. But maybe they're mad that I was asking questions about the basement project.

I don't say another thing until we reach the lowest floor. Very, very far below ground level. The doors slide open onto utter blackness. This must be it!

Fuck. They're going to kill me, for sure, for asking too many questions. Just...make me vanish. Nobody would look for me.

I'm starting to panic, and I try to stay in the elevator, but the security guy grabs me by the arm. I'm only five foot six, so he doesn't even have to strain his gigantic muscles to drag me with him down the hall.

I'm not even walking anymore; he just pulls me along, until we reach an ominous door. This whole floor is just one corridor, completely black, leading to one door.

"Go inside," the guy barks at me. I don't have a choice. I nod, face the door, and take a deep breath before knocking.

“Come in,” calls a soft voice from behind the door. I open it, go inside, and see...nothing. My eyes need a moment to adjust to the dark lighting in here.

“You...asked to see me?” I say quietly. I don’t move from my spot by the door.

My eyes are adjusting to the gloom enough now that I can make out a single window at the back of the room—or, wait. No, that’s not a real window. It’s a TV screen, projecting a fake view of a starry sky.

It’s a very good counterfeit, and I might be fooled if not for the barely audible hum of electricity that emanates from it.

In front of the “window” stands a man, very tall, easily three heads taller than I am, facing away from me.

“Come a little closer, Miss Woods. No need to be afraid,” he says, pointing me toward a chair. His voice is warm and feels like a hug to my soul. I venture farther inside and sit.

“I am Mr. Sire. You will not have heard of me, but I am the owner of this facility,” he says, before fully turning around. I can’t help looking him up and down.

He’s lean but muscular, and very handsome. His features are sharp, but his gentle, dark-blue eyes gaze at me soft and warm. I can’t tell in this light, but his hair is either black or a very dark brown.

“Have I done something wrong?” I wonder. He smiles and sits down; even with us both seated, I still have to look up to meet his eyes.

“On the contrary.” He smiles. “I have been observing your work, and I am very pleased.

“We have many xenobiologists here, but none have quite the same...inquisitiveness as you. I’ve seen you go above and beyond to learn about your test subjects. But you also treat them with kindness, and, I would say...pity?”

“More like compassion,” I correct. He nods, seeming satisfied with this.

“I have an offer for you. You will work down here,” he says, pointing to a door behind him I didn’t even notice before.

“You will have your own laboratory, your own funds, and your own schedule. You will work mostly alone, but there are some other workers as well, whom you will meet occasionally.

“You will earn twice your salary. You’ll have access to the best health care, all paid for by the company. You will even be able to live in this estate if you choose, for free, with servants obeying your every wish.”

I blink a couple of times. This must be a joke. "Are you...mocking me?" I wonder aloud.

He raises his eyebrows. "I can triple your salary," he suggests. Before I can even open my mouth to respond, he amends, "Okay, quadruple. Last offer."

"That's more than enough!" I exclaim. He smiles, nodding. "But...why?" I ask carefully. "Is it dangerous?"

"Your job has always been dangerous, Miss Woods."

"Cat is okay," I say.

He just keeps smiling. "A simple sting from a toxic insect or a bite from a venomous snake...and you'd be done for." He leans over, folding his hands. "You didn't seem to be bothered before. What has changed now?"

"Well...with an offer like this, there must be a catch."

"Oh, that." He waves his hand. "There is a...series of physical tests we have to run on you first, and some questions that might be uncomfortable for you."

"Can I decline?" I ask. He laughs, and the sound of it is warm and welcoming. I should feel wary of this mysterious boss I've never met, but for some reason he seems gentle.

It's not really his appearance or his words. It's something about his voice and his eyes that make me want to trust him immediately.

"Of course," he says. Then he leans in a little closer, adding, "But I have a feeling you won't."

He's right. I won't. Wasn't I just trying to find out what goes on down here? Now a handsome man is offering me the best job I can imagine, and I'm upset because it's too good to be true?

"Okay then," I decide. "I'll happily take a look." He nods, satisfied, then offers me his hand to help me up.

His skin feels cold. At a guess, he doesn't get out in the sun much, considering the darkness down here. He drops my hand once I'm standing, and I find I miss the contact a little.

"Through here." He presses his hand flat against the front of the door, and it swings open, I guess operated by some kind of handprint-sensing technology. I walk through.

Just as I'm about to ask him why he called me down here so late in the evening, the door closes between us and vanishes, leaving only a blank, white stretch of wall.

What the...?

I turn away from the mysteriously vanished door and see a long, white corridor with many doors to both sides. My eyes need a moment to adjust again, but then I can finally start walking.

I go to the first door on my right and try the handle, but it won't budge. There's a gap at the top to look through, but I can't reach it; it's way too high. Was this made for giants?!

I gasp when I hear a sudden bang from behind one of the other doors. Glad that's locked!

I keep walking down the hall to the very end. A sign above this final door says "Clinic," so I knock and walk in.

A young man in a white lab coat is sitting at a computer opposite me. He smiles when he looks up and sees me.

"You must be Cat." He stands up. I notice that he is also very tall—he must be well over six feet. Still a bit smaller than the boss, though.

"I am. I hope I didn't go somewhere I'm not supposed to," I say. When I take a closer look around, there are a lot of medical devices, so I guess they must run a lot of tests here.

"Not at all. I need to run the physical exam with you, and I also have some questions to ask. Which would you like to start with?"

"The questions, please," I say. He nods, still smiling, and points me in the direction of a standard hospital cot with a green sheet on top. I hop on and cross my hands in my lap.

"Do you have close family?" he asks.

"No."

"Parents? Siblings?" he presses.

"No. My parents died, no siblings."

"Good," he says. I am a bit confused why he cares one way or another, but he just keeps going. "Any close personal relationships? Best friends, romantic relationships?"

"Neither."

"Very well. Do you have regular appointments you need to attend?"

“Not that I’m aware of,” I answer, and he nods again.

“Have you had sexual intercourse before?” he asks. I frown and don’t answer right away, so he looks up at me, his face open and warm. “These are standard questions required for this position.”

“That’s...weird.”

“Some xenobiotics might smell certain pheromones, which could impact your work,” he explains. I slowly nod. They have creatures down here that can smell virgins?!

“Well, I have had sex before,” I say. He looks down at the sheet of paper before him, crossing something off.

“What are your sexual preferences?”

“Umm...like...hetero or homo?” I wonder.

He chuckles, looking back up at me. “For example.”

“Well, quite open I guess.” I haven’t experimented with women much, but I’m not opposed to it.

“Do you have any physical illness, such as known liver impairments, kidney problems, anything like that?” he asks while he reads.

“I don’t.”

“What are your sexual limits?”

Now I’m really confused. “I don’t know how this...”

“The faster you answer these questions, the faster you can go home,” he says with a smile. “If you’d like, I can tell you mine, so it’s not as weird. I do not like pain inflicted on my body; everything else is okay.”

I feel very awkward, but I swallow hard and nod. I have to remind myself: I do want this job, I do want the quadruple salary, and I do definitely want to find out what’s going on down here. That’s all worth the awkwardness.

“I don’t know of any limits. I can’t think of any right now,” I say very quietly.

“Perfect. Have you ever had pain inflicted on you during intercourse?”

“Yes.” This part comes out too fast; I’m answering without thinking about it too hard.

“Did you enjoy it?”

“Yes.”

“Have you ever had anal sex?”

“Yes...,” I say, wondering how graphic these questions are going to get.

“Did you enjoy that as well?”

“I did,” I whisper. He nods, crosses off the last thing on his list, and looks up at me, still wearing that same calm, friendly smile.

“Very well. Thank you for your cooperation. We will start the physical exam now.”

“Now? Isn’t that... Can’t we do it tomorrow?” I ask, thinking about the very embarrassing underwear I picked out today.

This stranger already knows a lot about my sexual preferences; I don’t want him seeing my ladybug panties too.

“If that is what you prefer, of course.” He points back to the door I came in through. “I will bring you back outside. Come in tomorrow at any time you like. And don’t worry; you can forget about your current work. The new job starts immediately.”

“Okay...” Confused, I let him lead me back to where the door to Mr. Sire’s office disappeared earlier. It still just looks like a blank, white-tiled wall. Then the scientist puts his hand flat against a small tile, and the door reappears in a flash.

“I didn’t catch your name,” I say as he’s opening the door for me.

“I’m Richard. I will see you tomorrow.” He nudges me back into Mr. Sire’s office and then stands in the hallway with a warm smile until the door closes.

This is so weird. I wouldn’t be too surprised to hear some director yelling “cut!” just now, as this whole scene could be straight out of a mad scientist movie.

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