

Why did the lights have to go out? Christ, there had been three men with me in that room. Palmer. Childs. Norris. Brothers formed in this frozen-over hell.

We know that It needs to be alone to consume one of us, to devour our core and wear our flesh as its morbid marionette. Fukes told us that much before he took his own life. But did It need the space, or just need us not to see? Three men had been in that room with me, and when the lights went out they may as well have died.

I run down the hall with their screams behind me. They want us to stick together, but the trust is gone. The only part of me that's left to them is the red trail of blood I leave behind. It's coming from my side, but I don't look down to see the extent of the damage. It doesn't matter, really. A part of me knew I was dead since the moment those Swedes showed up hunting that damn dog.

So why fight it?

Because I've seen what It's capable of. I saw It's tentacles burst out of that Swede's chest when Blair made the incision. I saw him choke on his own blood as the creature forced It's way down his throat. That won't be me.

"Mac, please! We have to stay in sight."

Childs.

He was the one who roped me into this expedition in the first place. He said it was a chance to get away from the world. Now I expect he'd set me ablaze if he caught up with me. The worst part is I wouldn't know if it was him doing it, or It. It could look so close to us.

I make my way to the kitchen, to the heavy steel door of the freezer. Not where I thought I'd make a last stand, but at this point it's the best option. Gary had blown the heating in an attempt to finish It when it wore Nalls' face. His stumble in the roller skates had tipped us off. Or maybe it was just fear that caused Nalls to fumble. Maybe we had killed him. I push the thought aside as my hand catches the door handle.

Putting weight on the door even enough just to open it shows me how bad of a condition I'm really in. The relief of not carrying myself feels too good. I have to struggle to keep going. But the freezer is the most secure location in the base, and with

the heating out and the power fluctuating, the cold inside won't long be worse than the cold outside. We'd always made fun of the government for putting a walk in freezer in an Antarctic base. Guess it was made in some senator's home state. Now it might save my life.

With a final exertion, I seal the door by knocking over a metal shelf in front of it. Meat spills on the floor, and when I slump down to join it, I realize I'm not in much better shape. I crawl to a spot where I can see through the window -- they'll know doubt find me soon. It will no doubt find me soon.

I close my eyes and in that moment, I'm back in '75. The memory consumes me in an instant, unrelenting as a hurricane, and just as loud.

*I'm back in the U.S. home for the the first time since my last deployment. Every sight on the streets of New York causes me to jump. I don't know whether to run or attack. The shouts are in English. The smells aren't wet dirt. The people move about unarmed. Something grabs my leg, and I spin. Then...*

I'm ripped away from the memory by the sound of dogs barking. Suddenly I'm back in the freezer at the end of my life. I never knew what it would feel like to meet death, even though I'd sent enough men to their own. I didn't expect the past to be so real in revisiting. I know what comes next, and it's a memory I don't care to dwell on.

I force myself to stay in the present. I keep my right hand firm on the gap in my side, but grab my pistol in my left. I won't be much of a shot in this state, but Fukes had shown that that didn't matter with the right target.

The barking stops, and the silence is worse than anything I could imagine. Did Clark put the dogs down? Did he let them free? This had started with that husky. If our dogs make it far enough that could be the end.

*Something grabs my leg and I spin--* No! I won't go back to that. In my final moments let me leave my shame in the past. *Something grabs my leg and I spin--* No!

A face appears in the freezer window, and I'm spared New York for a time, the memory impossible to shake off on my own. It's Childs, but I hear Palmer's voice.

“Just burn that bastard. It’s not Mac. Mac wouldn’t have run. He wanted to keep us together.”

Childs ignores him and tries the handle. I find the trigger of my gun but don’t raise it. Partly not to threaten Childs til I know more, and partly because I’m not sure I even have the strength to level the weapon.

“You got yourself pretty well stuck in there, Mac”. He’s smiling. But is that his smile?

“I don’t want to kill you Childs.” I’m not sure if my voice can carry through the door. It sounds distant to my own ears.

“Mac, I don’t want to let you die. You’re bleeding. Let me help.”

“How do I know it’s you?” I say, coughing. My chin is wet.

“We were in that room together. You know it needs to get us alone, friend.”

“It took you an awful long time to find me, we both know it took Bennings faster than--”

*Something grabs my leg and I spin. A little girl is hugging my legs. Her face covered in a smile that’s missing a few teeth. The slowed reactions that would have killed me back in my deployment save her life. She looks up to me and cries “Daddy, daddy!” I don’t have time to respond before her mother drags her away and they disappear into the New York crowds.*

“No!” I shout, pulling myself back. I return to the freezer, but the girl’s face still follows me. Outside, Childs is banging on the door.

“Mac, you need to stay awake. We’re coming for you.”

The concern in his voice seems real, but the way he’s banging on the door is more aggressive than anything I’ve ever seen from Childs. When Palmer joins him, I’m sure that they aren’t real. I’ve never seen that stoner move so hard in his life.

I think back on the girl in New York. She wasn’t mine, and I’d never seen her again, but she could have been my daughter. Her face haunts me. Just a confused little girl in a big city, thinking for a moment I was her father. I don’t revisit that memory

often. It reminds me of the child I gave up during the war. The one I never saw. The daughter who would never know her father.

In that moment I make my choice. The same choice Fukes made last night. He was always smarter than me, no wonder he came to it first. The only way to know It won't get me is to end my life on my terms. I may have never seen my child, but at least this way I can ensure that the first time she sees my face isn't when it's being worn by some monster. It's funny now thinking that Childs said I could come here to get away from the world, and now the fate of it all is in this place.

I close my eyes, but don't drift back to that day in New York. I've come to terms with that memory and my decision after all these years. Now I know why the lights went out: to make me face this. To bring me peace.

I raise my left arm, and open my eyes to steady the shot. But there is no gun. There is no hand.

All I see are my beautiful appendages expanding in the open air.

I've finished assimilating the memories. The worst conflict of MacCready has been resolved and I'm free now to his thoughts. I'm free to be myself again.

The conversions had started as a means of survival, but now I know that there is so much more I can do for these people. Each one I've consumed has had so much torment. I put an end to their torment. Elevated them to something more.

At first I only wanted to get home, but now I see that after a hundred thousand years that can wait, if only to give this world peace.

Outside the freezer the ones called Childs and Palmer run at the revealing of my true form. No matter, I'll find them eventually. The lights will go out, and we will become one.