

## Chapter 1

### Blood in the Oil

“Anesthetic has been inserted into P-137.”

“Cameras going in.”

A loud, painful scream sprung out of a boy’s mouth, piercing the ears of those around it.

“*Shut up.*”

It quiets. The voice sounded so..demanding. What else could he do? Resist her? He would be put in the Room with *him* just like last time he acted out.

“Just triple the dose.” The voice commanded, “If there’s any more resistance, just do what I told you earlier. P-137 will be *fine.*”

Even with her cruelty, she sounded gentle that time. As if she could ever possibly care for him.

Eye drops drip into his mouth, eyes, and open wounds. He has to keep going. He *has* to. He couldn’t risk being tossed away like all the others. He was— *no. Is* as useful as he was before this. He’ll be fine. He won’t be tossed to the trash.

“I said triple the fucking dose! What part of triple do you not understand you achterlijke!”

An even sharper pain went through his arm, crawling and scratching desperately up the rest of his body. *Everything hurt*. The boy tried to scream, but his mouth was forced shut with a cold clamp that *reeked* of the smell of the room.

Did he even need to smell it again? He'd end up in that room even if he did do everything he was meant to do— what he was *told* to do. She did hate him after all. Or did she like him? What does..

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A light shimmers through the boy's eyelids. It felt.. nice. It felt really nice actually. It was welcoming and warm, and..good. It was uncomfortably unfamiliar, but *goodness* was it nice. He opened his eyes to see where it was coming from despite the thought that it'd be a brighter and much harsher, white piercing light, but when the boy opened his eyes it was still as warm and as welcoming as before. No weird smell or anything. Nobody around... No...doors. Nothing

dangerous at all. It was just a room with a comfortable black carpet that he could very much easily fall asleep in. The boy slowly began to sit up, allowing him to see the comfortable shade of purple that colored each of the walls. It strangely brought solace to him when he looked at it. The calming lights were from warmly glowing yellow starlights all over the ceiling and the walls. There was a strange looking claw machine on the center of the wall farthest from him. There were also bean bags with the same purple as the walls surrounding the claw machine that looked even softer than the carpet that had sat along with small, rounded-out tables, one of them housing a white porcelain cup. He tried to talk, but he held his own mouth shut— *scared*.

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Why? Why was he scared? There wasn't anybody or anything that could possibly hurt him here. Nothing was wrong. Everything was just fine. *He* was fine. He was *fine*. He couldn't *be* scared, that didn't make any sense. Everything was fine, all he had to do was check behind him in the corner.

When the boy looked towards the corner, there wasn't a wall. There was a reflection. It was..

*him*.

The boy turned around and stared into his reflection, strangely entranced with his peculiar appearance. He looked at his forest green hair and pulled out a strand and placed it on his black pants. He gently touched the silky yellow-tinted wings that replaced his ears and gently spread them. It felt so..freeing. It felt nice. He picked out one of the smaller bits of feathers on his wings and wrapped the string of hair around it. The boy then noticed the suffocating black collar that

was wrapped around his neck. Choking him slowly. The more the boy stared at it, the tighter it seemed to get as if it could feel the disgust he felt towards it and made a personal goal to hurt him till he stopped. He began to scratch at it. Painfully slowly, but it only made it worse. When he finally decided to stop after being sold away from the air around him, it loosened. A loosening that felt transactional like it'd come back to him for a favor he knew he couldn't possibly repay. As he looked back towards himself, he brought his attention towards the white jacket he was wearing and began to mess around with the red-tinted white fluff that lined the hood and zipper of his white jacket to try to soothe himself and regain control of his airflow. Even with this, it didn't feel as nice as it looked like his wings and hair did. It felt rough and gritty, but also strangely sticky as well. He hated it. It felt so disgusting to wear now, but he felt like he had to keep it on. He hated it.

He stood up using the mirror to help sort out his balance. It made a strange, painful squeaking as if it was in pain, as if it were alive. The boy stared at the mirror, confused. His eyes switched to his tired, scarred face, then to the rest of the room from the mirror. It seemed stranger than the circumstance he was in, but there wasn't anything he could do about it. He couldn't understand it anyways.

The room, despite its strange appearance, had a comforting ambience, trying its best to make the boy feel easy. It made him want to relax his shoulders, sit back down and let his wings hang loosely to the carpet. He wanted to so badly, but he could feel eyes watching, analyzing, criticizing his every move. He knew that he couldn't relax. He knew if he did, *something* would happen. He didn't know what, but he knew he didn't want that *something* to happen.

The boy turned to face the rest of the strange room. He looked at the rest of the corners of the floor and ceiling, checking for the eyes he felt, but there was still nothing. The boy walks over to one of the tables that had a cup of what seemed to be coffee.

He felt..thirsty. He felt *hungry*.

He couldn't drink it. That *something* would happen. The boy just stared at it— smelling its scent despite the distance between him and the cup. He could smell oil and dried blood seeping from it. It wasn't safe.

Something was in it.

The boy stared at it despite this as if it was a dying light in a deep, cold cave without any backup light or someone to help him get out. He felt like he had to drink it. The Eyes wanted him to drink it; they *needed* to watch him drink it. The boy shakily and slowly picked up the white porcelain cup nearly filled to the brim with that “coffee” and put it up to his mouth; the smell getting unbearably strong, burning his nose, but he had to drink it— he didn't have a choice.

The boy opened his mouth and squeezed his eyes shut as the fluid invaded and violated his taste buds and burned his throat as he swallowed it— making a sizzling noise as it corroded his inner flesh. It was bitter and unbearably cold. The boy didn't want to finish it. He hated it. He hated *all* of it.

The boy slowly pulled the cup away from his corroded mouth as if the two were magnets being taken apart and shakily held it in his hands, fighting the urge to put it back up to his mouth. He looked down at the table and saw a note written on a white piece of paper with strange red stains

dripped near the left corner. Foreign symbols were jumping across the page erratically like they were in some strange dance ritual he wanted no part of. Although the boy couldn't catch what they said; he saw one of them standing completely still in the midst of the dance: "P-137: Aster" The boy stared at it for a second, confused by the feelings that arose from it. It felt.. Like it was him—his name—his identity: who he was. He didn't understand it, but it felt like a wave crashed right into him, flooding into his lungs and running up his spine.

*Aster...*

He thought to himself.

He felt strange— distorted like he was looking through a broken funhouse mirror that elongated his form. He didn't understand—he couldn't, but it was his name. P-137... Aster. He looked back at the tainted cup, watching it whirling and spiraling in its joyful dance across his vision like a trance dragging him back into a fire. He stared at the patterns that performed their dance in the cup and slowly picked it up. The boy put it back up to his twitching mouth, feeling his last drink still scratching desperately at his stomach. He opened his jaw and poured the rest of the liquid into his rugged mouth. He could feel it corroding the inner flesh of his mouth, his teeth, and his throat as he swallowed it down slowly. As it went down into his body, he could feel every single move the liquid had made to him, acid mixing with gasoline. Everything. His vision began to blur, dizzying him. It felt familiar. The kind of familiar that felt known to him, that wasn't a stranger. Despite this, he stood back up from the table, trying his best to keep his balance and headed towards the claw machine, feeling it pulling him in.

He stumbled on to it, the oil starting to take a toll on his body. Despite his blurred vision, he could tell there were humanoid toys stuffed inside of it with no faces. One of them had pink hair, peach skin, green dress, another had white hair, void black skin, white dress, another one he could spot had blue hair, yellow-peach skin, black suit. There were so many others he could see, but he just couldn't tell what they were. The machine suddenly went off, making loud beeping noises, throwing Aster off-guard, making his blurred vision and dizziness worse. He stumbled and a loud intercom voice came on, disorienting him further.

"Welcome to the ETO subject testing center. Your name is P-137, codename: Aster. Your mission is to \*\*\*\*\* District:27 and \*\*\* remaining \*\*\*\*\* of \*\*. Please use the skills and genetical \*\*\*\*\* we have given you. We have faith in you, 137. Do not fail us." A blaring alarm goes off, causing the warm yellow lights to turn a bright, burning red color, flashing at him. White spotlights turn towards his face, shining at him like lights he felt as though used to grieve pain in.

The boy covers his eyes, stumbling down a hallway he doesn't remember seeing. He tries to grab hold of something sturdy to balance him out, but all he can get is a handle of something under his grasp. He grabs it tight and pulls it close to him, trying to get it to look as a kind of protection to any kind of danger that could be lurking around. The knife feels so natural in his grasp and he stops for a second.

This knife...

He knows it.

He knows it very well. But from where?

The boy begins to notice the blur in his vision getting worse and causing him not to be able to see anything. He loses his balance in the hallway, tiredness of something he does not remember taking over him. He stumbles down to the ground, feeling the heat of bodies and lights surrounding him from all sides. He looks up one last time before he knocks out and sees a strange figure, body *tense*.

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