

“Congratulations. Every human being in this building is now dead.” Said James. His gnarled, broken claws scraped over the wooden counter that didn’t appear to have been cleaned in years. He was referencing the fact that Hank had now moved into the second stage of the disease.

“We’re still human. We’re not dead yet.” I said. I sat in the corner of the broken remains of a pub. My seat was missing a leg and the table was stained with blood.

“You just keep telling yourself that. Zentex doesn’t see us that way anymore.” Said Hank from the opposite corner of the room. His head had ballooned to nearly twice its normal size, and there was a steady river of blood coming out of his ear. Said river of blood was running back into a pocket in his neck, flowing back into his body.

“We haven’t frozen. That means we’re still human.” I said.

“As far as anyone on the outside is concerned, we’re one of the Demented now.” Said Hank bitterly. The three of us had been locked into a pub when they realized that we were all in stage one of becoming Demented. I had been hiding it well, but someone else spotted a hole in Eric, and the whole place had been locked down. Anyone who showed symptoms was locked into the pub, which meant me, James, Hank and Eric. There were four stages to the disease. Stage one was called The Cutting. Little holes appeared all over your skin, big enough to see your muscles still working under your skin. Hank, James and I were in the second stage, The Freakshow. Weird deformities began to appear, James claw, Hanks river of blood, and my... I don’t wanna talk about it.

“We haven’t gotten into the third stage yet. We just look a little weird, that's all.” I said.

“You have a goddamn second head growing on you Megan! That's far from looking ‘a little weird.’ We aren’t going to be in a Sesame street episode about the importance of recognizing people with disabilities anytime soon!” Ranted Hank.

“You know that show turned into Zentex propaganda years ago. Same with every other show in the past few years.” Said James. He was digging through the bar, trying to find something for us to eat.

*“He knows it's pointless. You went through all the food in here days ago.”* It was the other head. It's never formed a coherent sentence like this before. Only single words, or simple thoughts. This was the first time it had formed a thought that was anything other than “kill.”

“Hey, do you think Eric died yet?” Asked Hank.

“It's possible. He hasn’t been making any noise in the last few days.” Said James, glancing at the bathroom. We had locked Eric in the girls bathroom when he entered the third phase of the disease. The Frenzy. You go completely nuts, your only goal becomes to kill and eat everything in sight. We had locked Eric in there once the signs began to show. We have no idea what he was doing up there, but it was making a lot of noise. Scratches, metal coming off the walls, floor tiles being torn up and the barricaded door being banged on, over and over and over again. He had become silent in the past few days.

*“You’re about to be able to eat.”* Said the other head.

“I don’t wanna.” I whispered back.

“We have nothing else we can do. Lets go.” Said Hank. I headed over to the bathrooms, seeing the multiple tables and locks that we had hastily put onto the door. There was a massive crack in the door, but nothing had gotten out. The three of us moved the tables aside, and James picked at the locks. It felt like there was a pit in my stomach, an infinite abyss keeping me from doing anything.

*“Dinner Time.”* I heard the head.

“Please be quiet.” I whispered meekly. Hank glanced at James as the two undid the final lock. We opened up the bathroom door, it felt like it was going to come off its hinges if we pulled on it too hard. Once we saw inside the bathroom, we found that Eric had entered the fourth stage of the plague. The stage that the whole thing had been named after. The Demented stage. Eric was kneeling down while leaning back, showing off his chest. His arms were gone, and his chest had been completely opened up. His ribcage was open like a gate, with his arms stretching past it, holding out his still beating heart. Dozens of veins were attached to the heart, all connecting back to the eyes, teeth and limbs.

“How long before we get to that point?” Asked Hank.

“I don’t have a clue. It doesn’t seem like too long, considering what we look like now.” Said James.

“We’re all gonna die.” I muttered.

“Meg, what's going on with your back?” Asked James. Hank looked at me, then stepped back in shock.

“How long did you have the plague before you got stuck in here with us?” Asked Hank.

“I told you before, two weeks.” I told them.

*“She's lying.”* Said the second head.

“What the hell is that!?” asked Hank.

“Her second head can talk?” Asked James.

“If it can grow a body, why the hell shouldn't it be able to talk?” Asked Hank.

*“I've never had the opportunity to talk with anyone but her. This is brilliant.”*

Said the voice.

“Sorry Meg. James, lock her in!” Shouted Hank.

“No!” I shouted.

“Wait, we don't know if she's going to-” I felt my arm reach out and grab James's neck. The second head somehow had control. My arm was twisting in an unnatural way, breaking bones as it went for his neck. Hank grabbed me from behind as I screamed in agony and fear, and threw me into the destroyed bathroom. He slammed the door shut as I pounded on it, begging them to let me out.

*“Just let me take control. This doesn't have to be painful for you.”* Said the second head. I leaned against the bathroom door and began to cry.

“Let me out! Please, let me out!” I shouted, desperately banged on the door as the two of them held it closed.

*“Is this how you want to end it? Crying like a terrified child, trying to keep me out? This will end up with you looking like him.”* The broken arm raised to point at Eric. Still twisted, bleeding and dead.

“What are you?” I asked.

*“I am the demented one. I am the artist who turns you into something beautiful. I am the god who will turn you into dust. I am in everyone's head, having this very same conversation with hundreds of people. You ugly creatures should not have dealt in forces that you did not understand. For your trouble, I will make you beautiful. I will make you perfect.”* I could see the creature that was growing on my back from a fragment of a mirror that was still clinging to the wall. I realized that I wasn't looking at my own face anymore. I was seeing out of the second head's eyes. Its dead, soulless eyes and wide grin. As the last bit of control I had over my body faded, I heard one last thing from the ugly thing.

*“My second head is gone.”*