

*[Technology buzzes briefly]*

*[Low, droning ambient noise under narration]*

She could have been a mobile task force agent. In fact, the offer had come up rather frequently in the days before the Shift. Her resounding success at her job suggested that maybe she would be better suited for a larger, grander role within the Foundation.

Trouble for the Foundation was that Fatima Haldi was perfectly happy right where she was.

Officer Haldi had refused several promotions by this point. She was only still an officer in the semantic sense, having turned down the offer for Sergeant twice before. It was no secret that Captain Harraway considered her one unofficially, considering the length of her employment and how closely the lower officers listened to her. But Haldi herself believed that a change in title would set her apart from her fellows, and she would happily reject the pay raise if it meant leaving her professional relationships uncompromised.

But now, with one Sergeant killed and the other on the outside with the Captain, she was the lone and obvious choice for the Security Department's new leader. Or maybe she already was their leader to begin with, even if she wasn't on paper.

Haldi didn't know if they were the same in every site. Of the three she had worked in, it was roughly consistent. Security had a very different air than most departments. A louder one. A pervasive Department culture of boisterous noise and unapologetic fondness for each other. Although she had considered that it could have been her own influence.

After all, Fatima Haldi was a big, loud woman. Allah had blessed her with a body built for hugs and a face dimpled for smiling, and she used her gifts frequently and universally. You could find joy anywhere, if you looked hard enough.

Today was a busy day. Site-107 was back in its rightful position, her people were no longer risking their lives and bodies climbing over precarious rope bridges. And that meant they could all do something they had been looking

forward to for weeks - cross-testing the Dash Threes. Haldi tempered her excitement and did her best to reign in the basket of puppies that was her Department as they prepared for what would surely be rather grim business. She was overseeing the security measures herself, which meant she would be in the room for this one.

The Psychologist, or former Psychologist, as the case was, didn't seem very happy to be there at all. Haldi wasn't surprised. She wouldn't be excited about much of anything either, if she had to spend all day locked in an almost entirely empty box. Miserable, she imagined. And miserable he certainly looked. His posture slouched like his spine had given up and left for vacation, leaving him slumped in his metal chair till it returned. His eyes had a distant, soulless look about them. She tried, until Containment demanded she stop, to engage him in enough conversation to cheer him up, but he didn't seem to hear her at all. And that didn't bode well for the testing.

*[A metal door creaks open, and a cart is rolled across a hard floor]*

But for all the misery the Psychologist had endured, at least he had it better than the D-class. The D-class was restrained to a dolly, like the cannibal she saw once in a movie. After the last Reset, he swung hard back into an unstoppable fit of carving and cutting Dash Ones into every surface available in the short span of time before her people could dogpile him to the ground. He even finished a few of them.

*[Scraping against a hard surface]*

The D-class was wheeled in by two of her people, Larsen, who hated Christmas, and Beach, who liked reading pulp romance novels. Haldi was already in the room, attending to the Psychologist, making her best attempt to put a smile on his face in spite of his thousand yard stare. She wasn't feeling too peppy herself, in light of recent events, but somebody needed to keep things light, or no one would.

But as the heavy door closed behind the D-class and his two escorts, she took up her position beside the door, her taser at the ready. Not the sort of thing she or any of her friends liked to use, but a better alternative to a gun. Especially considering the subjects were only supposed to talk, and one of them was strapped to

a cart like somebody was about to put him on the roof of a truck and go camping.

No, they weren't worried about the D-class. If anyone was getting tased, it was the Psychologist.

Both of them knew they were being observed. If the Research and Security folk intended this to be a secret, then this would be considered a "very bad job." There were three guards posted at the door, first of all, and the Researchers in the booth above were fully visible as they clambered over each other trying to get the best view. Haldi wondered if that was a good idea, considering the Dash Threes might be less inclined to talk if they knew that everyone in the immediate area was watching and listening to them.

This turned out not to be a problem at all, for the D-class, who almost immediately launched into a whispered speech about "seeing the truth" and a host of other not-quite-spiritual nonsense.

Haldi wondered if the Psychologist understood what the D-class was talking about. "Chosen ones" and "callings" and such. Because she certainly didn't. And it was very hard to tell if the Psychologist was catching any of it, because if he did, it wasn't registering on his face. He just stared blankly at the D-class, any response he gave terse and monosyllabic. The D-class continued to try and coax agreement or common ground from the Psychologist in spite of all signs pointing to "no," which she guessed made sense, considering how unlikely he was to stop doing a lot of things.

What's more, and she knew she wasn't supposed to, but she sympathized for the Psychologist.

Fatima Haldi prided herself in keeping track of people. Their interests, birthdays. Their friends. She knew her own the best, naturally, but over the last several months had put a lot of effort into knowing the random assortment of agents trapped with them on their visit to 107. Which meant she knew how close the Psychologist was with the little field agent, the one who was currently laid up in Medical while the doctors scrambled about what to do with her.

Security brought him updates, whenever there was one. There usually weren't. And they weren't

supposed to, given their stations, and given the Psychologist's current working status as an anomaly. But they did anyway. Anomaly or not, he was there when they began, he still cared for his friends.

*[Background noise fades to Surveillance office ambience]*

Not to mention he was far from the only person affected by the recent events. Before the shift, Haldi spent a very long time wrestling with the immovable object that sat coiled up in the dark surveillance office. Officer Raddagher's birthday was in the winter. Not that you would ever know from asking her. She wasn't the conversation type, more the "sit in silence and stare at you for an uncomfortably long amount of time until you made up something else you had to go do" type. Haldi only knew her birthday from her file. She knew better than to set up a party for such a misanthropic thing, so she decorated the surveillance office a little before her shift instead. Only she didn't come in that day. Called in sick with a mysterious stomach bug. A mysterious stomach bug that recurred every year on her birthday.

A tough nut to crack, but Haldi loved a puzzle.

Officer Raddagher was the youngest member of Security and the only one not actually cleared for other Security duties. Her onboarding had been unusual, and mostly an accident, and the only thing she was ever trained to do was watch and listen. But she seemed alright with that. She never complained. She barely ever spoke.

It was a moment of great triumph when Bailey, whose favorite color was not lime and not seafoam but something in between, told her that Raddagher had finally begun to speak to him during their shifts. Just a little.

*[Officer Raddagher and another voice chuckle quietly]*

One step forward, a thousand steps back. When the first tremor brought half the ceiling down in BC-2, Bailey became another one of the brave and doomed. And Officer Raddagher, always sick on her birthday, was alone in the surveillance office.

*[Deep earthquake rumbling fades in and out]*

It was worse this time. Now she wasn't even IN the office. She was crumpled up like a dying plant in Medical's wing. Even Alves, who she had never seen slouch, didn't have the heart to remove her. She just asked Haldi to find replacements instead. After everyone else had returned to their jobs, sometimes quite reluctantly, Officer Raddagher stayed in her place on the floor like she was a permanent fixture.

She could have benefitted from little therapy. But the therapist she spent the most time around was currently preoccupied with staring blankly at a rambling D-class.

Upstairs, in the booth, the Researchers scribbled away in their notebooks, marking down every bizarre and outlandish thing that came out of the D-class' mouth. Which was a lot. Most of what he was saying, actually. Haldi wondered if they developed muscles in their writing wrists from all that. Maybe they had dedicated workouts for it. Although probably not.

What really piqued her interest was the way the D-class lowered his voice and leaned forward, folding halfway across the table like he was partially liquid, to hiss an interesting suggestion to the Psychologist. He suggested, in a secretive hushed tone, that the anomaly would "choose" someone else to continue its work now that the two of them were locked up and out of commission. The Psychologist leaned back, his nose wrinkling into a grimace, and called across the cell directly to Haldi:

LANCASTER

Are you guys brushing his teeth?

NARRATOR

Haldi wasn't supposed to address either of them outside of moving them to and from their cells. But she nodded, because they were brushing his teeth. Only he made it very difficult, what with all the biting. They tried their best. Maybe they were missing the back.

The D-class blew past this, tumbling into a disorganized monologue about how SCP-6320 had, in its infinite wisdom, chosen them to carry out its divine task, or something. The Psychologist looked at him like he was talking about the divinity of a crack in a wall. Because he was.

And then the Psychologist cocked his head to one side, thought for a moment, turned over his shoulder to look up at the viewing window, turned back to the D-class, and asked if that's how the compulsion presented itself to him. Through the feeling that the anomaly was a living being.

The D-class argued that SCP-6320 WAS a living being. One with some sort of grand master plan. This time, the Psychologist didn't contradict him, didn't say it was just a self-perpetuating anomaly with memetic capabilities, he sat and nodded and said things like "how do you feel about that?" Periodically he looked over his shoulder at the scientists, who were watching from above with a mix of rapt attention and curious confusion.

Haldi knew that as soon as her team left with the D-class, the Researchers would swarm the Psychologist about this interaction. They would read too much into what the D-class said and might try to reason who the next "target" would be. The Psychologist might leverage his cooperation to convince them to release him, but it wouldn't work, mostly because he didn't seem to have the strength to stand up for himself if they told him "no." She could tell from the dark circles under his eyes that in spite of his brief burst of energy, he wouldn't be giving them much to work with. He didn't seem to have much to give at all. All the energy she watched him funnel into his efforts to be let go had evaporated as soon as he heard the news about the field agent.

Maybe she should talk to him. No. Fat chance Containment would let her, now that they had so much more power. Maybe they would let someone else talk to him. Not Dr. Klein. Dr. Alves considered her friendship with Dr. Lancaster a "conflict of interest," which, in her defense, it was. They were cracking down on other "unnecessary" visitors as well, even though visitation was very necessary. Without it, Haldi watched in real time as the Psychologist started to turn into more and more into a shadow of a real person.

The test ended. The Researchers were satisfied with the data they collected, all buzzing to each other in the booth, and Haldi and her people were left to pack up the D-class and make sure the Psychologist didn't try to make a break for the door as they left. She knew he wouldn't. He

looked like he would give up halfway across the room.

*[Cart rolling across a hard floor]*

They wheeled the D-class out of the cell and back to his own, where he could be safely released from most of his restraints. Haldi hoped one day they could find a way to stabilize him enough to release him from ALL his restraints, but until then, his hands would stay in those clunky mitten things that Containment had cooked up.

*[Confetti scatters]*

The best way they had found to mitigate his compulsion was to scatter confetti from the birthday party bin onto the floor. He would spend long periods of time pushing the confetti into vague Dash One shapes, and then whichever Security guard sat in his cell with him would blow it away again with a compressed air can. A better alternative to him trying to carve one into the wall with his elbow.

*[Compressed air hisses a few times]*

Sometimes it felt like the Foundation didn't care about regular people.

Fatima Haldi cared about everyone, and that made her job very hard sometimes. The Foundation was supposedly created to care for humanity. But weren't *they* humanity? Didn't they count? Couldn't they ask to be cared for as well? Couldn't the Foundation do a better job at keeping people from dying in the dark? Couldn't they see the light sometimes?

She oversaw the return of the D-class to his cell, and made one more trip to escort the Psychologist to his, as well. A few of the Research people followed him into his cell, but he ignored them, slouching across the room and collapsing onto the dorm mattress they had replaced his cot with. Haldi didn't stick around to see if they would get anything else out of him. She knew they wouldn't.

She had two more tasks to do. For the first, she needed to return to AD-1. At the first sign of the thought, her stomach sank until she remembered that the building was normal again and she wouldn't be crawling across ropes to get there. Just up a few staircases, picking the

right elevator, down a couple halls, across the AB floor and down into the A half of the building. Things were solemn, she noticed. Haldi guessed this was in part due to Containment's new authority over the place. They were really accepting no nonsense anymore. Nonsense, in this case, included mingling with the other departments and slacking during what they had all decided were "work hours." No more unstructured movie nights or karaoke or games. Morale was better handled through individual therapy, even though therapy was now down to Chappel and a handful of psychology students yet to get their doctorates in anything. It could be going worse, Haldi supposed.

Alves was smart enough not to try and outlaw any form of fun, of course. Even she, with all her tight-lipped frowns and smooth, rapid speaking, couldn't calm the enthusiasm of the Security Department. They had been that way long before the Shift. But Haldi could tell she didn't like it. Wanted them to be more "professional," whatever that meant.

She wondered if Alves knew about the fight club. She probably did. Most everyone did, even though plenty of them would rather not believe it was there. Somewhere. Taking place after the lights had been turned off, in a room that changed every time. Far enough from the dorms that no one would be heard taking out their feelings on one another.

*[Muffled cheering and body impacts]*

Haldi turned the corner into the Medical wing and accomplished her first task, checking from a distance on the Surveillance officer, where she remained curled up on the floor outside the infirmary door. She wasn't allowed in, yet. The Doctors and Nurses had a few cautionary measures they had yet to take. The infirmary was well-stocked with equipment even the public didn't have access to, leftover from a lofty plan to expand into a major and independent location. Had the Shift not happened, they probably would have been broken down into a tiny, bare-bones medbay by now. But even as advanced as some of their tools were, they were for anomalous emergencies, not ordinary ones.

Medical could see the tiny pool of blood in Agent Love's brain. The next step was figuring out what

to do about it with what they had. And Officer Raddagher would only get in their way.

Officer Haldi wanted nothing more than to rush across that hallway, sweep her into her arms, and swing her back and forth until she felt better. But that wouldn't work. She didn't like people and she didn't like being touched. Haldi knew it would just make it worse. Maybe if she talked to the communications operator, he would be able to help. But that would have to be a task for a different day.

The second thing was to break a rule.

The shrine for Kasey Lowe, who wore colorful patterned socks under her dress code approved slacks, had not been set up again after the Reset. According to the new head of Upper Management, there wasn't a section in any employee handbook for shrines of the dead, and that meant you could not, or should not, have one. Maintenance had been tasked with clearing out items placed against the wall where Kasey fell, and they were doing just that. But they also were not locking the closet where they kept the extra paint. And they were making sure to tell everyone where the extra paint was, and how important it was that they do not touch it, because Maintenance lost the key to that closet this cycle, in a crazy accident where somebody dropped it into a circulation vent.

*[Keys rattling down a metal vent]*

Upper Management had grounds to make your life a little more difficult if you decided to take the matter of the shrine into your own hands and vandalize the wall. But painting on the wall with the same color originally on the wall didn't technically count as vandalism. After all, there's no rule that says you're not allowed to put another coat of white paint on a white wall. That's not defacing company property, it's helping.

And you can only see the words and pictures in the new layers of paint if you get really close up, anyway.

From far away, and from the security cameras, the messages and markings were invisible. Blending in to the whites and grays of the original surface colors. But if you were right next to it, you could see that the new layers were a little bit

shinier, the fresher paint lacking the same amount of wear and exposure to the air as the stuff behind it. If you stood very close, and you held your cheek almost touching the surface, you could see them. Handprints by the dozen. Messages, written in clumsy finger-painted block letters. Simple drawings, hearts and stars and smiley faces. Reflecting the fluorescent lights of the hallway they lit up bright white from this angle. The hidden evidence of Site-107's heart. Invisible to all who weren't looking for it.

Fatima Haldi leaned her head onto the cool surface of the wall. She realized it was a little tacky, another layer still uncured. Maybe she'd end up with a little paint rubbed off on her hijab, she didn't mind. She pressed her ear to the wall and she listened, the vibrations of the life support system sending a dull hum through the stone and plaster, like the muted rush of blood in your ears. There was a heart in there somewhere.

She listened for a moment to that quiet mechanized murmur, thinking about them all, breathing the same recycled oxygen, the walls between them all thinning even as the building stayed the same. One hundred people in the Foundation, one hundred white fingerprints on a white wall. She opened a paint can and set her hand on the surface.