

Safe Place
by
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FADE IN ON:

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

The room is big. White. Oh-so-clean.

ELISA (20s) hunches at a small table. Heavy silence fills the air. She hugs herself with skinny arms.

BANG! The door flies open. Elisa looks up - eyes filled with fear. Nearly jumps from her chair.

LUCY (50s) stands in the entrance. A warm smile contradicts her designer suit.

Lucy closes the door and sits down across from the girl. Seen closer, Lucy's perfect. Not a hair out of place.

LUCY
How do you feel?

ELISA
Nervous.

LUCY
A little?

ELISA
A lot. Maybe more.

Elisa fidgets with a hangnail. Lucy restrains her hand.

LUCY
No-one's going to hurt you. If at any point you get scared, focus your attention on me. I'll be at your side, the entire time.

ELISA
Really? You promise?

LUCY
Elisa, you have my word.

She takes Elisa's other hand. The small girl shivers in her chair.

LUCY
If you want, you don't have to go. I can have you sign papers here.

Defiance flares in Elisa's eyes.

ELISA

I won't be a coward! Momma says everyone should face their fears.

LUCY

No-one's accusing you of cowardice. Some things are just... too hard to see.

ELISA

But I want to see them. Please?

She locks frightened eyes with Lucy. The woman helps Elisa to her feet.

LUCY

I understand. Come with me.

They reach the door. Lucy rests a perfectly manicured hand on the knob.

LUCY

Ready?

ELISA

As much as I can be.

The door opens with a CREAK. The room floods with BLINDING LIGHT.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELISA'S POV: A few blinks; Elisa opens blurry eyes.

Lucy gazes down at her; with the same empathy as before. But her face - it's not the same. Brittle hair covers the woman's lab coat. LESIONS scar her neck and cheeks.

Elisa recoils - her view and the room appear to rock. Lucy strokes her face.

LUCY

Shhh. Don't move so quickly. Your muscles need time to adapt.

Elisa stares down at her legs. Emaciated and flabby. Her body limp and helpless in a bed.

The girl looks up, scans the room. It's filled with COMATOSE PATIENTS stacked in grid formation. Over a hundred, maybe more. Machines with MONITORS HUM over them, tubes inserted in fleshy sides.

ELISA

I want a mirror.

LUCY

That's not needed. You look just like them. And me.

Elisa raises a hand to her face. The skin looks dry and melted. Implanted SENSORS blink along one vein. Elisa GASPS. She fumbles with her IV.

LUCY

Don't touch that. Be gentle.

Lucy grabs the foot rail of Elisa's gurney, and tows it to a window.

OUTSIDE: A hellish landscape. Bombed out buildings. Nothing green. An acid-brown, heavy sky.

And on the glass: a reflection of Elisa's true face. She looks just as scarred as Lucy. The girl studies herself carefully. A tear trickles from her eye.

ELISA

Enough. Put me back now. Please?

Lucy nods, and rolls Elisa's bed back into line. She pulls out papers and a pen.

LUCY

You know what this is for, right? Sign *here* for another term. Or *here* to disconnect. If you re-up, it'll mean ten more years. After a decade, we'll wake you to choose again. You don't have to decide now. Take your time and think it over. But once you're in, you can't change your mind.

Elisa grabs the form and reads quickly. Multiple choice questions fill the page.

1) Reconnect? Y/N? Elisa CLICKS the pen, circles "yes."

2) Single/Dating/Married? Elisa waivers - selects "Single" - eventually.

3) Rural or Urban Domicile? Elisa checks "Rural". No hesitation there.

She signs - and hands Lucy the completed page.

ELISA

Thanks for preparing me. And for keeping me from being scared.

Elisa squirms around for comfort. Eventually, she closes her eyes.

LUCY (O.S.)

Wait - you missed one question on the back. Tell me, I'll write it down. Do you want to look like you did before?

Elisa's eyes stay shut.

ELISA

Sure.

LUCY

No change in ethnicity? What about a hair color tweak?

ELISA

Nah. Brown is fine with me.

LUCY (O.S.)

Any other modifications or requests?

Doubt floods Elisa's face. Her eyes pop open. Lucy's preoccupied. Typing code into the machine at her side.

ELISA

What about you?

LUCY

Dear, whatever do you mean?

ELISA

Will you come with me? I don't want you to have to stay.

LUCY

Sweetheart, that's nice but not possible. Some of us have to tend to the machines. Not to mention - all of you here.

ELISA

That's not fair. This place is horrible!

LUCY

Darling, it may seem strange, but reality's a choice. And some of us want to stay.

Lucy points towards the window.

LUCY

You choose what's best for you. As do I.

She ruffles the girl's hair.

LUCY

Now, just lay back. Let me handle all the rest.

Elisa sneaks one last look at Lucy's deformed face. Then obediently does as she's told.

She closes her eyes. The machine HUMS. Signals PULSE through tubes in her veins. Static flickers on the monitor. As well as in Elisa's mind.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Elisa opens her eyes. An emerald field yawns before her. Brilliant flowers. Sapphire skies.

Elisa whirls around and breathes in fresh air. Smooth skin on her now velvet face...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The same scene plays on the monitor. Lucy touches the glass and smiles.

LUCY

Enjoy your dreams, Sweetie. It's better than the nightmare here.

A comatose Elisa lies in bed. Lucy stands by her side.

Then heads for the next gurney. She checks the patient's vitals. It's a BOY with a scarred face, but a sweet smile. Fortunately, he's breathing fine.

LUCY

(sighs)

Ah, youth's wasted on the young.

She types in codes. Limpes away.

FINAL FADE OUT: