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### Taissa

Taissa is a twenty-four year old native New-Yorker. This is how her day starts: she gets out of bed at seven-thirty after snoozing all of her alarms, she brushes her teeth and then her hair, and throws on whatever pantsuit is on top of her pile of clean laundry. She grabs a granola bar — this step is time permitting — and is out the door by seven forty-five and on her way to her job that pays the bills and nothing more.

It's seven fifty-two and the busy streets of Manhattan are particularly brutal. Taissa skillfully weaves around pedestrians and slower commuters until she is stopped by a red light. She looks at her watch; there's no way that she'll make it to the office by eight. Taissa flags a cab.

She steps off the curb as a bright yellow car approaches. She's reaching for the door handle when her feet are taken right out from under her and a forceful pain collides with the left side of her body. She hits the concrete hard.

“Oh my god,” a woman on an electric scooter begins to say, “I’m so sorry!—”

Taissa isn't listening to whatever else the scooter woman says, not just because she's in complete shock, but because this is great news. This is a reason for being late; this is a really, really great excuse. In any other scenario, Taissa would've been livid, but today, this is just what she needs.

"I'm fine," Taissa stands up, brushing off her suit, "Really."

"Wait," the scooter woman insists "I'm a doctor and I really think you should go to the hospital. You look like you hit your head pretty hard."

Taissa already has the cab door open and is starting to climb in. "I appreciate the advice, but I'm already running late." She gives the woman a polite smile as she closes the door.

Taissa is giving the cab driver an address when the other passenger door opens abruptly and the scooter woman gets in.

"What are you doing—"

"I'll come with you and check on your injuries on the way to wherever it is you're going." She unbuckles her helmet and rests her death-mobile on the floor. "It's the least I can do for nearly taking you out."

The cabbie pulls away from the curb into traffic. The scooter-riding-self-proclaimed doctor rummages through her small backpack that, to Taissa's surprise, actually contains medical supplies.

"How do I know that you're really a doctor?" Taissa thinks out loud.

The woman hands over her hospital I.D. instinctively.

"Doctor Sasha Graham," Taissa reads aloud as the woman extends and then re-bends her elbow reflexively.

“And you are?”

“Taissa Li. Marketing assistant.” She says this like she’s reading it straight off of her business card.

Sasha examines her eyes, ears, and the usual. She is delicate but comfortable. Last but not least, she takes out a stethoscope.

“That’s weird,” Sasha murmurs.

Taissa turns from the window abruptly to look at her. “What?”

“Well, I can’t hear your heartbeat.”

“What do you mean you can’t hear it?”

“I mean I can’t hear it.”

“So, your stethoscopes broken?”

“I don’t think so; it works on me. Listen.” She hands Taissa the stethoscope, the other side is placed over the left side of her chest. A repetitive *thump thump* can be heard loud and clear.

“So what’s wrong then? I can’t just not have a heartbeat.”

“I know that. I’m a—”

“Doctor,” they say simultaneously to one another, grinning.

Taissa turns back to look out the window. The cabbie has pulled over in front of the corporate high rise that she works in.

“Exactly. So, stop by the hospital when you can and ask for me. I’ll use a different stethoscope and run some tests.”

“Sure,” Taissa says, but she has no intention of following through with this. “Thank you for your help.”

Dr. Sasha Graham smiles politely.

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Taissa works nearly the entire day, from 8:12 AM to 4:36 PM. When 12:30 PM rolls around, she doesn't need a lunch break and continues working until her project is complete. It's not until 9:00 PM, after various errands, that Taissa realizes she's not tired. Usually by 8:00 PM the exhaustion of the day has hit her like a truck and she's ready for bed shortly after, instead, she lies restlessly through the night as sleep eludes her.

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“So you're saying you didn't sleep last night— like at all?” Dr. Sasha Graham rephrases.

Taissa confirms this.

“Sometimes people fall asleep after a long period of restlessness and wake up feeling like they never fell asleep.”

“That's not what happened.”

Sasha raises her eyebrows. “But how would you know? Honestly, I think you might be feeling a little more shaken up than you think — and I don't blame you.”

Taissa can't think of anything to say that will refute what the doctor has suggested.

“How about you take the day off... I could write you a note?”

“No, it's fine.” She's ready to admit defeat and return to work. “Oh! But what about my heartbeat? Could we check that?”

“Right!” Sasha unloops the stethoscope from her around her neck. “I can run some blood tests as well so we can get to the bottom of this.”

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“I just got the results back from the lab,” Sasha has a beige folder tucked under her arm that likely contains Taissa’s fate.

“This doesn’t make any sense...” Sasha says quietly. “The results conclude that the blood I sent for testing wasn’t human. It’s pig’s blood — movie prop stuff.”

“So, the lab mixed up my results?”

“No. Yours was the only test run this morning. The lab doesn’t get busy until the afternoon.”

Taissa doesn’t know what to say, her train of thought is beginning to spiral. *How can any of this be possible?*

“I’ve never seen this before. I’m going to send your blood work to the General Hospital in New Jersey; they specialize in dealing with viruses. Until they get back to me, please take it easy.”

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Once again, Taissa feels no fatigue in the evening. She hasn’t eaten since before the accident. Maybe it’s just the shock, but regardless, she hasn’t felt hunger for two days now.

She’s in her pajamas and ready for bed, except her body itself isn’t ready for rest. An empty face stares back at her in the bathroom mirror.

“What’s happening to me?” she whispers.

She feels like her entire body has been reset.

For a brief moment, Taissa recalls her blood results and is entranced by a razor on the counter. She holds the sharp edge carefully against her shoulder; a place that hopefully won't cause serious damage. She has no intention to hurt herself, but something is compelling her to do this. She can feel the answer to her problems is near.

Red droplets trickle onto the ivory tiles below as she draws a long line down her arm. Through the gushing red stream she can see a hint of something shiny. Through the nonhuman blood she can see part of a metal frame. Through her almost real skin and nearly convincing blood, Taissa can see that she isn't human.

Before she can even begin to consider the implications of what she has seen, the incision begins to seal itself; like an imaginary zipper is zipping up.

“Hello, Taissa,” a friendly voice says. Or maybe doesn't say, maybe this is all in her head — or her programming. “We're going to reset you now.”

Everything goes dark.

When Taissa opens her eyes again she is lying in bed. She can see what she recognizes to be the Chicago skyline outside her window. How does she know? She doesn't know for sure, but something in her brain knows it is.

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