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about 1,000 words

Allergy

by Diorgo Jonkers

"What's wrong with Gideon Nelson?"

Doctor Wilma Meloi is caught off guard by the question. She is seated at her desk, facing doctor Dawid Riley.

"Who told you about Gideon?" she asks.

"I accidentally found him on the system while searching for another patient."

"If you've read his file then you know everything you need to know." She is eager to end the conversation.

"It stated he had an adverse, allergic reaction to the nano-vac, and has been an inpatient for over a year," he says. "But that's all. It doesn't describe his reaction, illness nor his treatment. There's not even a ward or room number."

"You don't have to worry about him. His treatment is

going well."

"So he's getting better?"

She clenches her teeth. Talking about the strange, seven year old boy always makes her tense. She and the others seldom discuss the boy. Dawid has been at the hospital for two weeks. Not nearly enough time to gain their trust.

"No, but his condition's under control," she says.

He is annoyed at her reluctance to share information.

"I'd like to see him," he states.

Internally she curses the hospital's director for keeping Gideon's file on the system. She weighs up her options. It is a big risk to tell just anyone about the boy. But Dawid strikes her as someone who will pursue the matter until he gets answers. And he might attract outside attention. She shudders at the thought of Gideon in a room full of reporters and cameras.

"Come with me," she says reluctantly.

She leads him out of her office to an elevator. He notices she selects the third floor below ground, where the morgue is located.

"By now you probably realise his allergy's not one of the usual ones associated with nano vaccinations," she says.

"Have you disabled the nanos?"

"We tried, but they didn't respond."

They reach the morgue. There is a woman and a man working there. Wilma greets them, then continues walking, followed by Dawid. They reach a door labelled "Deep storage". She swipes her card and enters a password into the door's panel.

The door hisses open and the temperature drops noticeably. Dawid's body shudders uncontrollably. It feels like someone just stepped over his grave. They enter the large room, which contains twenty cryogenic chambers. She leads him to a small room at the back, where Gideon is asleep on a bed. He is hooked up to a bedside monitor and a drip.

"We keep him asleep," she states.

"What!?" Dawid asks in disbelief.

"It's for the best. Just pretend he's in a coma."

He looks at the boy. Sound asleep and innocent. Dawid feels anger growing inside him. How can they keep the boy locked down here, sleeping his life away?

"This isn't right. How can you allow this? How can his parents allow this?" He looks at her imploringly.

"He's an orphan."

"I can't allow this," Dawid says. He steps forward and pulls the drip out of the boy's arm. Wilma's eyes are wide with shock.

"No," she croaks and leaps forward. Dawid pushes her back.

"I'm taking him upstairs, then I'm reporting you," he says in anger.

"Don't let him wake up," she whispers desperately. "He mustn't cry."

He ignores her, picks up the kid and walks into the large room. The boy slowly opens his eyes and looks up at Dawid. Confused and scared, he starts crying. Dawid stops in his tracks. The crying sounds unnatural. It echoes chillingly

around the large room.

Black tears start flowing from the boy's eyes. It looks like two black voids slithering down his face.

Dawid gets a fright and drops Gideon on to the floor.

"Get away from him!" Wilma screams. He takes three steps back. On the floor, Gideon turns around slowly and looks at him. The boy's t-shirt is almost completely covered in the black liquid, which is still running down his face.

A black pool is forming on the ground beneath the kid. A reflectionless mass, growing outward like a living thing. It creeps closer, now only a few centimetres from Dawid's shoes.

Wilma pulls him away from the growing pool. He turns and stares into her stricken face.

"We have to get out," she says, then runs a wide arc around the black ooze. He stumbles close behind. She struggles with the door's panel. Eventually the door opens and they rush through. Dawid looks back. Gideon is walking towards the door. The black streams are still running down his face, and the pool on the floor is following him like a long cape. The door slams shut.

"Turn on the gas!" Wilma shouts at the morgue workers. The woman sprints to a switch on the wall. She throws the switch and they hear a low alarm sound.

Wilma collapses against the wall. Dawid is still standing in front of the closed door. He is visibly shaken.

"What the hell was that?" he asks in a trembling voice.

"The nanos," she replies.

"I've never heard of them acting like that before."

"I imagine it's rare."

"What if more people start to show these symptoms? There are hundreds of millions who've had nano-vacs." Even he has been injected with nanos. They are moving freely through his body, defending him against diseases.

"I'm sorry," he says after a moment. "I should've listened before jumping to conclusions."

"Maybe it's better that you saw it for yourself."

He is quiet for a moment, then sits down next to her.

"I'd like to help you find a cure," he says. She nods her head.

"Good. We can discuss it tomorrow," she says.

Eventually she will have to tell him what happened to Gideon's parents. Parts of them were absorbed by the nanos. His parents' particles are flowing through his body, stored as raw materials for future use to cure him of diseases.

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