

Ethics in Psychology: a Short Fiction
Alternative Title: Price for Progress

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Abstract

Sometime in the near future a graduate student named Clematis Horwitz ends up as the lab assistant to Dr. Herrnstein. While working on his current research project, Clematis discovers some ethical breaches in the study. Clematis must come to terms with her own idea of ethics, while working to protect the research participants.

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Clematis Horwitz stood on quartz steps that glittered in the sun, staring up at the building that frowned down at her. She took a shaky breath, waiting for the timepiece on the wall of the building to click the hour. Then the doors would open for her, and she could enter into the Department of Psychology and Brain Studies for the first time.

Five years of schooling led to this. She clenched her fists, swaying on the balls of her feet, waiting. Waiting for the doors to open. She alone of all the prospects had made intern this year. Clematis took another breath. Soon. Soon she could grow, spreading her influence through the department. Then she would blossom as the next head of the department. It would all begin here.

The last second clicked over to a zero, and with a beeping and a whirring, the doors at the front of the Department of Psychology and Brain Studies opened. The air inside, a moderately pleasant temperature, rushed out as she stepped forward. She waited just on the inside as the doors slid shut, cutting off the sterile heat of summer behind her. She breathed in, waiting, watching.

A plump, older man walked up to her. He stuck out his hand for her, she took it. His hand closed around hers, and he placed his free hand on top. He smiled, his face relaxing as his eyes scrunched up and twinkled.

“You must be Clematis,” he said, shaking her hand up and down. “I am Dr. Herrnstein. I’ll be your mentor here at the Department.”

“Nice to meet you, sir,” Clem said, her heart pounding so hard she wondered if Dr. Herrnstein could hear it. He released her hand and turned into the lobby. He flung one of his hands wide into an arching motion.

“There’s not a lot here, in this room, but our accolades and our awards are hung nicely, don’t you think?” Clem glanced around as they walked onwards into a narrow hallway. The walls were indeed full of various awards and accolades, hung up on the pale pink panels. She caught a glimpse of a few names and fields.

“They are impressive,” she said, folding her hands in front of her. Dr. Herrnstein turned, flashing another wide smile.

“These are nothing compared to what’s hung up in most of our offices,” he said. “We try to appear somewhat modest when we have guests.” Clem pursed her lips. A few of the awards she saw she didn’t recognize from her schooling. Some were so rare she had never heard of anyone actually getting them. “I’m hoping for a new award soon with some upcoming research. It should be revolutionary, but if it wasn’t, the research wouldn’t be worth doing.”

Clem nodded, running her tongue across her teeth. She had never seen so much technology in one place. The halls were lined with computer displays of the research being conducted inside the labs. She could see the neural imaging scanners, the neural pathway nets... Clem held her breath as she walked. She saw

a few older pieces, an fMRI, a few EEG scanners. Living history, still functional and kept in great condition.

“There was nothing like this in school,” she said, her voice low and soft.

“We keep the best toys here. Nothing done in school is original, but when you have potential for an original thought you come here. We want you to come here to learn from the best.” He stopped outside a blank door. “Here’s my lab. You’ll be working here screening participants. You know how to do that, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Clem replied. Dr. Herrnstein opened the door and stepped to the side. Clem stepped forward, peeking her head through the opening. White walls, white ceiling, and white floor. A silver table with two blue chairs rested in the center of the room. She stepped in and looked around. The lights emanated from the walls. “When do I start?”

“Not today,” he said, standing aside to let her back out. “Today is orientation for you. We have to start you on the basics of how this department runs before we can get you started on my project.” He chuckled as she passed. “There’s not much to it. It’ll be a few years before you’re allowed to run a project of your own.”

Clem scowled a little bit but inclined her head. Dr. Herrnstein closed the door and lead her further down the hall. “It’s a simple behavioral modification study.”

“What sort?” She asked, stepping forward to match strides with Dr. Herrnstein.

“Ah, yes,” he muttered. “We have all this information on behavior to work with, and we’ve discovered so much that we can put to good use in behavior modification. We’re testing the limits now.” He turned back to Clem, smiling once again. “It’s truly a simple test. Honestly, you will be bored out of your mind but it’s our policy to put new people on easy tasks.” His voice trailed off as they stepped into a large room with monitors lining the wall. Two simple gliding chairs were positioned in odd corners of the room.

“Is this your office?” Clem asked, turning around and staring up at the walls.

“No, this is yours,” he said, yawning. “Usually there are more people here, but there weren’t enough candidates this year to fill the room. Make yourself at home and watch the orientation before lunch.” He nodded good bye, and then turned and left Clem alone in the room. Clem twirled about once, before sitting down in the closest chair. She pulled herself up to one of the port screens, mulling over the meager files on previous intern work. She read work on cognitive degradation in age, on persuasion, and on neuropsychiatry. She had never, in her entire academic career, read so much new material. Her eyes were wide as she drank in all the research.

The clock panel beeped, and Clem looked up. She’d missed the deadline to watch the orientation video. The door slid open and Dr. Herrnstein walked in,

hands in his pockets. Clem stopped and looked up, her eyes widening and her face growing taut. Dr. Herrnstein looked at her, then started to laugh.

“Don’t worry, Clematis, everyone gets sucked into the research. I would have been upset if you didn’t.” He came in and patted her on the shoulder. “The orientation on protocol is less important than a thirst for knowledge. We can catch up on protocol later, when we’re not busy. Come, let’s begin.”

###

Clem watched the line of students trickle into the building. Most of them were tired, heads hanging down over their chests. Clem sat in her chair in the screening room as they came in, one at a time, to answer her questions. What brands do you typically use? Where do you go to eat? What politicians do you think you will vote for?

Her second day at the job was much less exciting than her first. Yet, Dr. Herrnstein told her that it was important that she screen every single person for the desired traits. For compliance, for honor, for any traits that may get in the way of Dr. Herrnstein’s study. He was very particular. Of course, he could convince those people who were weak-willed, but he wanted to see if he could manage to subdue those with iron wills. That would be a feat worthy of the annals of history. Clem listened and nodded. How wonderful, she thought, to work with such an ambitious researcher. She would go far working for him. Dr Herrnstein’s love of knowledge was intoxicating, but there was a lot more posturing in psychology than she thought. She was excited. Learning from the Doctor would set her up as

a great mind. She could learn from him, follow in his footsteps. With him as her guide she would enter the halls of great psychologists.

The day passed, full of boring young people who glared and stared at her as they answered her questions. Young men and women stared off at the corners of the room, answered with short terse words, spoke only when spoken to. A few people glittered, their eyes shining as they answered with fire. These people she marked down for further study.

One girl stood out to her. She stared off into the distance, she looked bored, but Clem could see a spirit in the way she sat. This girl's answers coded how Dr. Herrnstein wanted them to. This girl burned, her words indicated her strong will, her determination. Once she left the room, Clem turned around to peer at the one-way glass, where she knew Dr. Herrnstein stood. She could imagine him smiling, nodding, shaking his head. This is what he wanted. A perfect specimen.

###

Clem sat in her office afterwards, waiting for Dr. Herrnstein to come in from his. She poured over the possible participants, screening out those who sounded bland and ordinary. The people who sparked she sorted into a file for Dr. Herrnstein to read later. She leaned back in her chair, thinking about the people who filtered in all day. They were exhausting. None of them understood the art of psychology. Clem curled her lip and snarled to herself. How droll. It didn't matter anymore, soon they'd all be part of something greater.

The door opened and Dr. Herrnstein walked in, hands in his pockets, whistling.

“Did you see that girl?” he asked, his smile stretching up towards his eyes. “Call in the participants who didn’t pass and debrief them. Keep back ten for the program.”

“They aren’t passing on?” Clem asked.

“They’re conforming. I don’t care about them.” He began pacing. “Behavior modification has so many uses. But the little people, they don’t need any further study. It’s people like us in other fields we need to study. They are strong, they haven’t fallen to the current methods of behavior modification. We don’t need the little people.” He stopped and stared at Clem. “We will do the next round of participants tomorrow. I need to know how many people like that we can find.”

He swept out of the room, leaving Clem behind to her silence. She pursed her lips. There were still some things she found confusing about this whole experiment. She leaned back in her chair. Dr. Herrnstein wanted to study free will. He hadn’t set up his experiment in the traditional way. Clem wondered about it, but she figured that Dr. Herrnstein knew best.

###

Rowan leaned her head against the wall, waiting as she filed into the Department of Psychology again. She curled her lip at the pomp, the lights, the people in grey coats who meandered about. They milled around, asking questions

without stopping to look at the people they were talking to. If she didn't need to participate for class credit, then she wouldn't be there at all.

She perked her head up as the line started moving again. The other people that had been chosen for yet another marketing research program were chattering amongst themselves. No one else seemed to realize how much of the world was doctored by the lab coats here at the Department. No one seemed to care.

A round older man stood at the entrance to the lab. He shook everyone's hand as they entered and introduced himself.

"Dr. Herrnstein, pleasure to meet you." Rowan looked him in the eyes, seeing exactly how much pleasure he felt. He was thrilled they were there, and it sent shivers through her skin. She glared at him but took his hand and shook it anyway.

The room she was shuffled to had sleeping pods lining the walls, with a monitor on the far side, and a mirror, which she suspected was two-way glass. She wandered over to the mirror and touched her finger to the surface. The gap between her finger and her reflection gaped. She pulled her hand away as Dr. Herrnstein shuffled in, coughing.

"Ah, yes," he said. He wandered up to the front of the room, placing his hands on his stomach. "We are studying living arrangements and their effect on social cohesion."

Rowan threw her hand in the air. Dr. Herrnstein pointed in her direction. "What exactly are we studying psychologically?"

He smiled, putting his hands behind his back. “Prolonged exposure to others and what that means for liking and for a person’s wellbeing.”

“Quality of life?”

“You could say that,” he chuckled. “It is an oversimplification, but it is true. You will be living in this room, and we will be studying your behavior, your reactions. Is that clear?”

“Yes, so this is an exploratory study?”

“Yes, we are looking into a new field of research and we need some baselines to measure everything else by.” Rowan looked into his dark eyes. She had an odd feeling about this. The questions that his assistant asked during their screenings didn’t quite match up with his explanation.

“I suppose we will get a debrief when we are done with this study then?” She asked, staring closer into his eyes. He paused, his eyes widening slightly and his mouth quivering.

“Of course,” he said at last.

“Will we be free to go if we feel like it at all?” The people around her muttered.

“Yes, that is only ethical, isn’t it?” asked Dr Herrnstein. Rowan nodded. He struck her as foul, the way he refused to meet her eyes, the pitch of his voice. She needed the credit though, and not sticking through these experiments would hurt her standing at the university.

So, she took her seat as Dr. Herrnstein continued talking about the experiment.

###

Clem read through the experimental brief again, trying to make sense of the confusing words. She couldn't quite grasp what Dr. Herrnstein meant to discover here. It skated dangerously close to the line of non-maleficence. Not a good thing.

Clem shook her head. For the moment, she had no idea what was going on. She would have to ask Dr. Herrnstein about it when she got the chance. Till then she would need to watch the experiment and see if it remained within ethical boundaries. He was the top of the department after all.

“My girl, we have done it. Tomorrow we will begin the true experiment.” He crossed his arms and looked out the two-way glass.

“Where is the control group?” Clem asked, glancing back to the empty window behind them. Rows of empty chairs faced a computer screen, black and static.

“I don't think we will need one,” Dr. Herrnstein said, staring into the lab, his eyes unfocused on the figures moving about inside. He turned back to her. “I want to study these people. What makes them tick. What makes them strong-willed and resistant to behavior modification. I hope to be able to get through their tough exteriors and find what sort of motivations and rewards get through to

them. These people refuse to fall in line with the status quo set for us by the Superior Government.” He humped.

“But having a control group would help use compare the results, right?” she asked, leaning forward and looking at the people. A few of them were talking together, she couldn’t hear them without the speaker. They looked friendly, and nice. They didn’t seem to be the sort of people who would need to have their behaviors modified.

“The Superior Government set down this sort of study for us,” said Dr. Herrnstein. “I admit, it is a tempting thought is it not? What makes people who dislike being told what to do, do what they’re told. I couldn’t say I am particularly interested in these sorts of experiments, but they have offered to let me study what I want for my next project.”

“What will we be doing to them?”

Dr. Herrnstein laughed a little bit. “Nothing life threatening, I assure you. We don’t want compliance; we want behavior modification. That is what we want to achieve with this study. Modification of those who resist modification.” He ground out his words, like Clem was a stupid child who wouldn’t understand.

I do understand, she thought. She furrowed her eyes, turning away from him to look at the controls. She understood, but she wasn’t sure she liked it.

###

Rowan sat on the edge of her sleeping pod. The rest of the participants were milling about talking. During dinner they’d decided to call themselves

inmates. She leaned back. This must be the easiest class credit ever, she thought. She rolled her eyes, swinging her feet to a rhythm only she could hear, while the ventilator above her hummed. Really, not a bad assignment.

The lights flickered. She slid off the bed while her fellow inmates stood, looking around them. Static hummed, for a brief minute there was a squeal as the speakers kicked in. A thin, clear voice spoke out.

“Uh, sorry about that. We’re having a slight malfunction in the lab systems.” The squealing continued for a moment more, then died down. Rowan shook her head, sitting again on her pod. Nothing was broken, at least it shouldn’t be. It was all part of the test. All part of the test. She began kicking her legs again.

The speaker squealed to life once again, with its staticky squealing horror. Rowan stood up again, hands going to her ears as she marched over to the speaker to see if she could see if something was wrong with it. She glanced up towards the speaker vents as the squealing came to a stop.

“Sorry, sorry,” the same voice sputtered: thin, female, the lab assistant who had screened them. Rowan snarled, pulling her hands from her ears. She shook her head, then glanced back at her fellow inmates.

“They don’t want us sitting,” she said, slowly.

“Are you sure?” asked one, a young blond male.

“It happened whenever I was sitting and swinging my legs,” Rowan said, walking back over to the bed. Another inmate, a woman with dark hair and skin, sat down and started swinging her legs back and forth. Nothing.

“I don’t know, Rowan,” she said. Rowan grimaced, turning back around and glaring up at the speaker.

“It has to be it,” she snarled. “Let me try.” The inmate stood and let Rowan take her place on the bed. Rowan leaned back and closed her eyes, swinging her legs back and forth, back and forth. Nothing.

“I don’t know,” said an inmate with green eyes. “It seems to just be the speakers malfunctioning.” Rowan opened her eyes and glared up at the speakers.

She stood, walking up to the glass. She peered through the mirror, hoping to catch sight of someone on the other side of the glass. Rowan shook her head. She didn’t understand why things were happening. Her professor had warned her not to think everything was part of the experiment. Right now the experiment was too confusing.

###

Dr. Herrnstein’s experiment didn’t make any sense. For the last day, Dr. Herrnstein had given her instructions to bother the young woman Rowan. So, she had, sending screeching along the speaker every time she did something that no one else was doing. Whenever Rowan called attention to this singling out, Clem would stop her actions. Now, she was cranking down the light above Rowan’s head whenever she looked down at the table or a book.

Dr. Herrnstein hadn't been in the lab since he gave his orders, so she really couldn't ask him what he wanted, singling out Rowan. It didn't seem right. She narrowed her gaze and rested her chin on her hands. In experiments, the treatment should be equally experienced by the participants. This seemed almost targeted.

She had expected that research would be different in the field compared to class. But not this different. She set her head on her hands.

###

Rowan stood in the room beyond the mirror. She stretched, glancing around at the room, at the people who were all sitting just a bit farther away from her than they had the day before. Clem noticed that the other participants all acted like Rowan was crazy. Maybe they thought she was a plant, someone who was sent by Dr. Herrnstein to confuse other participants. Like Dr. Herrnstein would be that obvious.

Rowan walked over to the wall and slid down onto the floor, burying her head in her hands. Clem moved over to a blinking panel with the floor pattern of the lab laid out. She grabbed the dial and gingerly turned down the floor temperature, slowly, so that it wouldn't be obvious until it was too cold for the young woman to tolerate.

She watched Rowan's face as it became pale and she began to shiver a little. She sat there, pressed up against the metal walls, face still in her hands. Clem turned the temperature down a little more. Rowan's shivering became worse, slowly her hands fell away from her face until she looked up into the two-

way glass. Her face was twisted, lips curled, eyes narrowed, looking into the mirror. Not to where Clem sat, but where she had sat moments before. Clem shivered.

The door slid open to the control room. Dr. Herrnstein walked in, a jovial plaid tie swaying from his neck. He glanced into the room, catching sight of the face that Rowan made.

“Interesting,” he said. “She is tough.” He walked further to the window, staring in at the room. “I wonder how quickly she will start to pretend that nothing is wrong.”

“Pretend?”

“Yes, yes,” Herrnstein said. “She is tough, an individual, her own person. The rest are... less so. I know I haven’t really explained what we are trying to study, Clem. But I can now that the project itself is underway. The government wants to know the most efficient behavior modification techniques.”

Clem turned to him, her hand falling from the dial. “You want to break people?”

“Yes, yes, get them to go with the crowd, accept conformity. There are always those members of society who hate to be like everyone else.”

“And Rowan is one of them?”

Herrnstein chuckled. “She is the best example of a free spirit that I have met. But look, even now, she is feeling the effects of social isolation. If she wants

to be accepted back into the herd, she must give up on her free spiritedness.”

Clem glanced back at the young woman. Rowan looked up, her eyes shot to the rest of the participants before she buried her head in her arms.

“How can this research ever be applied to the real world?” Clem asked.

Herrnstein chuckled.

“Simply by making life difficult for those who complain.” He folded his hand behind his back and turned to Clem. “This is a small study, with very limited scope. But the end goal is to make Rowan act like everyone else for the duration of this experiment. It is not as subtle as I like, she is aware of us. I have been watching from my office.” He smiled a bit. “Once she has left our lab, then the real fun will begin. She will fail classes if she speaks out against the professors. She will be overlooked whenever she is part of a social group that doesn’t conform with the community.”

“Is that something we can do?” Clem asked. Herrnstein shrugged.

“It will let me see if her behavior changes. This is a preliminary study. I asked several psychology professors to send students to my experiment. The rest of the group are strong willed, she just seemed to be the best candidate.”

“Why?” Clem asked.

“She is a resilient person. You read about her life, you asked about her life. She is strong. I wonder what it will take to make her bend. It is hard to understand such minds unless you are willing to take the risk.”

“Oh,” Clem said, glancing down at the desk. This really was skirting the line of where non-maleficence became maleficence. She bit her lip. Rowan wouldn’t be hurt physically but messing with her life in small ways would probably harm her mentally in the long run.

“If it proves successful, I bet you will see this sort of behavior modification everywhere you go. Every difficult member of society will find their lives harder until they conform. Behavior modification at its finest.” Herrnstein chuckled again, then left the room.

Clematis ground her teeth as she walked into the lab. How long ago did I used to get excited to come into work? She closed her eyes, waiting for the door to open. Not even a week ago. She didn’t like gaslighting a poor girl. This work made her feel wilted and tired.

“Most people, when uncertain, will look to their peers. That’s talking about major situations, emergencies, fires... I want to know what it takes to make someone like Rowan uncertain in day-to-day life.” Dr. Herrnstein had said, the first night of the experiment.

“Is this a case study then?” Clem had asked. “Since you’re just studying one person?”

“No, I will replicate this once I am done seeing an extreme case. We will get her to change her behavior from a leader to led in two weeks. I promise.”

Considering his treatment of Rowan, Dr. Herrnstein's prior joviality disgusted Clem. She slunk into the control room, the lights slipping on over her station as the doors slid closed behind her. She glanced up.

Rowan stood at the 2-way window, a hand covering her eyes as she peered into the room. Clem froze, her hand going up to cover her heart that began to overload into her chest. Rowan's eyes narrowed. Clem raised her arm and gave a little wave to see if the girl on the other side of the glass noticed her.

Rowan's eyes narrowed even more. She pulled away from the window and turned into the room, where a few of the other participants were watching her. Rowan shook her head at the quiet questions lobbed her way, before walking away from the mirror.

Clem closed her eyes, taking a few deep breaths. What was this girl thinking? She couldn't see in. Was she looking to see when her tormentors arrived again? Clem took her seat and buried her head into her hands. She let out another long, deep breath. The poor girl.

The computer screen beside her flared red for a second. She looked up, seeing a list of things that Dr. Herrnstein wanted her to do that day to Rowan. Clem licked her lips and swallowed. She didn't want to. She glanced back to where the girl slept, face down on her bed, her long hair a tangle and mess. No, she would not do that to her. Not today.

###

Rowan opened her eyes. Far away on the other side of the room, she could hear the others talking, telling stories and swapping tales. She was alone again.

She couldn't wrap her head around the parameters of the test. There was something up, some secret twist that she couldn't understand. Only she could see it! She lay her head back against the pillow. No one would listen to her either.

So far, nothing had happened that day, that she couldn't comprehend. She growled under her breath. What new game had Dr. Herrnstein thought up for her. It kept happening. Every time something ended something new, a new pain or bother, would start. She ground her teeth, feeling the familiar pinch in her temples. Her eyes stung; her temples throbbed.

She swung up and over the side of her bed, standing and stretching. The voices on the other side of the room quieted. She glanced at them; their eyes were narrow as they tracked her movement across the room. Rowan shrugged, staggering in a half sleep towards the two-way mirror. Pulling her hand up over her eyes, she peered into the mirror, hoping to see what lay behind it.

She pressed her face close to the 2-way mirror, hoping, hoping, to catch movement on the other side of the mirror. The voices in the corner resumed, but in muffled whispers. Rowan drew in a thick breath and peered deeper into the mirror. Her eyes bored into her reflection. They wavered, and were red, staring back at her. They echoed. Rowan blinked, closed her eyes, then turned away from the mirror.

Arnold a tall brunette man, stood up and walked over to Rowan, grabbing her by her arm. The tight pressure stopped her before she could walk off towards her pod. He glanced into her eyes, pulling her away from the mirror.

“Are you alright?” he asked, pulling her towards the wall. He glanced back over his shoulder to where the others sat around a table.

“Fine,” Rowan said, following his gaze. Two dozen eyes glanced towards the screen, looking away from her. “Fine.” She looked back up into his eyes. His brows furrowed and his mouth twitched.

“You’re not acting fine, Rowan.” He closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. “You’re acting so off, Rowan. You’re acting like a plant, or sick. You were so different when you started this. Now…” his voice trailed. “I think it’s just because this is stressful, but the others are worried about you. Come on, sit with us and have dinner.”

Rowan glanced back at her fellow inmates, who were glancing at the screen, their eyes flickering to where she stood. Behind them she saw the mirror, reflected in the window. Rowan grimaced, dropping her head to her chest. Of course, she would go. Her bones ached, but not as much as her heart. Rowan dropped her head and fell into step beside Arnold.

Her fellow inmates scooted to the side on one of the benches, allowing her to sit down at their table. A plate full of food appeared in front of her, with a fork and a knife. Rowan closed her eyes. She scooped up a bite of the food and joined in on the conversation.

###

Clem watched the scene for a while, wondering if she had done the right thing by ignoring the list that Dr. Herrnstein had left for her. For the moment Rowan sat among friends. At dinner she never once brought up her strange musings that the entire program centered around her. No one asked her either, to retract what she'd previously said. I hope I haven't triggered the behavioral change, she thought. She rolled her lips between her teeth, wondering, hoping she hadn't gone too far.

She drew her legs up to her chest, glancing at the woman sitting amongst her people again. For the first time in days, Rowan smiled. Clem felt something inside of her swell, a happy feeling, like the sun breaking through the clouds. The sun shone for the first time since the experiment started, spreading its light and nourishment to her.

Clem walked into the lab the next morning, rubbing her eyes. Dr. Herrnstein's message woke her up earlier than she desired. Her presence was requested back at the lab. Clem wanted nothing more than to take a few days, maybe the rest of the next two weeks, off. She clenched her teeth, rubbing her tongue against the backs.

The door to the lab slid open. Dr. Herrnstein swiveled around to face her; his brows close together. He grumbled a greeting to her as she walked in. His eyes bored into her. She swallowed, going to stand in front of him.

"Do you know what you did?" he asked.

“Not what I was supposed to?” she asked. His brows furrowed; his eyes narrowed even more than they had been.

“Exactly. You disobeyed me, but I will overlook it. I think you added something to our experiment. Rowan now sees what she was missing when she was talking about her problems.” He swiveled around again, looking in the window. “Today we will pick back up where we were yesterday. Do not disobey me again.”

“What happened?” Clem walked forward and investigated the room.

“She was asked to rejoin the group. If we once again force her into isolation, then she will have to decide. Is it worth it to be right, or be part of the group? That is her conundrum.”

A dark pit opened in Clem’s chest. She felt the sunlight, the warmth of maybe doing the right thing, disappear. I may have made it worse. Clem closed her eyes, sinking into the chair beside Dr. Herrnstein.

“It’s really alright in the end,” he said, continuing with his lecture. “We were hoping she would stubbornly refuse to back down from being right. You may, unintentionally, have led me to a discovery. We’ll see if she remains as steadfast now that she knows what she’s missing. If she caves sooner... then that’s all the better, really.” Dr. Herrnstein smiled wide. “I know you were trying to be compassionate, Clem, but you can’t be in these situations. Science requires that we study it with cold detachment, even in the study of live humans. If we treated them with compassion, we might never get hard data on tricky subjects.”

Clem wrapped her arms around herself, watching as Rowan stood up and went to join the group of participants at the breakfast table. To think... no. Thinking had gotten her into this mess. Clem blinked back the cold pit, looking up to the control panel and flipping the appropriate levers. She wasn't sure if she wanted to study people with cold detachment.

“Everyone has to learn how to separate themselves from their research,” Dr. Herrnstein said. “Don't beat yourself up over it child, not now.” Clem nodded, biting her bottom lip. “But if you do something like this again you could ruin this experiment. Remember, the government is supporting our research.”

Clem nodded again. What an idiot she was. Clem leaned over the panel and went to work, while Dr. Herrnstein watched her, giving orders all day on how to sink Rowan into isolation again.

###

It had begun again. Rowan gritted her teeth as the latest round of torture reamed through her head. Her food was cold, but she could see the steam rising off the other inmates' breakfast. She felt an electric shock every time she stood or sat down. When she collapsed into bed that night, she noticed that the sheets were damp. The dampness soaked through her shirt, seeping onto her skin. A line of condensation spread up her neck, fanning into her hair.

She knit her brows into a thin line, squirming into the clammy sheets. The gentle breathing of her companions thrummed, a rhythm that should've put her to sleep. But the dampness soaked further into her skin, spreading down her legs,

pooling in the small of her back. She closed her eyes, trying to slow her breathing to match the breathing of her fellow inmates. The safety lights dimmed as everyone in the room, except Rowan, drifted off to sleep.

“She’s not mentioning anything to them.” Dr. Herrnstein leaned back from the control panel, rubbing his hands together. “Two days back from your little misstep and she is keeping quiet and rolling with what we’re throwing at her.” He smiled broadly. “She hasn’t even had a breakdown yet, which is what I hypothesized would happen.” He rubbed his hands again and looked at Clem.

“Why did you think that would happen?” Clem watched Rowan steadfastly eat from a metal spoon that shocked her every time. She would wince, her pale face scrunching tighter with every bite. Did Rowan really give in? Clem’s stomach clenched uncomfortably as Rowan took another bite. I shouldn’t have done anything.

“People need social approval. She needs social approval. I wanted to see how far she needed to be pushed to conform, even when her reality contradicts everyone else’s reality. I want her to deny her situation, remain quiet, and rejoin the group permanently.” He looked into the lab, his jaw muscles moving as he thought. “You let her have a taste of social approval. Let’s see what happens next.” His smile widened.

The next stage in the experiment would be worse. Clem ran her tongue along her cheek, swallowing deeply. She should never have accepted this position. Never. It had gone too far. Dr. Herrnstein had left behind beneficence

and non-maleficence. He wanted to continue, to ruin someone's life. He would never tell her; he would never stop. He wanted to get his answer more than he respected other people.

###

Things went easier when Rowan kept her mouth shut.

Rowan looked up as the screen flashed the time. It blinked white. Then the words HELLO appeared before being replaced with the time. Rowan blinked and glanced back up at the screen. It still bore the impassive and inscrutable numerals of time. She clenched her jaw tight, feeling the muscles roll up along her jawline. Arnold nudged her elbow. He glanced at her, one of his eyebrows arched.

"Is there something wrong?" Rowan shook her head and turned back to her food. If they think I'm crazy again... Rowan closed her eyes, shook her head again, then resumed eating. Her eyes stared off, unfocused, into the white walls.

As her mouth closed around the fork, a sharp blinding pain erupted along her jaw, her bones rattled. The fork fell from her hand, clattering on the table. Every eye in the room turned to her. She leaned forward, dropping her head into her hands, massaging the jawline where the shock still rattled her joints. She squeezed her eyes shut against the tears. No one needs to know I'm anything but clumsy.

###

Clem lay back on her bed that night, hands over her eyes. She took a long breath in. Nothing felt right about this anymore. Rowan's pale features and sunken eyes appeared whenever she closed her eyes. This was not okay anymore.

There were seven days left until this leg of the study was over. She rubbed her eyes, then let her hands fall to the side. She glanced up at the light, round, pulsating slightly. She groaned. She felt dirty and tired and angry. Her bones ached, her head ached, her heart ached. She was scum.

She didn't want to go to work the next day. She didn't want to go to work at all. But she needed this job to advance in the Department, and if she didn't go in, someone who was more sadistic and willing to hurt Rowan could take her place.

Not only that... the idea of breaking the strongest in society brushed wrong against the ingrained ideals in Clem's head. The fact that Government wanted them to find a way to break these people. The fact that she had a hand in the breaking of one young woman. Clem had wanted to do research to do good, to learn ways to help people. Not to hurt them or misuse them in the name of progress. That was a price Clem couldn't pay. Rowan seemed so sad, her lips pressed tight together, her eyes distant, her head bowed even in conversation.

Dr. Herrnstein wandered around the lab, his hands clasped over his belly, humming to himself at their progress. He seemed pleased, too pleased, to let Rowan pay the price for his curiosity. He cackled at the expression on her face, he pointed out all the previous research that had gone into making this environment.

Clem clenched her fists and fell into an exasperated silence. She didn't want to have any more to do with the experiment. She had to do something. The pained face of Rowan would haunt her dreams until she could find a way to save her.

The eyes in Dr. Herrnstein's picture followed her through the halls. Clem ground her teeth, an intense strain growing up her jaw and spreading through her face. If only he wouldn't follow her. She groaned, rubbing her fingers along her jawline. She felt so heavy, so tired. The stress compressed her joints and her muscles.

She punched her code into the panel, standing back as the door opened. She slipped into the office, letting the door slide shut behind her. The cool air slid over her skin, the computers and machines beeped and whirred softly around her. She slid through the dim cool light, sinking into her chair. She swiveled around once, trying to figure out how to let Rowan know she wasn't going crazy.

Rowan was starting to comply. Dr. Herrnstein had told her that the night before. Rowan had begun to enter what Dr. Herrnstein referred to as the "proper mental state." Soon he would start making requests of the participants to see how she reacted. If Dr. Herrnstein was correct, it wouldn't take long for Rowan to comply. Then she would be released into the wild, to continue the experiment. A life-ruining, terrible experiment.

Clem leaned forward staring into the quiet room where the participants currently slept. Rowan looked peaceful for the first time since the beginning of

the experiment. Clem felt the clenching in her muscles release. If only Rowan would look like this forever.

Clem swiveled around in her chair and began thinking of the ways she could contact Rowan. She could send her a message. She couldn't let Dr. Herrnstein know about it, or he would remove her and have someone else torment Rowan. Holding off on the experiment didn't work, it really only gave Rowan a break. Clem worried she'd done nothing but set the girl up to fall further into the experiment.

The faintest stirring from the participants drew her attention. Arnold swung out of bed, going over to the washrooms. She wondered if she could trust him to tell Rowan the truth. He hadn't believed Rowan about the experiment. But if Clem asked, maybe he would give Rowan a message. She just had to make sure he wouldn't tell Dr. Herrnstein what she was doing.

Without stopping to think of a brilliant plan, she decided to contact Arnold, and let him know what was going on. He cared, at least. Hopefully, that would be enough.

###

Rowan hung her head as she slumped into her seat. Her bedsheets that night had been stiff, the mattress rocky. A weird beeping kept sounding in her sleeping pod. No one else had heard it, but Rowan knew that already, even without asking. No one ever heard it. She couldn't see the point in bringing it up anymore. Not when it just made her look ridiculous.

Arnold plopped down beside her as her food slid down the service ramp. She picked up her fork, ready to eat the weird yellow lump that may or may not be colder than her fellow inmates.

Before she could eat, Arnold scooped up a spoonful, putting it to his lips. His face screwed up, he gently placed the fork down on the table and slid his bowl to hers.

“Not very good service you’re getting,” he muttered through a mouthful of the lump. He took a long drink of his water, coughing slightly.

“It’s alright,” she said, looking down. She quickly shoveled the food he had given her into her mouth, a warm, finely seasoned plate of breakfast, unlike the oddly chilly eggs that Arnold attempted to swallow. What is he thinking?

“No, this is awful,” he said. He winked at her, then turned back to the rest of the inmates, striking up a quiet conversation. No great topics were discussed, nothing revolutionary passed their lips. But Arnold made an effort to pull Rowan in and welcome her to the group.

Rowan furrowed her brows, looking down at the perfectly fluffy eggs, the crispy bacon, that Arnold had given her. How interesting indeed.

###

Clem’s grin grew ear to ear as she watched Arnold and Rowan interact. He stood by her side, as every botheration came through. He would talk to her, pull

her to the side, distract her. He hadn't told Rowan that he had talked to Clem yet, that he knew everything that was going on. He knew that Rowan wasn't crazy.

She wondered what Rowan's reaction would be, to learn that she wasn't crazy. To learn that there was a woman behind the madness, entangled in Dr. Herrnstein's experiment. Clem didn't want to be the reason for Rowan's pain. She didn't want to be blamed for this. How do strong people respond to those who wronged them? She couldn't rely on the doctor anymore to protect her, not if he found out what she had done.

Her grin slowly fell away as her thoughts continued running faster. If only Dr. Herrnstein would remain oblivious, and then maybe, just maybe, Clem could pull this off. Rowan wouldn't have to suffer.

Arnold followed Rowan into the bathroom. She turned to face him, raising her fists. Arnold grabbed them, pulling them together in his firm grasp. He pulled her closer to him, leaning down towards her. She felt his breath in his ear.

"You were right," he said, his voice low, sending a shudder through her.

"About?" she asked.

"About being targeted," he said. He leaned back, glancing around the room. Rowan followed his gaze around, high and low on the walls. He turned back to her, releasing her hands. "The lab tech for the experiment told me all about it. She says you're the target, since you're so strong willed."

Rowan felt her chest swell. At the same moment her vision blurred, and her head began to pound. She clenched her fists, turning and staring in the bathroom mirror. She took several deep breaths.

“Did she say anything else?” Rowan asked.

“Only to not give up hope. If you don’t react well to the experiment in here, they can’t continue it while you’re outside.” Rowan looked up, meeting his eyes in the mirror. She held her breath for a long moment, while an idea formed in her head.

She looked away. She hadn’t been dreaming at all. She closed her eyes, against a mounting pressure inside. She hadn’t been dreaming at all.

###

Clem jumped as the door opened. Dr. Herrnstein walked in, hands in his pockets. He looked over her shoulder at the participants milling about. Rowan sat in the middle of the crowd, talking and laughing with Arnold. His eyes narrowed, as Rowan stood up and walked over to her bed. She threw a glance towards the observation room, eyes darkened and pinched. Then she slid onto her bed, covering her head with her hands.

“She seems different today,” Dr. Herrnstein said, glancing back at Clem. Clem smiled, shaking her head.

“You chose her because she was strong. Maybe she rebounded?” Clem sat forward, looking out the window. He harrumphed, going to take his place at his seat.

“A few of my investors want to come and see how this experiment is going,” he said. “if she is not miserably complying with everything I ask her to do, then I am going to lose my funding for this.”

Clem turned away. How terrible, she thought, rolling her eyes. She pressed the icons on her panel, watching as the next torture primed. She watched Arnold walk across to where Rowan sat. The newest annoyance—an electric shock connecting Rowan to her bed. Arnold’s eyes opened wide; his hair seemed to quiver. He glanced into the window, then grabbed Rowan’s arm and pulled her off the bed. The two of them walked off towards the rest of the inmates.

Herrnstein grunted. “What are they up to?” Clem held back a sigh, spinning her chair around to face her mentor.

“He tasted her food and seems to be believing her story now about things just happening to her.” Clem leaned forward, watching as Arnold put an arm around the girl, pulling her away from any chairs or tables.

“How wonderful,” Dr. Herrnstein growled. “I personally vetted this group of participants. None of them are supposed to intervene. I made sure of it.” He rubbed a hand through his hair.

“Is there anything we can do about it?” asked Clem, holding back a smile. He was furious. Just as she planned.

“I don’t know, let me think,” he snapped. He watched the participants as they laughed and talked. “We don’t have enough time left in this experiment to try and change it.”

Dr. Herrnstein watched them interact for a few minutes, while Clem held her breath, releasing it briefly when he looked away. The computers beeped; the machines hummed. Clem sniffed. Her entire body radiated and shook. If he didn’t speak soon, she would explode.

“We will finish this out,” he said. “Go easy on what you do to Rowan, so that no one else figures it out. I will find a way to include him in the second half.” He turned and strode out of the door, leaving Clem to watch Rowan and Arnold try to survive.

###

Rowan glanced at her face in the mirror, lean, tired, with circles masking her expression under her eyes. Arnold stood beside her, watching as she stared into her own eyes. Rowan wondered how much he knew. He was always popping up whenever things started to happen to her. She knew now that Herrnstein was out for her. She wondered if he did.

“You know, we are almost done,” Arnold said, leaning back and glancing at the ceiling.

“I know,” she said. “It’s not coming soon enough.” She blinked, then looked away from the window.

“Don’t let it get to you.” He placed a hand on her head. “You have been remarkably strong given the circumstance. I probably would have started yelling at the walls.” He chuckled slightly. She glanced up at him, her brows furrowing. She glanced back at her reflection.

“I don’t know what else we can do,” she said, putting her head in her hands. “Who can we tell?”

“There’s the review board,” Arnold said, leaning forward, speaking into her ears. “I don’t know why they would sanction this.”

“You took Psych, right?”

“Yeah,” he narrowed his eyes. “This doesn’t seem like something the review board would’ve approved.”

Rowan nodded. She narrowed her eyes, feeling something strong and heavy in her chest, anger hardening in her heart. She grinned, a slight, piercing grin. She had an idea. All she needed was to tell the assistant about it.

###

Clem heard the conversation. She tapped a pen against the pad, her eyes looking out towards the light fixtures. She rapped out a rhythm that kept time with her thoughts. She never spoke to the review board about this. She licked her lips, glancing at the time. She had the data; she had the time. Dr. Herrnstein said she could take a day off if she wanted.

Clem stood up, her legs pumping as she slid out through the doors, down the hall to where she knew Dr. Herrnstein kept his proposal. She glanced through the door. If he was in there... she couldn't make out his figure though. She grinned, holding her badge up to the reader.

The doors slid open. She rushed in, looking around the office at the many awards Dr. Herrnstein had received since he graduated. She grimaced. What had he been studying back then? Sliding into his chair she typed Rowan's name into a search bar at his computer, hoping that her name would pop up.

It did. Three files. The first one Clem pulled up was Rowan's profile. Clem scanned the file for any useful information. The only things of note were Rowan's working-class hometown and her academic report in school. She'd done well getting into the university. There wasn't anything new in the report. Clem ground her teeth and moved onto the next file.

The door down the hall slid open. Clem closed the computer and slid under the desk. If Dr. Herrnstein came in there... she held her breath as the footsteps started down the hall, stopping at the laboratory. She could explain her being away from her post. She glanced back up at door, then slid out of her hiding spot. She would have to look later. She needed to know if he had lied to the Review Board.

She hurried out the door, slowing her steps as she approached the lab. She paused just out of sight and took a deep breath, flattening her hair. She took

another breath, then stepped through the door. Dr. Herrnstein looked up at her as she entered.

“Where you in the bathroom?” he asked.

“Yes sir,” she said, walking over to her seat. “Sir, why did you want to do this project?”

Dr. Herrnstein laughed. “Money, mostly.” He grinned. “And intellectual curiosity. All the old big questions have been answered. I wanted to start something new.” Clem saw him grimace, turning back to the two-way glass. “The government offered me a chance to really do some research, with the promise that my next project can be about whatever I want.”

“But you could have discovered new things about the old fields without crossing ethical lines,” Clem said, looking past him at Rowan, kneeling in the corner with Arnold.

“Yes, I probably could have. But then my name would have gone on an endless list of researchers attempting to breathe new life into old fields. I wanted more than that. I wanted people to look back and say, without Herrnstein, this field of psychology wouldn’t exist.”

Clem shook her head. “There’s more to psychology than being renowned. This study, it’s not ethical. You can’t publish it.”

Herrnstein sighed, clasping his hands over his large belly. He stood there, quiet for a moment. “You are right, and you are wrong. I can’t publish this now. I

may never be able to publish this in my lifetime. But I will know the answer to my question. Like no one else in psychology's history, I will have proof for my conclusions." The corners of his mouth flipped up. "We can't learn anything within ethical considerations. If we can't go beyond their limitations, we may never know the answers to the questions I have. This study is the first step in growing as a science, Clematis. If we can study this, we could study anything. We could help so many more people that way."

Clem grimaced. Sure.

###

Arnold tapped his fingers together, staring down at the list in front of them. Rowan's eyes were closed, her breathing long and slow. He felt bad for pushing her, but she had told him she wanted to remember everything that had happened.

She opened her eyes, looking back at him. She smiled, sitting up straight. Arnold wished he had listened to her earlier. She seemed happier now, with him at least believing her.

As soon as they were able to, they would take their information to the Review Board. He grasped her hand in his. Soon.

###

The last day approached. Clem swiped her key card at Dr. Herrnstein's office door again, glancing side to side as she slid into the room. She held her

breath, hoping that today she wouldn't be disturbed. Dr. Herrnstein had a meeting with all the other doctors at the facility. Hopefully it would keep him busy.

She slid behind the desk and pulled up the files on the computer. Scrolling through the pages, she found the two files marked proposal. She opened them, reading their contents. One of them talked about living in close quarters with others. The second one talked about mind control. This one, Clem figured, was real. She peered through it, wondering why he bothered to write this proposal. She opened a tab and sent the file to herself. She deleted all signs that she'd been in the office, before slipping back into the hallway. Soon.

###

Rowan counted down the hours in her head. Tomorrow they would be free. She wouldn't have to look over her shoulder anymore. No more mind games. She hadn't talked much since Arnold told her he knew. She didn't need to. The rest of the inmates wouldn't talk to her either. They thought she was weird. It was nice, though, to have one person believe her. He was making the plans, she was waiting. Waiting for freedom.

The latest bother had been electrical shocks wherever she sat. She stood by her sleeping pod. Waiting for the next problem. Watching. If it wasn't for Arnold, she wouldn't be able to stand it. She wondered if she would have given in, if he hadn't come around.

Near her ears a sharp buzzing began to echo through her pod. She closed her eyes, wondering if anyone else heard it. She opened her eyes and looked up at

Arnold, who sat a little way from her. She looked up to the sky, then pointed to her ear.

Arnold shook his head, then stood and walked over to her. His brows furrowed as he got closer to her. He shook his head, grabbed her hands, then pulled her away.

“We’re almost home free,” he said. “In less than a day you’ll be free from this.”

“Yeah,” she muttered, closing her eyes. “When will we go to the...” she glanced around, “you know?” The Board.

“As soon as we get the information that I asked for,” he said, looking up at the camera above their head. “Hopefully the day after.” He gave her hand a squeeze. “We’ll make them listen, don’t worry.”

“Thank you,” she whispered, leaning into his shoulder. “Thank you so much.”

“It’s the right thing to do,” he replied.

###

Clem watched as Dr. Herrnstein paced up and down the lab. He ground his teeth, and clenched his fists, grumbling and growling.

“How did they figure this out!” he snapped, turning to glare at Clem.

“I don’t know, but you have targeted Rowan the entire time. I guess Arnold figured it out...”

“They want to take this public!” he threw up his hands.

“Well, you have been targeting Rowan this entire time. It’s unethical—”

“Who cares about ethics?” he spat. “They hinder the exploration of psychology. We can’t learn all we need to learn if we follow these archaic guidelines.”

“You have been hurting Rowan,” Clem replied.

“It’s a small price to pay to learn the truth about our brains,” he said. “If we want to learn things, we need to be willing to pay the price. We used to experiment on rats, but they outlived their uses. If we don’t experiment, we will fall behind all the other sciences.”

“But on people! Against their knowledge?” Clem stood up, clenching her fists to her side. “For an experiment that makes them doubt their own reality!”

“There is a price for progress,” he said. “If you don’t like it, get out.”

Clem met his eyes. He pointed to the door. Clem stood her ground.

“I can’t leave you to mess up her life anymore.”

“I can’t have you stay here and mess up my experiment anymore.” His eyes narrowed. “Get out, Clematis.”

“No,” she said, grounding her heels into the floor.

“You don’t have the drive to succeed in this field,” he said. “I taught you what I could, but the lessons didn’t take root.” He grabbed her arm. She struggled,

fidgiting out of his arm. But he held on, dragging her through the door, out of his lab, and to the front door. He dropped her outside, then stepped back into the Department, locking the door behind him.

Clem slumped against the wall. She had tried to fit into Herrnstein's methods. But she couldn't. She didn't have what it took to grow, to make it in this life, not if she had to hurt people. She couldn't. Not for any of the fame and renowned that Herrnstein promised her. But her dreams sunk. She felt them wilt away as she shook in the quiet, barren hallway.

###

Rowan felt like she bounced through her skin as they waited to be released. She couldn't wait to get out. She knew she would be free afterwards. Free forever. Arnold grabbed her hand, and the two of them walked out of the lab together for the last time.

###

Dr. Herrnstein watched them go out. He ran his hands down his face, drawing in breath. This experiment did not go as planned. If Rowan became too stubborn, he may have to redo the experiment, with a new assistant. One who understood the price of progress. He glared at Rowan's head as she walked away. There were too few people as stubborn and independent as she. It would be a headache, trying to restart this experiment.

If only Clematis hadn't failed. She had so much promise. But she was too soft. Soft psychology was in the past, dealt with ethics, cared for participants. You

couldn't care for participants and learn everything about human psychology. Once the government request was completed, he could move on to other, more beneficial projects.

If only Clematis could see the big picture. There was only so much progress when research was constrained. He had tried to nurture in her the longing for knowledge he'd seen, but it hadn't stuck. Instead, she had wilted in the harsh realities of the field.

###

Arnold looked around the lab as they walked through. He only saw Dr. Herrnstein watching them go, no sign of the woman who had helped him out. He glanced side to side, then met eyes with the doctor. Herrnstein narrowed his eyes. Arnold looked the doctor straight in the eyes and wrapped an arm around Rowan. Dr. Herrnstein stepped back into his office.

Arnold kept his eyes peeled, looking up and down the halls as they hurried out of the lab. Rowan's step had picked up, she almost ran through the main lobby lined with awards. Arnold walked slower, scanning the crowd. He'd expected the lab assistant to be outside, waiting for them. As they stepped out into the sunlight for the first time, he saw her. She waved at them, stepping forward to meet them.

They came face to face, and she held out a packet to them. Arnold grabbed it, flipping through the paper. Rowan looked over his shoulder at the papers. He watched her brows knit and relax as she read.

“What does this mean?” Rowan asked, looking back up at the other woman.

“I think it means that Dr. Herrnstein got this experiment passed by the Review Board.”

“This one?” Arnold asked.

“It was requested by the Superior Government. He made a fake proposal as well, just in case someone came to investigate him.”

“This is allowed?”

The woman shrugged. “Apparently it is.” She ran her hand through her hair. “Dr. Herrnstein kicked me off the project when I objected and meddled in it. If the review board allows it, I don’t know what to do.”

“We can take it to the public,” Arnold replied.

“There are some underground news sources,” Rowan replied. “Fringe ones who would love this sort of story.” She looked up into Arnold’s eyes. “They may believe us too, if we give them the copies of the proposal.”

The three of them began walking away, planning, waiting. They would figure out a way to fight this, however they could.

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