

The call came in at eight in the morning. A woman shrieked all hysterical about her boss being dead. Come quick, come quick please; she screamed and screamed until the operator almost joined her. Then she went quiet, whispered a nonsense apology, and gave the address. A fertility clinic on the outskirts of the town.

Two dead, their innards squeezed out and their flat bodies left curled up and crooked. A man and a woman, caucasian and in their mid to late fifties. First folks on the scene sit out in the parking lot, next to the caller, and mumble their disbelief, their fear. You stand sentinel by the lot entrance, chewing gum. You listen, lips smacking.

“Think it might be a new chemical agent?” one EMT says.

“Maybe?” says the other.

You cross your arms over your chest. Fuck, don't let it be that. You went inside that place. You were exposed. All of you were exposed.

The caller, a young woman with a long neck, breaks into tears. She has been doing this off and on since first responders arrived. Sobbing over the death of her coworkers, and her own eventual end. Start and stop, start and stop, like a sprinkler. She needs to go to the hospital, or at least be sedated. Even a good slap would do.

You look down the road, gray as the sky above, and sees a dot. A little black dot, growing larger and larger until he can make out the shape of a bike. The rider wears black, too, a black helmet, a black jacket, and black pants. Your stomach drops at the sight.

The rider comes to a stop a few feet away from you and cuts the engine. Nice thighs on her, nice round hips, too. Tight waist, pear-shaped. You pop your gum; you could go for a bite. The rider jerks her head in your direction, and that ache of lust spins into one of fear.

You can't see your reflection in the helmet's visor.

"Officer Mateo Holly, ma'am," you blurt. You cover your mouth, confused, and stares into the black of the rider's visor. Not even the sun can be seen in it. "The receptionist called it in. Two dead, two of the patients are missing. She said--" Words keep spilling out. You clench your jaw, but your lips still move. Your tongue flicks the back of your teeth as you talk. "She said this place is some kind of fertility clinic that specializes in surrogacy and, I, fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, she keeps bawling too much to make sense."

The rider walks away.

You choke on your gum, the wad lodging in your throat. Retching, you pound your chest, beating your sternum until you hork up the sticky gunk. It splats on the toe of your polished boot, the spearmint green discolored with milky phlegm.

"Who are you?" the EMT asks as the rider approaches. He retreats as the rider's gaze runs over him, his partner quickly joining him.

*Get it away from her,* you mouth, voice gone, as the rider kneels before the receptionist. The receptionist's eyes glaze, her expression strange and dreamy, as she looks down at the rider. She holds out her hand to her, expectant.

The rider takes her hand.

*Get away from her, get the fuck away!* You break into a sprint, feet leaden and tripping over each other. You reach out, jaw hanging as you gargle trapped words. It's like your dreams, the ones where you are back in high school, running the 100-meter dash. The finish line lies within reach and you run and you run, friction eating away the cartilage in your knees, your lungs and muscles combusting, and yet, you never get any closer.

"I'm sorry," the receptionist says, squeezing the rider's hand. The rider presses her helmet to her hands. She then rises to her feet and cups the receptionist's face in her gloved hands. "Oh, oh, thank you! Thank you!"

Her praise is lost between wet sobs, fat white tears running from her eyes, down to the rider's gloves. One of the EMTs starts to cry, too, his face stricken as he wipes his cheek. His partner snuffles.

The rider leaves, fingers dripping white with the receptionist's tears. You watch her return to her bike, mount it, and rev the engine. She stays there for a moment, visor tilted to the dead sky, gray as the road. You blink back the stinging in your eyes and swallow. Behind you, a chorus of crying starts, a wounded keening that sinks into your marrow, and you can't help but think how all of you were exposed.

You lick your tears; they taste like milk.