

Abalone

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Abalone

The floater lay on its side, the cockpit burning with a ferocity matched only by the fury in Claudia's eyes. She stood next to the flames, pulling the trigger of the pistol rapidly and with utter aplomb. Before today, she had never struck out in anger. Now, the results of just one of her many outbursts that day lay all around her. Two transport floaters in flames and six Enforcement Officers arranged in various poses of death and dismemberment. Also known as EOs, they had been charged with capturing her, but that was not in Claudia's plans. After the crash, she had killed them hurriedly one by one.

The gun whined in her hand, its high-pitched cry indicating that the power cell had nearly reached its limits. Her hand relaxed and she watched the small wisps of smoke rise up from around the discharge barrel. Claudia observed the way the radiating pistol made the air around it shimmer. It was a brief moment of beauty in what had been a terrible series of events.

Claudia turned her back on the EOs and trudged methodically back to where her own floater lay burning on its side. The rapidly advancing flames marred the blue metallic surface of the transport vessel. She reached into the cockpit and recovered the bag she had killed to retrieve. From the passenger seat, she dragged out the source of her violent outbursts. The bloodied and broken corpse had not been killed in the crash and Claudia was not to blame for his condition. The EOs and an angry mob had executed her lover, her Jeremiah, days before.

She couldn't drag him far from the burning floater since the adrenalin of the kill was quickly fading. Her resolve had not wavered but exhaustion was beginning to settle into her bones. Already she could sense them calling out to her. She waved her hands around her head, subconsciously willing their presences away like the way flies were buzzing around Jeremiah's stinking corpse. She rested his body on its side beneath a nearby evergreen. The darkness under its branches invited to her to rest.

The lilting sound of the mindspeak that beckoned to her eventually coalesced into a coherent thought. 'Claudia... Give back the Abalone, Claudia.' She measured the intensity in the telepathic call. 'We can help you Claudia. Give back the Abalone.' They didn't know her exact location yet. The deaths of the EOs came as a surprise to them and prevented the seekers from learning her whereabouts. She had time until they found her. The telepathic call became more frantic and intrusive. It was growing in intensity as the reaction to her rebellion traveled throughout the globe. Other voices joined the first few and soon they would threaten to overwhelm her. She clamped her hands instinctively over her ears and concentrated on building the walls and defenses that Jeremiah had taught her. Up the mental barrier went, silencing the multitude of voices.

Telepathy had come to the human race twelve generations before, a survival mechanism invoked by the need to overcome the sentient machines that had threatened to wipe out humanity. With simultaneous thought, the AI war was waged efficiently and with devastating result to the machines. As history went, the machines were unable to compensate for the extraordinary coordination that telepathy brought. Their silicon chips were far slower than two minds working in unison. After the war, privacy became a lost word, falling into obscurity and was eventually purged from human existence. Ten generations had passed with the telepathy forcing openness upon the populace. With it came the fear of personal thought. That was, of course, until Jeremiah awoke to his true calling.

She was never as good as he was building the walls, but then he had been doing it since he was a child. He had been able to block himself out of the Communal Oneness. She never believed his tales until he had shown her what it was like to be Alone. Truly alone. That day he had built the mental walls for her, brick by brick. He had shown her true peace, true quiet.

Silence. It had frightened her.

It was in the peaceful quietness of her mind that she realized that she had fallen in love with the eccentric scientist. Her chest tightened with the remembrance as she looked down at his pale white form. The tears were beginning again.

They had worked together within the Ministry of Dimensional Exploration. She was little more than a lab tech; he was a genius of fractal mathematics. Jeremiah however was a closet radical, waging his own private war against the Communal Oneness. He joined the ranks of the Quiet Prophet and fought long and hard in a

subversive effort to isolate himself from the Oneness conformity. She agreed with him, also scribing to the belief of the Quiet Prophet and the prediction of his return.

Jeremiah had risen up against the Oneness, sending out vocal and telepathic messages throughout the Oneness about the suffocating practices that the human race had come to accept. ‘Where was privacy?’ he had cried. ‘Where was the silence where one could collect their thoughts without someone chiming in their opinion?’

They came for him then, the EO’s beating him in front of those few that rallied around him. They dragged him through the streets, offering him up the masses to be stoned and eventually killed.

Claudia had not lifted a hand to help him, hiding from all that accused her of being associated with him. All during his uprising and subsequent martyring, she hid within her apartment, begging the mind probes to stop their assault on her.

It wasn’t until the day after his death did she finally act in his defense. Realization finally came to her as to what Jeremiah was, that he was the Messiah long prophesied about in the texts about the Quiet Prophet.

A mad plan had formed within her mind.

One that would bring her lover back so that he might live on to free the world of the Collective Oneness.

The Abalone was the key.

This morning she left for the lab just as she always did. There she killed two of her coworkers and stole the Abalone out from under security. As she escaped, she killed an EO with the Security Officer’s weapon and stole his floater. Within hours she had taken Jeremiah’s corpse away from where he was publicly displayed, killing dozens of bystanders when she smashed the floater into their frail forms. She dashed away from the cities with an EO floater in pursuit. She had wrecked her floater into it, causing them both to crash amid the wilds of the north. In the ensuing chaos, she had killed the remaining four Enforcers chasing her.

It had been a long and violent day.

Her hand fell to her bag and she pulled out the small silver packet.

She hesitated, momentarily second-guessing herself. It had to be done. The prophecy had to be fulfilled. She peeled back the thin metallic covering, exposing the pink tissue beneath. Ten thin rectangular sheets rested inside, each no bigger than two of her fingers put together. All glowed vividly with a sheen of mother of pearl.

Abalone.

They were not related to the gastropod in any way. These were inter-dimensional nexuses of distortion with physical form. Some theorized they were sentient as well. A probe into a sub-dimension had returned with them only weeks before. She touched the topmost Abalone, feeling the slipperiness of the gel it was packed in. With that touch she remembered the first time she watched the video of the Abalone as it worked its magic.

An assistant had not been following proper containment procedures and had come in contact with the Abalone. Immediately it attached itself and frantically the assistant struggled to remove it as it absorbed into his skin. Moments later, the assistant began to change. He leaned against the table in front of him and the table surface squirmed and rose up like a living being around him. Random objects began flashing into existence all around the assistant and crashed to the ground. The assistant turned back to the camera, his face wide with amazement. "I can see clearly now..." were the last words his mind uttered as his body began to writhe. Pain crossed his features and his body began to twist and squirm in ways no body could manage. His bones seemed like rubber. A high-pitched squeal emanated from his mouth and those closest to him felt his mind extinguish like a flickering match.

All that remained was a blackened and twisted corpse on a warped and twisted table.

After that incident, the Abalone were quarantined within the Labs confines, sealed in the container that Claudia had just opened. She did not fear the Abalone because the prophecy had to be fulfilled.

She picked one up, looking intently at it. She could feel the gel beginning to fade away from between her fingers. There would be no turning back now.

"What are you doing?" The vocalization startled her and she dropped the Abalone back into its container while she looked to find the source of the sound. It came from the EO's corpse. He lay on the ground, his eyes open and his back propped against the floater. Her eyes widened and she reached for the gun. The EO was obviously dead since there was a gaping hole in his forehead. He had to be dead; but there was no explanation for his speech. "This won't help, you know." His eyes were dead but his mouth moved.

"It must." She shook her head as if to clear it. "You're dead. You can't be speaking."

"A hallucination then," the corpse stated. "No doubt brought about by the grief induced insanity that is raging through you." He paused for a moment, his gory head glistening in the sunlight. "You do realize you are insane." It was a statement, not a question.

“Shut up! Shut up!” she cried, her eyes closing to block him out. “I’m going to bring the Messiah back. The Abalone can do that, I know it.”

“You’re correct, they can make matter into whatever you want it to be for a brief moment. It can bring back your Jeremiah, the one you call Messiah. Only there is a price. Your life.”

Frustration crept into her voice. “What does it matter? Jeremiah is the one. The one to lead us our people away from the suffocation! I read the ancient texts; I know the prophecy where one will come who will be impervious to the mind control, the telepathy. He will lead his people out of the cacophony inside their minds and into blessed silence.” She stopped her rant and focused on the EO. “What are you and what do you want?”

The EO smiled. “I am nothing but a warning from within your mind. You are making a mistake. You do not understand the consequences of what you are about to do. You are selfish and short sighted.”

Claudia picked up the pistol and fired repeatedly at the hallucination. The corpse jerked several more times as the high-energy bolts struck its lifeless form. “I will bring him back!” A gentle clicking sound was all she heard as the power supply ran dry. She threw the dead weapon down and walked over to Jeremiah’s corpse. Kneeling down beside him, she held her breath to not smell his rancidness. She took out one of the Abalones, watching as it curled upwards, reaching for her fingertip. She stretched out her left forearm and placed the glittering strip onto her skin. It faded away from her skin, disappearing into her flesh. She felt no different.

Claudia then watched as her left arm twisted around itself of its own volition. She forced it to return to its natural shape. As she did so, a strange creeping sensation crawled up her back and a sense of newfound power flooded through her. A chattering sound filled her ears. Patterns of light and color glistened over her eyes. “I can see it now...” she mumbled, understanding how the energy of the third dimension worked. She saw figures and beings, all outside her dimensional plane.

Jeremiah lay in front of her, the blackness of his death pervasive to every molecule of his body. She laughed, instantly knowing now how to return him to life. She touched his lifeless body and the chattering inside her mind became louder. “Heal,” she commanded. “Live again for me. Live again to free our world.” The corpse warped where it lay, the wounds disappearing and a healthy color restored. She watched as a spark burst into existence within his skull and immediately it winked out, surrounded instantly by Jeremiah’s natural walls.

The breath of life entered into his once dead flesh.

Jeremiah opened his eyes, looking up at her. His eyes were not filled with joy at seeing her face, or happiness at simply being brought back from the dead. Instead, they were filled with hate.

“Why?” he asked, trembling with rage.

She felt the first of the pains begin to strike her belly. “I gave myself for you, to see you one last time. To say I love you.”

“You selfish child!”

“No! You are the Messiah! The one who will free the world from the Communal Oneness. You are that man in the ancient texts.” Pain speared through her and she willed the Abalone to heal her. She pooled her newborn energy into her body, reconstructing it even as the Abalone distorted it. In her veins, the unending chatter suddenly turned to laughter. Even though she knew she was dying, peace came over her. Jeremiah lived, even if she did not.

His mind voice was little more than a whisper. ‘I saw the darkness of death. I have felt the eternal quiet. I know now what I have to do.’

He reached out and touched her face, but she could no longer feel his touch. His hand came away coated with a black dust. Fear of her impending death now gripped her. Within that brief moment of contact, she knew his new purpose. Death had shown him true silence and he would bring all their people to experience it. The Abalone, in their twisted way, had shown him the way to open a hole into their dimension. The Abalone would consume this existence, to warp and twist it to their own fashion, and bringing Jeremiah’s goal of blessed silence to all.

Jeremiah picked up the opened pack of Abalone and smiled at her. ‘Enjoy the silence, my love,’ he mindspoke to her. She recoiled at the sight of him as he placed them one by one on his skin. Already she could feel the chattering beginning to fill the air as the Abalone fed on the restored Jeremiah. A disturbing power was coalescing within him. She knew the end was near not only for her but also for everyone. She sobbed and fell to her knees, seeing her blackened legs twisting around her in strange and unnatural ways. Agony seized her and she fought against it.

The translation of the ancient texts was wrong. The Quiet Prophet would free the people by destroying the world, not by ending telepathy. The blessed silence would be the death of all nations and beings. The horror of her terrible error held death at bay for few seconds longer, but the unending silence would not be denied.

The End