

Westcrest

Episode #11: Wormwood

Marcus opens his eyes to see Helena looking down at him. He winks at her and she smiles wanly. "He's awake," she says.

Marcus rises groggily on one elbow and glances around the room. He recognises the Westcrest medical bay immediately, but can't remember how he got here. "What happened?"

"You've been out cold for a couple of days," says Sarra. "Helena got you transferred out of the muggle hospital—"

"I *hate* that word," snarls Marcus. Then: "You had me transferred? How does that work? I didn't know they had a checkbox on the forms for an invisible island."

"As far as they're concerned you've been transferred to a private upstate medical facility owned by the government, due to your status as a military veteran," explains Helena.

"Ha!" Says Marcus but his chest starts hurting and he winces. "How badly am I hurt?"

"You'll survive," says Sarra, jabbing him in the side.

"Don't do that," scolds Helena. "You're fine, Marcus. Though I did detect some unusual traces in the tissue sample I took."

"Unusual how?" Says Marcus.

"Do you remember anything about the explosion?" Asks Helena.

"No, I... well, I grabbed this guy out of..." Marcus pauses. "Unusual *how*?"

Helena looks at Marcus and Sarra, her eyes shifting between them. Finally she sighs and resigns herself to speak: "I have reason to believe that the substances I detected in your blood resulted from contamination by an artificially-engineered contagion."

"Wormwood," says Marcus and Sarra thinks she sees his bottom lip quivering.

"Wormwood," repeats Helena.

"What the hell is Wormwood?" Asks Sarra.

"Professor Wormwood used to be a member of Westcrest," says Helena.

Sarra's mouth drops open. Though she knew that Westcrest was only one of many branches operated by the mysterious Dept. 38, the others are seldom mentioned.

“He went mad,” continues Marcus. “He started performing experiments with alien poisons. He...”

His voice trails off and for a few moments there’s only silence in the medical bay. Helena bites her bottom lip. Sarra crosses her arms over her chest.

“The bike,” says Marcus, breaking the silence. “Is it okay?”

Sarra brightens and nods her head. “Not a scratch on her.” She wonders for a moment if she should mention the champagne coloured ribbon that was tied around the left handlebar when she found it, but decides against it.

“I think you need to check the third regulator,” says Marcus. “Could you?”

Sarra realises at once that she’s being dismissed, but it doesn’t make her jealous; just a little afraid. She takes Marcus by the hand and nods. “I’ll go check it out.”

She leaves, the green door closing with a whisper behind her.

Marcus grabs Helena and she squeals as he pulls her close. “I’m going to ask you two questions,” he says, baring his teeth. “And I *need* you to tell me the truth.”

Helena nods as best she can and Marcus loosens his grip.

“How long have I got to live?”

“Whatever Wormwood infected you with is unpredictable,” she looks away. “I can’t say.”

Marcus nods. He can feel it now, though it’s probably just his imagination. It feels like insects have crawled inside him and are slowly gnawing on his internal organs.

“You have another question?” Asks Helena. She’s moved away and Marcus can see how afraid she is. Not afraid of *him*, though, afraid of *losing him*.

Marcus swings his legs over the side of the bed. “Where can I find the Professor?”