

Back at my dorm, the room was empty. Harry was still in the library, of course. I set my bags down, glancing around. Normally, after a day like this, I'd be exhausted. But now? I wasn't tired at all. If anything, I felt energized.

*The gym*, I thought, grabbing my new workout gear.

The sports bra was a struggle to get into, squeezing and lifting until it felt like half of me was spilling out the top. The gym shorts were no better, clinging tightly to my hips and thighs. Even my sneakers felt odd, but when I looked in the mirror, I was stunned. My body was perfectly toned, lean but strong, with defined muscles that didn't seem to belong to someone who'd only been casually active before.

At the gym, Scarlett was at the desk, her sharp eyes catching mine as I entered.

"Hey, have you been here before?" she asked, looking me over.

I nodded, then froze. Of course she wouldn't recognize me. "Uh, yeah. I just... joined recently."

"Name?"

"Eleanor Nocturnia," I said, my heart pounding.

Her brow furrowed. "Nocturnia? Are you related to Ethan?"

"He's my cousin," I said quickly, hoping she wouldn't press further.

Scarlett nodded, seeming satisfied. "We'll need you to re-sign up," she said, handing me a form.

After filling it out, I started my warm-up on the treadmill. Almost immediately, my hair became a problem, the thigh-length strands whipping around and getting caught on everything. Scarlett noticed, walking over with a hair tie.

"Here," she said, showing me how to tie it into a high ponytail. "How have you not done this before with hair that long?"

I laughed nervously. "It's... new."

The ponytail helped, though it only accentuated my figure as it swayed behind me. Running on the treadmill, I caught my reflection in the opposite mirrors. I looked... built for this. Athletic, graceful, almost effortless.

After thirty minutes, I moved to weights, piling on what I used to lift as Ethan. I bent down, gripping the bar, and pulled. It came up like it was nothing.

I frowned, double-checking the plates. Everything was there. I doubled the weight, hesitating for a moment before trying again. The bar came up smoothly, with barely any strain.

"What the hell?" I muttered, drawing the attention of a nearby group of guys.

One of them, tall and broad-shouldered with sandy hair, walked over. "That's impressive. How much can you lift?"

I shrugged. "Not sure," I admitted.

"I'm Luke," he said, offering his hand. "Second-year, football team."

"Ellie," I replied, shaking his hand. His eyes darted down for a split second, and I couldn't blame him.

Luke loaded the bar with more weight and began lifting. He was strong, but after a few reps, his muscles trembled with effort. "Your turn," he said, spotting me.

As I finished the set, I glanced up and caught Luke's gaze. His eyes flicked down, just for a moment, tracing the line of my arms, my toned shoulders, and then—of course—lingering on my chest. He snapped his gaze back to my face quickly, but the flush on his cheeks gave him away.

I couldn't blame him. My sports bra was working overtime, squeezing everything so tightly that it only made the size of my chest more obvious. Even I couldn't look in the mirror without noticing how my enormous breasts seemed to draw attention no matter what I did. But what surprised me more was how he glanced again—this time at my legs.

"You've got some serious muscle," he said, sounding genuinely impressed.

"Thanks," I replied, trying to sound casual. "I guess I've been working harder than I thought."

Luke laughed. "Whatever you're doing, it's working."

As he stepped back to let me continue, I caught sight of other people watching me. A couple of guys were huddled near the dumbbells, whispering and sneaking glances my way. A girl near the mirrors looked me up and down, her expression shifting between awe and curiosity. I even noticed Scarlett at the desk, her gaze lingering before she quickly turned back to her clipboard.

The attention was strange, almost intoxicating. It felt like I was on a stage, and for once, I didn't mind performing.

I moved to the squat rack, loading more weight than I ever would've attempted before. The plates clanged together as I adjusted the bar on my shoulders. A small group began to gather around me—two girls chatting by the treadmills, a few guys pretending not to stare. Even Luke hung back, crossing his arms and watching as I prepared to lift.

Lowering into the first squat, I expected the strain—the usual burn in my thighs and back—but it wasn't there. The motion felt fluid, almost effortless, despite the heavier weight. I powered through the reps, pushing myself further than I ever had before. Ten. Fifteen. Twenty. I only stopped because I knew I should, not because I had to.

"Holy shit," one of the guys muttered, his voice carrying across the room.

I stepped back from the rack, feeling a rush of adrenaline as the small crowd clapped lightly. One of the girls, a petite brunette with a determined look, approached me. "That was incredible. Do you... train a lot?"

"Not really," I admitted, wiping sweat from my forehead. "It's just something I enjoy."

She nodded, clearly impressed. "I'm Mia, by the way. First year. Maybe you could show me some tips sometime?"

"Sure," I said, smiling. "I'm Ellie."

Luke stepped forward again, gesturing to the weights. "You should try the bench press next. Let's see how far you can push it."

A few others nodded, their curiosity obvious. I played along, moving to the bench and piling on more weight than I'd ever dared as Ethan. The metal bar felt heavy in my hands, but as I lowered it to my chest and pushed back up, it felt... easy. Too easy.

"More weight," I said, grinning at Luke.

He added more plates, his eyebrows lifting in disbelief. I pressed the heavier weight with ease, completing clean reps as the small crowd cheered me on. The rush was addictive, the attention electrifying.

“Do you even get tired?” Luke asked, shaking his head.

I laughed, standing and stretching. “Not yet.”

A few people introduced themselves as I wiped down the bench—Mia again, a tall blonde guy named Jordan, and a pair of twins from the track team. It felt like the entire gym was buzzing, everyone wanting to know who I was, what sports I did, how I trained.

As I packed up my things, Luke approached one last time. “You ever think about joining a team? You’d be a beast on the field.”

I hesitated, glancing at my reflection in the mirror. My body, my strength—it all felt so foreign, but so... right. “I’ve been thinking about cheer,” I admitted, the words surprising even me.

Luke laughed, the sound warm and genuine. “That makes sense. It suits you.”

His words echoed in my mind as I left the gym, the curious stares of the other gym-goers lingering behind me. It wasn’t just the workout that had felt easier—it was everything. My body moved with a precision and power I’d never known before, and no matter how much I pushed myself, it never felt like enough.

The gym was still buzzing in my head as I walked out into the cool night air, Mia tagging along beside me. She chatted animatedly about her own workout routines, how she wanted to get stronger, and how impressed she was with what I could lift. It felt nice, natural even, to have someone so genuinely excited to talk to me.

When we reached the building, I stopped in front of the men’s dorms. “This is me,” I said quickly, trying to sound casual.

Mia frowned, tilting her head. “Isn’t this... the guys’ dorm? The women’s dorms are further down.”

A sudden flash of panic hit me, making my stomach twist. I stammered, “Oh, uh, yeah. I’m just... picking something up from a friend. But I’ll catch you later, okay?”

She hesitated for a moment, clearly puzzled, but then nodded. “Sure. See you around, Ellie.”

I waited until she disappeared down the path before letting out a long sigh. Keeping this a secret was going to be harder than I thought.

When I stepped into my room, Harry was back, hunched over his desk with a towering pile of books next to him. He glanced up as the door closed behind me, his expression shifting from distracted to... something else entirely.

“Ethan—Ellie!” he said, his voice cracking slightly. “How was your da—” His jaw dropped as he took in my appearance: the makeup, the outfit, my tied-back hair. His eyes darted awkwardly before settling on my face.

“It was good, thanks,” I said, setting my bag down. “Did you pick anything up from the library?”

Harry blinked, his mouth still slightly open. “Uh, yeah. I did.”

He gestured to the stack of books on his bedside desk, snapping out of his stupor as I raised an eyebrow at him. The pile was... eclectic, to say the least.

“I wasn’t sure what to look for,” he admitted, running a hand through his hair. “So I just grabbed anything that seemed remotely relevant. There’s biology—figured maybe it’s some kind of genetic anomaly or mutation. Mythology, because who knows, right? Maybe it’s connected to something

ancient. And, uh..." He hesitated, looking slightly embarrassed. "The occult. Because if none of the other stuff explains it, well, maybe it's... supernatural?"

I nodded slowly, glancing at the titles. One was a thick tome on body transformation myths, and another was about the science of rapid cellular changes. There was even a book on curses and hexes, its black cover embossed with gold lettering.

"That's... thorough," I said, trying not to laugh.

He sighed, leaning back in his chair. "It's all I could think of. But, uh, could you... maybe change? I mean, it's just—" He gestured vaguely toward my chest. "It's a little hard to focus with... those. Right there."

I flushed, crossing my arms instinctively. "Fine. I was going to shower anyway."

Grabbing a towel and my pajamas, I headed to the bathroom. The mirror caught my eye as I undressed, and for a moment, I just stood there, looking at myself. My reflection still didn't feel real—the long ponytail, the curves, the way my body seemed to flow in ways I never imagined.

The warm water hit my skin, and I shivered slightly before relaxing under its steady stream. My hands moved instinctively, tracing the lines of my body as I washed. My chest felt impossibly full, the water cascading over the curves in a way that sent shivers through me. My hips, wider than they'd ever been, swayed slightly as I shifted under the spray. Even my legs—strong, toned, and smooth—felt unfamiliar.

I tilted my head back, letting the water soak my hair. It fell in thick, heavy strands down my back, and I realized how long it was now. Drying this was going to be a nightmare. I'd need a hairdryer. Maybe straighteners. And definitely more hair ties.

Wait—did I just *think* that?

I finished quickly, drying myself off as best I could. The towel barely wrapped around my chest, and I struggled to squeeze the water out of my hair. By the time I was done, I felt like I'd fought a losing battle. I definitely needed better tools for this.

Sliding into my new pajamas—a soft tank top and matching shorts—I sighed in relief at how comfortable they were. The tank top, of course, was no match for my chest, stretching tightly over me, and the shorts clung to my hips in a way that left little to the imagination. But at least it was something.

When I stepped back into the room, Harry glanced up from his book. His eyes widened slightly, and he muttered, "Damn. Those things really are gigantic."

I couldn't help it—I laughed. "Goodnight, Harry."

"Night," he said, shaking his head as he returned to his reading.

As I crawled into bed, the day's events swirled in my mind. The shopping trip, the gym, Mia, and now Harry with his pile of books. It was overwhelming, but for the first time in what felt like forever, I felt... settled. Like I was starting to understand this new version of myself, even if I didn't have all the answers.

The warmth of the blankets wrapped around me, and I drifted into one of the best sleeps I'd ever had.

The piercing sound of my alarm jolted me awake—a rarity. Usually, I slept straight through it, groaning and fumbling for the snooze button long after it had gone off. But today, something was different. I was already awake, my body humming with energy that felt almost unnatural.

I blinked at the faint light streaming through the blinds and stretched, my muscles feeling loose and relaxed. There was no grogginess, no struggle to drag myself out of bed. Just... energy.

Glancing at the mirror, I noted that nothing had changed overnight. My reflection was still the same as the night before—same curves, same long hair, same striking features. A small sigh escaped my lips. At least nothing else had changed, even if I hadn't changed *back*.

Turning toward Harry's side of the room, I noticed him slumped in his chair, fast asleep, a book balanced precariously on his lap. His hair was mussed, his glasses slightly askew, and his chest rose and fell in deep, even breaths. I couldn't help but smile. He must've passed out while reading. Bless him.

Quietly, I slipped out of bed and padded over to his desk, careful not to wake him. The book wobbled as I gently lifted it from his lap, and I reached for a bookmark to save his place. My eyes flicked over the title—*Supernatural Entities and the Occult*.

Of course. Harry always went above and beyond.

I glanced at the page he'd left off on. It seemed irrelevant—just a general overview of folklore and mythical transformations. Still, it was interesting. He really was trying everything to figure this out. I carefully placed the book back on his desk, straightened his glasses where they'd slipped, and grabbed my clothes for the day.

The morning stretched ahead of me. Only one lecture today, and not until the afternoon. But the rumbling in my stomach reminded me of the more immediate priority.

Starving again.

I pulled on my outfit for the day—a fitted black t-shirt and dark skinny jeans. The shirt, of course, clung tightly over my chest, riding up slightly whenever I moved. At least it wasn't as obvious as yesterday's choices. Brushing my hair, I tied it back into a high ponytail, smoothing out the strands. I liked this style; it suited me.

Then came the makeup. I wasn't sure how I was this good at it already, but the eyeliner and green eyeshadow went on almost perfectly, just like the day before. Today, though, I added a touch of green lipstick. The color looked... right. Natural, somehow.

The cafeteria was buzzing with students when I arrived, and, as expected, the stares started almost immediately. Some people whispered, others just openly gawked. Nobody recognized me, but they sure as hell noticed me. I tried to ignore it, focusing on the smell of food wafting from the serving stations.

"Ellie!" A familiar voice rang out behind me, followed by arms wrapping around my waist.

I turned my head, grinning. "Morning, Amy."

Sophie wasn't far behind, rolling her eyes at her sister's enthusiasm. "Let her breathe, Amy."

We exchanged pleasantries as we grabbed trays and moved through the line. I piled my plate high—eggs, toast, bacon, fruit, whatever I could fit. I couldn't help it. My stomach felt like a bottomless pit.

Amy stared at my tray as we sat down. "Okay, Harry wasn't exaggerating. You really do eat like a linebacker."

Before I could respond, a familiar voice joined in. "With the weight she can lift, I'm not surprised she needs so much fuel."

I turned to see Luke approaching, his usual easy grin in place.

“Hey,” I said, smiling as he set down his tray nearby. “Luke, these are my friends—Amy and Sophie.”

He nodded at each of them. “Nice to meet you. Ellie mentioned you two yesterday.”

Amy leaned over the table with a teasing smirk. “You mean after you spent the whole gym session not staring at her chest?”

Sophie gasped, swatting her sister’s arm. “Amy!”

Luke flushed a deep red, scratching the back of his neck. “Uh... well—”

“Relax,” I said, laughing. “Ignore her. She does this to everyone.”

He smiled sheepishly, but before he could say more, one of his friends called him over. “Guess I’m being summoned,” he said, standing. “Catch you later, Ellie.”

“See you,” I replied, watching as he walked off.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Sophie leaned in, her voice low. “He’s hot.”

“Yeah, and sweet,” Amy added with a grin.

I rolled my eyes, though I couldn’t deny that Sophie had a point. “Anyway,” I said, lowering my voice, “there’s something I wanted to tell you both. I think... I think I’m really strong. Like, super strong.”

Their eyes widened, Amy nearly dropping her fork. “Go on.”

I told them about the gym, how I’d lifted far more weight than I ever could as Ethan. “It’s not just a little bit either. I doubled the weight I used to do and barely felt it.”

Sophie nodded, her brow furrowing. “That’s definitely... something. But what about hiding your identity? You’re already drawing attention.”

I sighed, pushing my food around on the plate. “It’s getting harder. People are going to notice eventually. Staying in the men’s dorms, attending lectures... it’s only a matter of time before someone puts two and two together.”

Sophie tapped her chin, deep in thought. “Let me think about it. We’ll figure something out.”

The rest of breakfast passed in easy conversation, though I couldn’t shake the weight of Sophie’s words. As I finished eating, I glanced around the room, noting the curious glances still aimed my way. Keeping this secret was going to be harder than I’d imagined.

As I walked back to the dorms to wake Harry, a sudden, pressing sensation hit me—I needed to pee. Fast. I quickened my pace and pushed into the bathroom nearest the dorm entrance without a second thought, my mind too distracted to realize I’d wandered into the wrong one.

Just as I was rounding the corner, I collided with someone—hard. The impact sent me stumbling back, and to my surprise, so did the other person.

“Woah, careful there, doll,” a deep voice drawled.

Looking up, I realized I’d bumped into none other than Jason. His broad, athletic frame was unmistakable, but despite his build, he had actually taken a step back. My strength, coupled with my... well, oversized assets, had clearly caught him off guard.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” I stammered, feeling my cheeks flush.

Jason grinned, his expression shifting into something sleazy. “No problem, baby. You can bump into me anytime.” His eyes lingered, roaming over me in a way that made my skin crawl.

I took a small step back, but he didn’t seem to notice—or care.

“What’s a pretty thing like you doing in here?” he asked, tilting his head toward the row of urinals. “Didn’t notice where you were going, huh?”

I swallowed hard, nodding. “Yeah, I wasn’t paying attention. Sorry.”

He leaned slightly closer, his grin widening. “Well, since you’re here... maybe we could have some fun, huh?” His voice was low, laced with suggestion, and he took another step forward.

I instinctively stepped back, my heart racing. Jason was taller than me—probably somewhere in the mid-six-foot range—and his presence was overwhelming despite my own size.

“N-no, I was just leaving,” I said quickly, my voice trembling as I backed up toward the door.

“Aw, don’t be like that, doll,” he said, his tone mockingly sweet. “I don’t bite... unless you ask.”

I felt the wall behind me and froze, my breath catching in my throat. Jason’s grin deepened, and for a moment, I thought he might block my way entirely.

But then I darted to the side, squeezing past him and rushing into the women’s bathroom. I slammed the door shut behind me, my hands trembling as I pressed them against the cool sink. My reflection in the mirror showed my flushed face and wide eyes, my makeup thankfully intact thanks to its waterproof formula.

Splashing my face with water, I tried to steady my breathing. *What the hell just happened?* It took me a few minutes to calm down enough to finish my business and peek out of the bathroom to make sure Jason was gone. Thankfully, the hallway was empty.

By the time I reached my dorm, I felt shaken, my chest still tight from the encounter. I stepped inside and saw him finally awake, rubbing his eyes groggily as he stretched. He looked up just in time for me to throw my arms around him, burying my face against his shoulder.

“Ellie?” he asked, startled. “What’s wrong?”

I didn’t realize until then how vulnerable I felt. My oversized chest squished against him, and I didn’t care. His presence was grounding, steadying me in a way I desperately needed.

I pulled back slightly, looking at him with watery eyes. “Jason,” I said simply.

Harry’s face darkened. “What did he do?”

I recounted the encounter, my voice trembling slightly. Harry’s fists clenched as he listened, his jaw tight with anger.

“That piece of—” He stopped himself, taking a deep breath. “Ellie, I’d go beat the crap out of him if I thought it would help. But someone like Jason? He’s untouchable around here.”

I nodded, my shoulders sagging. “I know. I just... I didn’t think it’d be this hard, keeping everything secret and dealing with—” My voice cracked, and I looked away.

Harry reached out, placing a comforting hand on my arm. “You’re strong, Ellie. Stronger than anyone I know. You’ll get through this.”

I gave him a weak smile, grateful for his reassurance.

After a moment, he glanced at the clock. “I’ll skip breakfast,” he said, rubbing his temples. “I’m not really hungry anyway. Let’s head to the library and go through some more books. Maybe we’ll find something useful.”

I nodded, standing aside as he grabbed the books from last night and tucked them into his bag. As we headed out together, I glanced at him. “You sure? Skipping breakfast doesn’t sound very ‘you.’”

He gave me a lopsided grin. “I’ll live. Besides, you’ve eaten enough for both of us, haven’t you?”

I snorted, rolling my eyes. “Fair enough.”

With that, we left the dorm, heading toward the library and the next steps in unraveling the mystery of what was happening to me.

The morning passed in a haze of books and discussions. Harry and I holed up in the far corner of the library, surrounded by towering stacks of volumes he’d pulled from every possible section—biology, mythology, folklore, even conspiracy theories. We combed through them relentlessly, jotting down notes and sharing theories in hushed voices.

Occasionally, Harry would sigh, rubbing his temples as he flipped through yet another book. “This is getting us nowhere. Everything’s either too vague or too ridiculous.”

“Well, it’s not like we have much else to go on,” I said, scanning a page about ancient transformation myths. Most of it sounded like fairy tales.

As noon rolled around, Harry set his pen down with a determined look. “Okay, I’ve got three working theories.” He held up a finger. “One: it was some kind of ritual. Kate drugged you, knocked you out, and performed it while you were passed out. The headaches could’ve been part of it—like, your body resisting whatever she did.”

I frowned. “That’s... horrifying.”

He raised a second finger. “Two: it could be a parasite, something altering your DNA or biology. Maybe it’s in your bloodstream, rewriting your genetic code or something.”

My stomach turned. “Great. That’s even worse.”

Finally, he raised a third finger. “And three: aliens. Maybe you were abducted, probed, and experimented on. Sounds crazy, but it would explain how you’ve got super strength and a body that doesn’t match human biology.”

I groaned, slumping in my chair. “None of those sound remotely appealing.”

Harry leaned back, crossing his arms. “Well, it’s what we’ve got. Until we can prove otherwise, all three are on the table.”

I sighed, but before I could respond, my stomach growled loudly.

“Lunch?” Harry asked, smirking slightly.

“Lunch,” I agreed.

In the cafeteria, I noticed my appetite wasn’t as ravenous as it had been before. My tray was smaller, just a modest portion of food that felt... normal. We joined Sophie and Amy at their usual spot, the twins already chatting animatedly about their morning.

Before I could fully settle in, the room seemed to quiet. A wave of whispers and murmurs rippled through the cafeteria, and I glanced up to see the source.

Madison.

She walked with purpose, her flawless blonde waves bouncing with each step. Heads turned as she passed, her cheer uniform hugging her impossibly perfect figure. She was the kind of person who didn't just enter a room—she owned it.

To my surprise—and dread—she headed straight for our table. Ignoring Sophie, Amy, and Harry entirely, she stopped in front of me, her blue eyes locking onto mine.

“So,” she said, her voice smooth and commanding, “about cheer tryouts. Are you in?”

I hesitated for a moment, acutely aware of how every pair of eyes in the room seemed to be on us. Then, to my own surprise, I nodded. “Yeah. I want to try.”

Madison's lips curled into a satisfied smile. “Good. Tryouts are Thursday at four. Don't be late.” Without waiting for a response, she turned and strode back to her table, the other popular girls welcoming her with knowing looks.

As soon as she was out of earshot, Sophie groaned. “I can't believe her. She just... acts like we don't exist.”

“She didn't even glance at us,” Amy added, stabbing at her salad with unnecessary force.

Harry scowled. “She's the worst.”

I sighed, poking at my food. “I don't know. I just... I want to do this. Cheerleading feels right. Even someone like Madison can't change that.”

The twins exchanged a glance but didn't press further.

After a moment, Sophie leaned forward, her voice lowering conspiratorially. “Speaking of changes, I've got news. Starting tomorrow, you'll be able to collect a new ID badge and move to the women's dorms.”

I blinked, stunned. “Wait, what? How?”

Sophie smirked. “Called in a favor.”

Harry and I exchanged a look. “Illegal?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” Sophie said cheerfully. “But it worked.”

“Thanks,” I said softly, genuinely grateful.

Amy, however, seemed focused on a different angle. She pushed her tray aside and leaned toward me. “Okay, Ellie, let's rule some things out. When you woke up after the kiss with Kate, did you notice anything weird? Burn marks on the ground? Strange symbols? Anything like that?”

I shook my head. “No, nothing. Just... darkness.”

Amy nodded, her expression thoughtful. “That rules out theory one. No ritual markings, no signs of magical activity. And aliens—let's be real, that's a stretch.”

“So that leaves the parasite,” Harry said grimly.

I groaned, burying my face in my hands. “Great. I love the idea of a parasite turning me into this.”

Amy patted my arm. “It's just a theory. But it explains the headaches and changes. We'll figure it out.”

The four of us spent the rest of the lunch hour talking and theorizing before heading to our only lecture of the day. To my surprise, I stayed awake for the entire class. Not only that—I still felt full of energy, as if I could've run a marathon afterward.

By the time Harry and I headed back to the dorm, I felt a strange sense of optimism. Sure, we didn't have all the answers yet, but with my friends helping me, I didn't feel so alone anymore.

The call came when I was trying to distract myself with some notes. Amy's voice buzzed through the line, her words sharp with excitement. "Ellie, can you meet me in the Bio Labs? I think I've figured something out."

The Bio Labs. Just the thought made me nervous. The labs at our university weren't like the ones you'd find in a typical school—they were some of the best in the world. Walking into that towering glass building felt like stepping into a place where miracles and horrors were made in equal measure. I didn't belong there, not really, but Amy did. She thrived there, surrounded by cutting-edge equipment and some of the smartest people alive.

As I walked through the glass doors, the hum of machinery filled the air. The sleek floors reflected rows of state-of-the-art equipment: centrifuges spinning furiously, tanks bubbling with glowing chemicals, and robotic arms assembling God knows what. Lab coats swept past, their wearers speaking in hushed, hurried tones about things far beyond my understanding. I felt small. Insignificant.

Amy waved me over from near the entrance, her face lit up with a grin. "Come on," she said, beckoning me toward the back. "I reserved a private lab."

I followed her through the maze of machines and glass-walled rooms until we reached a secluded area. The lab was dominated by a circular scanner surrounded by monitors and consoles that looked like something out of a sci-fi movie. A faint antiseptic smell lingered in the air, making me want to hold my breath.

"This won't take long," Amy said, snapping on a pair of gloves. She held up a syringe, its needle catching the light. "I'll need a blood sample first."

I winced but stayed still as the needle slid into my arm. Amy's hands were quick and precise, and she barely blinked as she placed the vial into a machine. It whirred to life, analyzing my blood in real-time.

"Now for the fun part," she said, motioning toward the scanner. "Lie back, stay still, and let the machine do its thing."

I obeyed, stretching out on the reclining chair as the scanner's arm rotated around me. Soft clicks and flashes of light danced across the room, and I found myself staring at the ceiling, wondering what this thing would find.

After what felt like an eternity, the machine beeped, and Amy started pulling up scans on the large monitor.

"Let's break this down," she said, gesturing at the skeletal structure displayed on the screen. "Bones first. They're denser than normal, way stronger, but they're not any heavier. That's why you're strong without bulking up."

She zoomed in on the muscles. "These are wild. Your muscle fibers are hyper-efficient. You've got strength levels that would take years of training—if they're even achievable by normal humans."

I stared at the screen, my body rendered in glowing lines and shades of gray. It was strange seeing myself like this.

Amy moved to the circulatory system. “Your blood flow is fascinating. Your heart’s working harder than average, but it’s not stressed. It’s efficient, like an elite athlete who’s been training their whole life.”

I opened my mouth to respond, but then she froze. The screen shifted to an image of my brain, and Amy leaned in, her brows furrowing.

“This... this is weird,” she muttered.

“What is it?” I asked, my stomach tightening.

She pointed to faint, irregular lines near the base of my brain. “There’s evidence of something foreign—like a parasite rewired part of your neural pathways. But here’s the kicker: there’s nothing *there*. It’s like it did its job and then... disintegrated.”

My chest tightened. “So it’s gone?”

Amy shook her head. “No. The changes are still there, permanently. Your brain isn’t fully... human anymore.”

Her words hit me like a punch. I stared at the glowing image on the monitor, trying to wrap my head around it. Amy, meanwhile, was already flipping through studies on a nearby console, muttering to herself about neural plasticity and precedents.

Her focus was so intense that she didn’t even notice when I slipped out of the lab, my steps quiet against the floor.