

Side Effects

by

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FADE IN:

A WALL

Painted with venetian-blind stripes of moonlight and a boxer's shadow. That throws lightning speed punches into the air. The shadow of...

INT. DARKENED ROOM - NIGHT

The CHAMP (30), muscled body, pants as he hits, ducks and moves, imitated by his dark double.

His pitch black eyes reflect the face of an imaginary opponent, as the champ's gloves beat blood out of it.

NURSE (O.S.)

Are you ready?

He stops. His shadow continues to punch and move as he turns to look at...

The NURSE (25), seated behind a desk against the venetian blinds, red cross tattooed on her forehead, takes a drag from a cigarette.

CHAMP

Ready for what?

NURSE

It's pill time.

Dread creeps upon his face. His shadow stops boxing and turns its head.

CHAMP

I don't want the pill no more.

She puts her long to-kill-for legs over the table and stares at him with her green feline eyes.

NURSE

I heard that before.

CHAMP

This time is for real.

NURSE

I heard that before. You're still afraid, aren't you?

His fists clash together with the unnatural sound of clanging metal that echoes across the room as...

CHAMP

The champ is never afraid.

She chuckles.

NURSE  
Of course not.

Takes a drag and blows a chicken-shaped cloud into the air above her.

CHAMP  
And I know something ain't right  
with your pills.

NURSE  
Something besides your fear to  
swallow them?

CHAMP  
And something ain't right with  
you.

NURSE  
Phobias are fascinating. Why  
would a grown man fear such a  
little thing?

Noisy coughing somewhere in the room.

He turns to stare at his shadow: it falls to its knees  
grasping its neck with both hands, coughing and choking.

She smiles delighted.

NURSE  
You should be more afraid of what  
would happen if you *don't* take  
it.

CHAMP  
And what would that be?

NURSE  
God, I hate this crappy job.

She stabs the cigarette out in an ashtray.

NURSE  
You don't want to remember.  
You're not strong enough.

He smashes a fist against the wall with wrecking ball  
force, cracking it.

CHAMP  
I know what I want.

NURSE

Life can hit harder than that,  
champ. And you already received  
the 10-count.

She nods her head towards the wall.

He turns to look at it. Mouth agape, what he sees puts fear  
into his eyes.

She stands.

NURSE

You must take it at eight o'  
clock.

She walks to him. Her stiletto heels clack across the  
ceramic tile.

His breathing rate increases. Runs a hand through his hair.

CHAMP

Stop.

She does. But the clacking sound of her heels continues.  
With the steady rhythm of a metronome. Like the ticking  
of...

A clock on the wall. The champ turns to look at it. Almost  
eight.

NURSE

You can't stop time.

Sweat drops run down his neck as he takes a step backwards.

CHAMP

How about you gimme smaller  
pills?

She walks to him.

NURSE

There aren't pills small enough  
for you, champ.

His back reaches a wall. She's right in front of him.

Her thick lips separate to let her tongue out. A black pill  
rests on it.

He swallows hard and stares at the pill, oblivious to the  
perfect body pressed against him.

She french-kisses the petrified champ.

Long fingers with well-kept nails painted in red caress his face as they slowly morph: becoming shorter, the paint gradually disappearing. Till they turn to...

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - ROOM - NIGHT

...the wrinkled fingers of the ugliest nurse on earth, as she shoves a pill into the back of the champ's throat.

He coughs repeatedly. And swallows.

UGLY NURSE

God, I hate this crappy job.

She turns.

Her heels clack away from him as he stares at the shadow on the wall: his dark double is seated on a shadow wheelchair.

He pants as he slowly lowers his horrified gaze to look at his legs.

Which aren't there.

OLD LADY (V.O.)

I want him out of here.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

An OLD LADY looks through the window of one of the metal doors at the side of the narrow hallway. A DOCTOR puts a hand on her shoulder.

DOCTOR

I know m'am. But it's gonna take some time.

She stares at the champ, lying on a bed behind the door, his gaze lost in drugged oblivion.

OLD LADY

He looks so...

DOCTOR

Your son has been through prolonged hallucination periods. An unusual side effect of his medication. We're going to change it again.

OLD LADY

I wonder if you should.

He gives her a curious look.

OLD LADY

It's the first time I see him  
smile since the accident.

He looks at the champ: From a window, lightning outside  
paints intermittent white glints on his smiling face  
like...

INT. RING - NIGHT

...flashes from photographic cameras. Various photographers  
take pictures of the champ, raising his hands, standing  
beside a fallen opponent.

Eyes burning with triumph, he looks at the cheering public.

The pretty nurse, seated in first row, winks.

FADE OUT.