

a r r e s t

I thought my stomach would feel bloated and upset but I stuffed my face a second time with no problems. The rain picked up and struck the window hard enough that it sounded like hail.

The lights dimmed down. It seemed kind of childish, like they were telling me it was my nappy time or something. I felt a little restless. I stood up and stared out the window. It was a long way down, my room was at least on the fifth or sixth floor. Curtains of sideways rain rolled over streetlights like a slow whipping towel and fell into a directionless mist down in the parking lot. I looked down into the blackness of the pavement and imagined it was the ocean and it felt like the hospital was a giant wooden ship rocking back and forth and dipping over slow mountainous waves. We dunked down and mist sprayed over the ship's bow like whale breath. My belly wound up with the rising and falling and I held my IV stand like a mast and swayed to keep balance.

I lay back on my bed and turned on my side. I picked up Firefly's comic book. On the front was a dark haired girl flying around in a storm, surrounded by skeleton birds. Her face had a skull painted on it. She

was wearing some skimpy shorts and top. I never understood the appeal of comics. I flipped through, checking the cheesy dialog. 'Now I've come for you' and 'prepare yourself' type of stuff. I rolled my eyes. I stopped on the last page. The girl stood on top of a building in one of those common hero poses. Firefly had written 'Nikki' down her leg. Fucking cheesy moron. I set the book down.

Outside of my room a doctor met with my nurse. They talked and then motioned towards me. An overweight, Aryan-looking guy sat reading a newspaper about twenty feet away from the them. He sipped a coffee in a way showed his apparent skill for enduring long stretches of boredom. He wore khakis, a shoulder harnessed gun and a black shirt. He shifted towards me and white letters on his shirt read: POLICE. A detective. He looked up and I looked down. Was he waiting for me? It wasn't so unlikely. My stomach knotted up.

The escape routes were limited. Out in the hallway I'd either have to run left or right. I'd have to rip my IV out and hurl the stand in his way. I could probably outrun that chunky bastard. The nurse shook her head and put her hands up. Her short brunette ponytail bounced aggressively every time she moved her head. She had a fake orangish tan and she looked soft to the touch.

She walked into my room with this firm expressionless grin. The doctor stood at the door with his hands on his hips. He turned his back and walked away. He was young for a doctor and seemed nervous. The detective looked over at me and then looked away. Under the blanket I pulled the IV needle out slowly and then I sat up, gripping the stand. The nurse huffed nervously.

"Nikki, please. Lie back down."

"Oh, I'm fine where I am." I propped one foot back on the bed ready to bolt down the hallway. I glared into her eyes, trying to read her. I'd have to do without my stash. I bet someone would find the sushi wrap of Q-tips eventually and stare at it, all wondering what the fuck was going on in here.

"Nikki, you and the other girl. Gabby."

"Firefly."

"Firefly?"

"Yeah, nobody calls her that. She's my sister." I knew if I said anything else they wouldn't let me leave with her. The woman blinked a few times and swallowed.

"There was a lot of smoke in the building, and that exposure...your sister had a condition. What I'm... There were complications and she passed away." Her voice cracked.

I laughed in her stupid fucking face.

"Yeah. You have the wrong person. She has sorta brownish blonde dreads. Wears rubber bands around her

wrist. She's a little shorter than me. Lean and all skinny like."

She looked at me like I was some kind of fancy machinery she was seeing for the first time.

"Nikki. The doctors couldn't get her enough oxygen. She wasn't...I'm sorry, they couldn't do anything."

"Just go check again. You're thinking of a different person." I half grinned at her.

She coughed and looked at me with her brow all scrunched up.

"Nikki."

"Don't look at me like that. I'm not in denial, you're just straight up fuckin wrong. And stop calling me by name like we're BFFs or some shit."

"There were only two girls brought in tonight and you're the other."

"And you're a fucking idiot. You stupid bitch, I told you to go check again cause you're wrong."

Her expression made her seem like some kind of fish. Not even a particularly bright fish. Her glasses couldn't hide how stupid she looked with her wide empty eyes--eyes decorated with full lashes, because you know you have to have your lashes in order. I imagined the inside of her head as a dark movie theater with a reel projector sitting on some wobbly desk, spinning and clicking long after the film had stopped, with a crowd

of mouth breathing morons all drooling and glaring up at a big blank screen.

She was wrong.

"Nikki..." She reached out to put her hand on my shoulder.

I kicked off the bed and slapped her like I was trying to end her life and cracked like a goddamn lion whip. A slap so loud and solid I was surprised she was still standing. She fell back against the wall with a look of shock so empty and so confused that it was obvious she'd never been hit before. I hate anybody who's never been hit. I've been hit every way you can get hit and then some creative ways people have never even heard of before. No one ever thought to hit this bitch because she seemed so helpless. Like if she wasn't spoon-fed she would curl up and die.

My hand throbbed. She held her cheek and tears ran down her face. Maybe her eyes were just watering but I hoped it was tears. Her knees buckled a bit. She looked up at me searching for pity or maybe giving it. She held one side of her face. I gritted my teeth and slapped her southpaw on the other side. I've never slapped anybody southpaw before. It felt good.

I threw wild punches. She leaned against the wall and screamed for help. I clawed her face wanting to disfigure her. She tried to push me away and she yelled something about how she was sorry. She turned her back and hunched over, cupping her hands over her ears and

drooling blood. I grabbed her hair, arced my fist from down low and uppercutted her in the jaw. Her teeth clacked together like two rocks. I hoped she could taste blood and the bitter grittiness of chipped bone.

The doctor lifted me up. I didn't even hear him come in. All I heard and saw was that stupid bitch. I wrapped my hand up in her hair like some people do with spaghetti and when the doctor pulled me away I dragged her along with me. She gripped my hand with both of her soft hands and I screamed something about fucking killing her. I ripped at her hair again and again like I was trying to start a lawnmower. Most of it came out along with a small chunk of her bloody scalp. She stumbled out of the room and slipped to the floor like a newborn calf. The fat detective handcuffed me to the bed. I didn't see him come in either. I reached for their eyes with my free hand. They stuck me with something to make me sleepy. I tried to fight it and sit up. The doctor put his hand on my chest and in slurred words I accused him of trying to cop a feel. He seemed embarrassed and jerked his hand away.

A group gathered around the collapsed nurse to help her. She wasn't moving. She didn't know I was motherfucking King Kong. She sure as fuck knew now. I got that lying cunt good.