

A Favor So Kind

She told me I am crazy. The words really meant something coming from Isabelle. Especially considering she is a recovering addict. In and out of different clinics for the last five years, she has never been able to completely grasp the concept of self-control. Not that I have either. But I have never desired control — only my freedom. I attempt to peel my hands from the table's sticky surface, it grips my palms like an industrial strength adhesive. *"This is disgusting, why did you pick here of all places to meet?"* Isabelle lights a cigarette, inhales, and the unfiltered smoke coils at the glowing tip, unravels, clouding the air with a grey fog. She begins to laugh when I tell her the restaurant is non-smoking.

"You're concerned about me lighting up a cigarette after what you just said? How does that even make sense? Do you even know what you just asked me to do?"

Of course I knew. I have been contemplating it for weeks. I only need her to consent to my request, and after the act has been completed she will no longer be necessary. The smell of burning tobacco makes my mouth water. As a two-pack-a-day smoker it is nearly impossible for me to just watch someone else smoking and not concede to lighting one myself. I fight the urge and take a mint from my jacket pocket. The cellophane is glued to the sticky mint candy, but after some effort I remove it and place the red and white swirl in my mouth. The stale candy must have been a leftover from last Christmas — just like so many friends from my past. Things that are now lost and forgotten. An older couple passes by our table, hanging on to each other, struggling to walk while looking for a place to sit in the empty restaurant. Watching their efforts,

how they cling to life, to each other — this is reason enough to do what I have been planning for almost a year, but I cannot do it alone. She needs to help. She must help.

“I won’t do it, Stan. I can’t.”

“The money, Isabelle. Would you at least think about it.”

“You couldn’t pay me enough — ”

I quickly jot down a few numbers and slide the piece of torn notebook paper across the table. Isabelle looks at me, rolls her eyes, and considers the numerical values she has been shown.

I tell her, “No one needs to know you were even there — ”

Her eyes flicker like a dying light bulb — a lone firefly. She will always be that to me, a single firefly on the last day of summer, her light old and fading, somehow surviving but all the strength has left her inevitably alone. She opens her wet mouth, the words are sucked into the back of her throat initially before she can ask the question.

“You think that is enough for what you’re asking me to do?”

“How much do you need?”

“More — ”

She knows that no one else would do this for me. What is worse, there is no one left to ask. My entire life has been a blur of faces and names, places that seem familiar but were never really there. Like a movie from your childhood, single frames and images burned into your mind but the story is incomplete. What good is a mind if it is no longer able to make any connections? When you can only find pleasure walking the empty streets after midnight, hoping someone will notice, praying someone will jump out from a dark alley and say something — do something to you. The only consistency in

my life has been Isabelle. She is the only person who I can trust, the only one who understands me. But she is the kind of person who will never know what it is like to feel. She will forever be numb to life, and in every possible way I desire the same thing. Although, the syringe could never be the answer for my problems. It only creates a dependency. Without the flesh the drug is useless.

“Is that all? Will you need more?”

“What else could I possibly want?”

“Consider it done, the money will be waiting for you in the room. Leave now, I will be there in fifteen minutes.”

I lay the key to the room on the table, and Isabelle casually gets up from her seat, taking her purse and the key with her. I finish my coffee, savoring the last few sips that always seem to be cold no matter how quickly you drink. I want to be that cup, and I want Isabelle to be the one drinking me.