



Sharon is becoming a legitimate problem for me.

Until recently she's been a thorn in just about everyone's side, but she's provided an interesting opportunity for me to do good. Returning thrown necklaces and other bits of stolen property, stopping fights before they begin, stupid little stuff. Little stuff that makes people happy and lets me see my mother in my dreams. The dreams, even if they are filled with confusion and violence and strange warnings that I don't understand, are still time with my mother. Until Sharon I've been used to people somehow intrinsically understanding to leave me alone, like animals in the wild that know to only hunt the weak or injured. I think I give off something that keeps most people away from me. Like potential adoptive parents. It never mattered much to me because I was always waiting for Jasper to come and get me. Of course when I was twelve, he was eighteen and he didn't come for me, so I gave up quickly on the fantasy. I really had tricked myself at first into believing he would come, but when he didn't, I unpacked my bag again and went back to my regular life. It was foolish to think he would come, considering I blamed myself for the car accident; it was likely he blamed me for it too. But I guess I had hoped that he would come anyway.

When Rachael shows up at dinner with a broken wrist I know that Sharon has drawn an invisible line in the sand, and it's up to me to step up to it. I begin tailing Rachael everywhere she goes, becoming her self-appointed guardian. I see her injury and chide myself for sitting idly by for too long; it's time to stand up, if not for myself, then for someone else.

So I wait for my opportunity.

Sleeping on my bunk a few days later on the third floor of the dormitory while Rachael reads on her bunk at the other end of the room, Sharon comes in. She's all anger and frustration bottled. My senses perk up instantly; it's as if the air in the room tightens all around me, so that I

can even feel Sharon's steps and her body weight as it presses into what was once empty air. I'm not sure if she sees me or not, but she goes right for Rachael regardless, knocking her book out of her hands and across the room into the wall with a sharp slap. Rachael doesn't even cry out, just draws in her breath, preparing herself for whatever onslaught is to come. I know nobody else is in the room with us without even opening my eyes, and I reach out with everything I have to see if I can feel anyone nearby.

We are very alone. Now's my moment.

Sharon slaps Rachael hard enough that she falls backwards off the bed. I move, fast, until I'm standing in front of Sharon, her face shocked at the speed at which I've crossed the room. She's holding Rachael's other arm, the one she hasn't broken...yet, twisting it backward unnaturally and Rachel is giving off a low pitched whine that sounds almost animal.

I ball up my right fist and throw my first punch.

It's a good one.

It connects perfectly with Sharon's jaw and she flies back hard enough that she loses her grip on Rachael before hitting the wall and leaving a little dent as she slides down to the floor, landing on her butt unceremoniously. Rachael scrambles under the bed like a kicked dog. Sharon looks up at me from the ground, one hand on her jaw. It's broken. I look at my fist, shocked at what I've done.

"J'am gong ta kl yoj," she says, one hand still holding her broken jaw as if to keep it from falling off. I step back, so that we are further away from the bed Rachael is hiding under. Sharon lunges at me and sends an awkward punch toward me, which I catch easily in my own hand. I begin squeezing her fist with my hand, until her hand breaks. She screams, but all I can see are Rachael's tiny feet peeking out from under her bed. Even her feet look terrified. Something

snaps in me as I stare at Rachael's feet and I suddenly can't stand someone like Sharon anymore. Her very existence disgusts me.

I push Sharon away from me, hard, intending to be done with her, but she trips on the edge of one of the beds and crashes through a window. I lunge at her as she goes through the glass, trying desperately to catch her, but I'm too late. She falls three stories onto the grass below. I watch horrified, paralyzed. Sharon's body is twisted badly on the grass and my heart is in my throat, my eyes wide. I wipe my sweaty hands on my jeans and walk out of the room, Rachael gazing at me from under the bed, her face some strange mix of horror and thanks.

Fortunately for me, Sharon has been such a problem that nobody is inclined to believe her that the mute girl, who has never harmed a soul before, has attacked her unprovoked. For her part Rachael is silent, claiming to have seen nothing. When they find me nearly a quarter of a mile away, at the other end of the compound, reading peacefully under a tree, not a mark on me, it settles any suspicions that I might be involved.

Sharon's hip, jaw, and shoulder are broken and her right hand is partially crushed.

Seeing her on the ground all twisted makes me careful though. I decide then and there that it's the last time I will be so careless. I had gone further with Sharon than I had ever intended, hurt her beyond what was reasonable and it scares me to see my power; to see that I'm maybe not totally in control of it. My emotions had raged when she'd been standing there in front of me. She had seemed disgusting, like an affront to everything I felt inside, and that rage scares me. I don't know if that power exists beyond that rage - can I even tap into it at that level without also tapping into that rage? I'm not sure. It's terrifying.

And so I become more solitary than ever before. If it is possible to be more silent than already being mute, I find it.

And I remain incredibly alone.

And I wait patiently for someone to open the front door for me.



I meet him the next day for lunch near one of the big casinos, the one with the giant lion face entrance. Inside this one all the waitresses are dressed like Dorothy which I think is really lame, but then I see all the guys ogling them and realize they're totally getting off on it. I don't know why I'm surprised by these things. But Adrian never takes his eyes off me, no matter how hot a Dorothy walks by us.

We go into some rainforest restaurant where we walk through a giant aquarium, which looks really cool, but suddenly has me worried he's taking me to some kind of fish place, and I don't really like fish. So I'm nervous all of a sudden, but wondering at the same time why I care what he thinks. It seems to go against all my instincts to care what he thinks, but it also feels natural, like maybe how any girl feels on a date and so I don't know whether to embrace it or shun it, which leaves me only more confused. As we walk by a family eating I see a hamburger on someone's plate and relax a bit. We sit in a cushy leather booth and the hostess leaves us with menus. It's not three seconds before an overly cheerful voice assaults us.

"Welcome to MGM Grand's Rainforest Adventure! Can I get you something to drink or an app to start?" I feel like the waitress is practically screaming at us in her enthusiasm.

"Uh yeah, I'll have a Pepsi and a water...Lola?"

"Oh, yeah, Pepsi for me too."

"Okay, two Pepsis - any apps?"

"Yeah, yeah, Lo how 'bout the appetizer sampler?" I just nod my head okay, my heart skipping beats in my chest, because I love that he's calling me 'Lo'. It sounds so natural, so

intimate; nobody has ever called me by a nickname before, except Delia of course, and I try not to think about that.

When the appetizer sampler comes I eat all the chicken tenders and Adrian eats all the crab and calamari and most of the wontons. The shrill waitress, Kimmy, arrives just as Adrian polishes off the last of the crab, and sets down a giant plate of shrimp pasta, which looks pretty good even though the shrimps make me wanna squirm. My 'rainforest burger' looks pretty boring in comparison, but it tastes good.

"You really like seafood, huh?" I say between giant bites of my burger.

"Oh man, I totally love it. Ever since I was a kid it's been my favorite food. My mom practically raised Felice and I on fish tacos y'know? I'm always kind of dying to get out of Vegas; head to some coast where the seafood has gotta be better than the desert, y'know? I heard about this place in Malibu where they literally catch the shit in the morning and whatever they catch is the special for the day...because it's so fresh y'know? I mean, imagine how good seafood that fresh has gotta taste?"

"Yeah, I guess. I don't really like seafood too much."

"Really? Well I guess that's not that weird...a lot a people don't like seafood. You're totally missing out though."

"Well, to be honest I haven't tried it that much...it's just the idea of it...I don't know, it seems kinda icky."

"You should totally try it then...here, try this shrimp," Adrian stabs a bit of shrimp and winds his fork around some pasta and holds it out to me. I'd had shrimp once before and hated it, but somehow now, it seems like an adult thing to do, to try new things. I don't want Adrian to think I'm just some stupid uneducated kid, and it also seems kind of romantic, and so I take the bite and chew. To my surprise it isn't awful.

"What do you think?"

"It's okay. I like the taste...but it's a little...rubbery maybe?"

"Yeah, shrimp can be that way, it's one of the reasons to get it super fresh - the better the shrimp, and the better it's cooked the less rubbery it will taste. I'll get some good shrimp one of these days and cook you an awesome meal with it - then you'll totally come over to the dark side with me." I giggle a little bit but think it makes me seem too young and way stupid so I stifle it. A kid at the table next to us starts screaming and I crinkle my nose.

"You don't like kids, huh?" Adrian says without judgment.

"They're okay I guess...I do prefer the non-screamy ones."

"Nah, I can tell you don't like them."

"Sure I do, sort of," I stammer. I can't imagine ever wanting to have kids, though I guess, technically that's not what he's asking me. I know that like Delia, if I have a daughter, one day she'll take my power, probably kill me for it, and I'm just getting used to having it. There's no way I'm going to be willing to part with it anytime soon.

"I grew up with Felice and a whole mess of step-brothers, so I guess I feel pretty used to screaming...do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"No, it was just me and my mom."

"That sounds nice too...I mean the idea of having one on one time with a parent is pretty nice, I can't think of a time my mom and I were even alone in a room together."

"That's too bad, although Delia and I, my mom I mean, we were never too close, 'oil and water,' she used to say."

"Used to?" he pauses. "Did she pass?"

"Yeah...yeah, she passed."

"Was it recent?"

“Yeah it was.”

“I only ask because, I mean, I’m not trying to be nosy, but you know you’re only 17, and obviously on your own...I guess you just ran off? Didn’t want to stick around?”

“Yeah, it was pretty sudden, her death I mean, and I don’t have any living relatives, so I just hit the road, figured I’m old enough to take care of myself...” I pause, as the conversation is giving him more than I want to. I try to reverse out of it. “It’s working out pretty well so far,” I say smiling at him.

“Yeah, it is.” We share this long moment of silence before Kimmy breaks in on us again.

“How ‘bout some desert you two?” Adrian nods at me and so I look at Kimmy.

“Sure. What’ve you got?” We decide to split a brownie sundae of sorts and when Kimmy finally departs the table, Adrian changes gears.

“So, I guess I should talk some business...” he trails off as if he is unsure it’s a good idea.

“Okay...let’s hear it,” I say, steeling myself up.

“Well, I guess after we left last night Felice talked you up pretty good and convinced them to give you a shot...kind of like a try out. Do you think it’s something you’re interested in? I mean, I know we didn’t make a great first impression.”

“Well,” I begin, trying to seem professional. “What’s in it for me?”

“This time? Probably nothing...probably just earning your place on the team...but the cut is pretty good once you’re in. We pull a job every couple months or so, maybe more or less depending on how hot the scene is. It’s a nice enough life that I don’t have to have a real job so I’m not going to complain.”

“If you don’t have to work, why does Felice waitress?” I ask, cocking my head to the side.

“Eh, there will never be enough money for Felice. She’s pretty cheap...y’know, stingy. I think she also likes the idea of a double life, you know, like waitress by day, master thief by night or something silly...like the anti-Batman or something.”

“But not you?”

“Nah, I’d rather sleep in by day, hang out by night and occasionally hit a big score,” he says smiling and honest.

“So um, you’re more like Catwoman then?” I offer. He laughs.

“Hhn. Yeah, I guess so.”

“So, uh, what’s the job...the job I’ve got to do to get in?”

“Well I don’t know the specifics, we’ll have to bring you in and have Melvin lay it out for you. Some disc he wants.”

“Like a computer disc?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“What’s on it?”

“I don’t know...probably I’ll never know...you definitely won’t know, at least not this time...that’ll be part of the test I’m sure Lo...how willing you are to take orders.”

I look at him warily, “I’m not so good at taking orders,” I say. He chuckles.

“Yeah, I noticed. But can you just pretend? Just until you get in...behave yourself like a good girl. I’ve got a feeling about you, and if I’m right you’ve got enough talent that you’re gonna be able to get away with that mouth of yours eventually, but you gotta get in first y’know? Play the game.”

“Yeah, I can play the game,” I say, one eyebrow raised.

“I thought so,” he says. Kimmy sets the brownie sundae down and leaves hastily. We dig in and are silent for a while. Finally he speaks again. “Is that something that matters to you?”



“Is what something that matters to me?”

“What the job is – what’s on the disc, or in the bag, or the box, or whatever.”

“Well, I mean it’s important I guess cause I don’t want to be taken for a ride, but I don’t care like...morally or anything, is that what you mean?”

“Yeah, I guess I mean morally...like you don’t have issues with that? We’ve had trouble bringing people in before, either they want to know too much and Melvin has drama with it, or they get ideas about, oh, I don’t know, not liking kind of the ‘larger picture’ I guess of what they’re involved in.”

“Like you mean it could be drugs or something and suddenly I feel bad about putting drugs on the street for innocent kids or something?”

“Yeah. Yeah, like that exactly.”

“No I don’t have moral issues with it.”

“Can I ask why not?”

“Well, why don’t you?”

“I asked you first,” he teases.

“I don’t know. Seems to me that people are responsible for themselves. If someone wants to do drugs, that’s their problem, and there’s no reason I shouldn’t profit from it, I mean someone’s going to, right?” I trail off, not sure if my answer is correct. For a moment I’ve forgotten to be careful what I say and just said what I actually think. I don’t know what his reaction will be.

“Exactly!” he bursts out. I smile. It’s nice to know that we think some of the same things, even when I’m not trying so hard. “Some people just don’t get that,” he says. “Some people start to feel bad about things we do, and I’ll be honest, I’ve never seen a good “break-up”

with Melvin. He's a pretty scary guy. So just, y'know, be on your best behavior, stay close to me, and don't piss him off too much and you'll be fine." I smile at him again.

"No problem." I'm not thinking it's no problem to 'be good' or to not piss Melvin off, but it's definitely going to be no problem staying close to Adrian. At this point I've already mentally committed to staying as close to him as humanly possible, whether I have any interest in his gang or not. But I *am* interested in his gang. When I used to imagine my "new life" before I left home, before I killed Delia, I always kind of imagined myself alone, maybe because that's all I've really known. But now, now I can't imagine anything better than being the awesome talent in a crew of criminals. It kind of sounds like an opportunity for a family I've never had...a family that comes with a hot boyfriend. Adrian pays the check and we head back out into the casino.

He holds my hand the whole time.