

Tea, Coffee, Blood.

I had not expected so much blood to flow out of Nussy's body nor did I expect the loud jarring sound. An hour ago, we had been drinking tea at the lounge of Nussy's Los Angeles Mansion, a place that used to be my second home. I was visiting with the excuse of settling the differences we had. It wasn't the first time we quarreled this month but the last one had led to a physical fight.

When I arrived and rang the doorbell, I was relieved when Nussy answered. I had chosen to visit on Saturday. The maids and caretakers took the weekends off and Nussy was alone. I walked behind Nussy examining the house as though it was the first time I was there. We walked up the stairs, down the hall, and to the lounge. It didn't have its usual citrus fragrance, it smelt more of peach and cinnamon.

"Tea or coffee", Nussy interrupted my thoughts.

"Hmm?", I replied.

"Tea or coffee?"

"I'll have tea, thank you."

I watched as the hot water flowed from the kettle into the tea cup. It had been a week since the fight. Nussy had been promoted to the role of partner in our organization on account of a presentation I had originally created. I had shown the presentation to Nussy who was my long-time best friend and director for two years. I wanted to get Nussy's approval and support before presenting it to the members of the board. She had given me a standing ovation when I finished presenting. This was my breakthrough to getting a much-needed promotion but when I arrived at work the next day, Nussy had already presented it as her idea and got promoted to the role of partner.

"I'm sorry you got fired," Nussy said as she handed over the teacup to me. "You shouldn't have hit me. I wasn't going to take your work and not promote you, you know. I'm not that crazy."

"I'm sorry.." These were the same words she said to me nine years ago at the Catholic girls' boarding school where we first met.

I had everything I wanted growing up except present parents. What my parents lacked in their presence, they tried to make up with everything else money could buy. They got me nannies and sent me to the best schools.

It wasn't a surprise when they called me one late afternoon to the sitting room and told me I was going to boarding school.

"Toby darling! We have some amazing news for you." My dad only said the word "amazing" when he was suffering from guilt and needed to make himself feel better.

"You're going to boarding school!" "You're gonna enjoy it, meet lots of friends and...."

I stared at my mom. For the first time, I noticed the freckles under her eyes and her innocence. I had not waited till the speech was over, I walked back to my room. I was getting bigger and having nannies would be ridiculous so they were sending me away so the sisters of St Agnes catholic girls boarding school could do their jobs for them.

The boarding school was notorious for having young girls like me with similar backgrounds- wealthy parents who were so career-driven, that they didn't know what their daughters looked like now. While every other teenager was excited about high school, we were stuck with judgemental sisters. Life at St Agnes was predictable and mundane but everything changed the morning Nussy walked into the classroom.

She had come in as a transfer student in our senior year, unlike the rest of the class. Soon, word got out on why her parents had her transferred- she was crafty in notoriety and the sisters of St Agnes were supposed to instil strict catholic values in her. I knew better to stay away from her but something about her made me watch her closely.

She showed up to classes and the cafeteria late and she had the funniest excuses each time. She wore her skirts higher than the rest of the girls, put on shorter socks, and made hurtful comments at the sisters. But what spiked her popularity was when the semester results were out, and she was topping the class despite being a transfer student and notorious. She became some sort of rebel role model to us. I was even more drawn to her and when the portal had opened to pick my roommate for the following semester, I picked Nussy.

Each hostel had 5 floors and there were 20 rooms on each floor with two girls in each room. The rooms were on opposite sides leading to a long hallway. Sister Mercy was the head matron. They had especially moved Sister Mercy to our hostel because she didn't cower to Nussy's meanness.

I didn't immediately warm up to Nussy when we became roommates.

"You don't speak much?"

"No."

"No? Or you're just afraid I'm a bad influence? So why not change your roommate?"

I didn't respond.

A graveyard had more activity and life than St. Agnes. The boredom and regimentation were driving me insane. I was not supposed to feel exhilarated by bad influence but watching Nussy shake things up did excite me.

Our room got a lot of impromptu checks and I secretly enjoyed the needless yet hilarious resistance the sisters suffered at Nussy's hands every time these checks happened. The entire floor enjoyed it. Our souls were parched from the absence of drama and so we craved it even more.

The day I started to warm up to her, I had just returned from a practical class.

"What's that on my bedside table?" I walked slowly to the table as though whatever it was was dangerous.

"It's a phone," Nussy said sharply, clearly irritated by my goody two shoes.

"What are you doing with a phone and why is it on my table?"

Nussy stood up from her bed and walked up to me.

"Don't you have a boyfriend? Any friend? The phone has internet. I thought you might wanna use it."

At that point, I didn't care that she had contraband. I was excited that she thought of me. I felt validated that she somehow cared for me. She allowed other occupants of our floor to borrow the phone but it was a little secret.

Nussy began bringing more contrabands and everyone on the floor shared.

On the evening of the last day of Lent, Nussy had asked all of us to return during the evening mass. We gathered in our room when she brought out a tall bottle of alcohol and a pack of cigarettes.

"What the heck, Nussy?"

"Shhh! Why are you being so dramatic? We've had contraband all semester and we've been careful."

The other girls had started to sit on the floor, waiting for Nussy to convince me so they could feel less guilty about their actions.

"It's just a little alcohol and you don't have to try the cigarettes. Relax a little."

"I can't! What if someone walks in?"

"All the sisters are occupied with Lent. No one is going to notice we are gone."

She grabbed my hands and looked me straight in the eyes.

"Do you trust me?"

"A little", I tried to smile.

"A little is good. Now let's party!"

We sent someone out to check every 10 minutes. But when we sent Barbra, she ran back and said she heard Sister Mercy coming with other sisters. The girls hurried to their rooms and locked their doors.

But we all knew Sister Mercy would not search any room except ours.

"Both of us are going to be punished for this, Toby."

"You think I don't know that? I didn't want this in the first place."

The room smelt like a cheap bar. The cigarette heads were scattered on the floor. Sister Mercy will demand that we open the door any minute.

"Toby please look at me!"

I turned to see her amidst tears. So Nussy was capable of getting scared?

"You have to say it was all you."

"What? You're sick."

"Please! If I admit it, I won't be class valedictorian and my parents will send me out of the country," She was wailing now.

"What about me? What happens to me? I never wanted this!"

"I'll tell everyone I did this as soon as I become valedictorian I promise."

I was so scared but I had never seen anyone panic the way she panicked especially with how tough Nussy had made herself to be, so when Sister Mercy demanded we open the door, I felt the need to protect her and I took the fall.

It was the first and only time I was suspended from school and when I returned, Nussy had said, "I'm sorry but you had nothing to lose."

Even now, at her home, there was not a single remorse on her face. The witch. As she talked, I imagined myself standing over her cold, lifeless body. She wouldn't be partner now, would she?

Time had passed and she said she had more work to be done and she hoped we were good. I got up and walked behind her as we headed for the main entrance. As we walked through the hallway I slipped my hands into my bag to get the loaded gun and brought it out.

“What do you think you’re doing?”, Nussy screamed in horror as she turned around to check if I was still behind. She wasn’t supposed to turn. She wasn’t supposed to see me. She started to run towards the stairs screaming. I wasn’t going to let her get away this time. I ran after her and pushed her against the wall. I aimed for her neck and shot her. For a few seconds, I didn’t hear. The sound had deafened me and left me hazy. I knew I had a few minutes before the police arrived. The neighbors must have heard the noise and would have dialed 911.

“Shit! Why did she bleed so much?”

Her neck was badly severed. I had to get her neck to stop bleeding. She looked so fragile like her head would snap out of her body if I tried to lift her. I knew Nussy’s house well. It was my second home. I dashed from the hallway to the ground floor and into the garage. I knew I would find something there to wrap her neck and stop the bleeding.

“Cellophane!”

I ran back upstairs with it and began to wrap it around her neck till it held on tightly. The blood splashed on the oil paint wall and spilled over the blue marble floor.

I lifted her and headed downstairs again. There was a bathroom on the ground floor for the maids. The maids stored the cleaning materials there. She had to stay there while I cleaned the area. I dropped her gently in the bathtub, grabbed a bucket, bleach, and soap, and went back upstairs. I gasped for air as I cleaned. It will be all worth it, I told myself. I had taken my life back. If I wasn’t going to get credit for my work then no one should.

As I scrubbed the floor, I thought about what I was going to use to wrap her body. There was no more time to chop her off or bury her. The screaming and the gunshot had alerted the neighbors and messed up my plans. How did I just find out that a gun sounded so loud? I would have thought of an easier way to kill her.

I didn’t find trash bags when I looked around for the cellophane. I was going to use the blanket in the guest room. No one would notice. The house had about eight rooms and people barely slept in them.

The fragrance from the soap could not conquer the smell of the bleach as it filled the house. I returned to the bathroom with the materials and flushed the water down the toilet. I was taking the towel I used to clean with me. It was too compromised to be left behind. The guest room was the room opposite the bathroom. I grabbed the blanket and spread it on the bathroom floor. Nussy’s body felt heavier than it did when I brought her to the bathroom. I lifted her body and put it on the edge of the blanket. I was going to wrap her like a burrito so that I could rinse the bathtub.

Her garage had two doors. The first door connected the house to the garage and the second door led to the compound. I drove my car to the garage door, opened the trunk, and rushed back to the bathroom. I lifted her wrapped body onto my shoulder and checked one more time

for any trace of blood. I grabbed the compromised towel. I had to hurry but I had to be careful. I placed her body in the trunk and drove out of the compound.

Watching from my rearview mirror, a police car pulled into the streets. I let out a deep breath. I don't think I allowed myself to breathe for the last few minutes.

I turned on the radio and let the music play loudly. I was going to drive to the store to pick up bottles of acid and a large EPDM rubber bowl. Then I would drive to the beach and wait till it got very dark. I would put her body in the rubber and allow it to melt, then empty the deposits into the ocean.

Instead, I stepped on the brakes in panic. "Oh my goodness! I forgot the teacups! It has my lipstick stain!", I screamed.