

a very small man with a very small pistol and mustache

A Long Metal Sigh

It's Jordon's turn to feed Aunt Laura while she strokes his face with the furry nubs at the end of her arms, but he's dead. And not the kind of dead that keeps you guessing. No, "Is he chatting up Benjamin Franklin in a golden café in the sky?" No, "Will he visit me in my dreams and haunt me with cryptic messages that will ultimately save my life?" He's the kind of dead you can't take back.

A ten year old boy struck him in the back of the head at my nephew's birthday party. Candy didn't erupt from the wound. The birthday clown offered to perform CPR, but when no one said anything, he walked into the house and closed the door.

The parents of the boy told their son that Jordon moved to Africa. So says my father. He also insists that the parents said, "Lies are cheaper than therapy." My father laughs when he tells me this, disgusted, angry.

I say, let the boy live with a song in his heart for a few more years, though I don't say this out loud.

Anyway, I would feed Aunt Laura myself, but I'm being held hostage by a very small man with a very small pistol and mustache.

Like you, I doubted the significance of this weapon. That is, until the demonstration on my pet chinchilla.

I hold the bleeding ball of fuzz in my arms. He's so new that he doesn't have a name yet, but I feel a part of me evaporating, drifting and funneling into the little man.

I want to kill him, the way I'd kill the boy if he were a monster. Not so monstrous that I wouldn't recognize the human in him.

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Just monstrous enough.

The chinchilla kicks and startles me. I drop him.

“He’s still alive,” I say.

“Kill him then,” the tiny man says. “I’m not wasting any more bullets.”

I scoot the chinchilla under my bed. On the way, I name him Franklin.

“Bring out the photographs,” the little man says.

“What photographs?”

“Family photographs! What do you think?” He paces back and forth on the dresser. For the first time, or maybe the second time and I forgot, I notice the man’s lack of reflection in the mirror behind him.

I almost ask him if he’s a vampire. However, I’m too busy pissing myself and saying, “I don’t think I have any photographs.”

“Everyone has photographs!” he says, and scratches at his mustache.

My Aunt Laura waddles in. She says, “Would you be a dear and feed me my stuffing?”

The little man points his gun at her. “What the hell is that?”

“She’s my aunt,” I say. What I don’t say is that she’s also a teddy bear. Or at least as close to a teddy bear a person could possibly be, with hair transplants, amputations, and a mad swarm of cosmetic surgeries. Not to mention two dead parents and a substantial inheritance.

“Please let her go,” I say. “She’s harmless.”

“She’s not going anywhere,” the man says. “She could call the police.”

“She doesn’t have hands.”

“How do I know she doesn’t have a specially made phone she can use?”

“She doesn’t.”

“So says the guy with the gun pointed at his family. Where are those photographs?” He aims the gun at my face. “Get on it! Now!”

“Who’s your little friend?” my aunt says. She fiddles with the perky ears of living flesh attached to the top of her head and steps closer to him. “You look just like a little doll.”

“Stay back,” the man says.

“Why don’t you sit on my bed for a while?” I say. “I need to do something, then we can go eat dinner.”

Or maybe I’m not saying this. Maybe I’m not brave enough to say a few damn words, and I watch as my aunt holds out her hands to pick up the little man and press him against her hairy chest.

Before she can lay a hand on him, he shoots her. The miniscule pellet whizzes past the layer of brown fur which cost her more than a bullet