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## Chapter 1

Bernadette “Princess” Rausch is holding a wet dish towel to her bloody nose as she stomps about her flat. The margarita held in her opposite hand sloshes out over the rim and drips down her hand. Dried spaghetti, cat hair, dirty Q-tips, and droplets of blood are scattered across the linoleum.

Princess’s nose is gushing out blood like a fire hose.

“Dewey!” She shouts as she bursts into the bedroom. “Dewey, wake up!”

Dewey is dead asleep in bed. One leg is slung out from under the blankets and his neck is crooked and hunched forward.

Princess shakes him awake. His eyes roll around and focus in on her.

“Whaaa? I’m sleepin’ princess, lemme be a little while longer, huh?”

“Dewey, if you keep sleeping like that you’re gonna give yourself back pains. Your neck needs support.”

Dewey snuggled back into his pillow. Princess sits down on the bed next to him. “Listen I need to talk to you about those damned kids.”

“I know damn well you ain’t wakin’ me up for no damned kids, Princess.”

“Never mind the time Dewey, those hooligan kids are at it again and I need your help.”

Dewey opens his eyes and taps his phone.

“Princess, love, it’s eight-thirty in the mornin’, give it a rest will ya!”

“Dewey, my nose is gushin’ like a thirteen-year-old’s first flow and those damned rat bastard children are makin’ a mockery of me.”

Dewey sits up and grabs her shoulders.

“Princess, princess, please... Shut the fuck up alright? I was up all night and I really wanna go back to sleep, huh? Can’t you give me that? I’m sure those kids are fine and you’re overreacting like you always do, huh? Am I right?”

“Dewey, they’re out there shootin’ pellets at each other like they’re Iraqis. And they’re scarin’ gravy boy. You see I was out there tryin’ to meditate ‘n breathe ‘n such like Dr. Wallace told me to you know. Get my mornin’ coffee ‘n such. And these bastard children come running outside with their guns ‘n screamin’ ‘n such. I was scared to death, Dew. I thought I was done for.”

“They’re just kids, Princess. Let ‘em have some fun.”

“Gravy boy won’t come out from underneath the car with all the commotion. I tried coaxing him with wet food and he ain’t budgin’ for nothin’. And while I had my back turned. these little kids came up and shot me in the back with them damned pellets.”

Princess runs to the window, snapping open the blinds, to stare at the kids running amok in the Aloha Motel’s parking lot.

“Where’s their parents?” she ponders.

“Who? Them kids? Probably gettin’ high all night and sleepin’ it off. Speakin’ of which, I got myself a killer headache and would like to sleep that off as well.”

Princess plops down to her knees next to the bed. “Please Dew, please, please, please. I really don’t want gravy boy all scared and alone out there with them kids runnin’ around all day. Won’t you help me?”

Dewey puts the pillow over his face and moans.

“Deweyyyyyyyyy,” Princess cries.

He yanks it off and throws it at the wall. “Jesus Christ, Princess, won’t you ever just shut the fuck up! Really, I had up to here with ya. You step in here, wake me up and immediately start whipping me around like a goddamn monsoon. Now, I had a shitty night. Got into it rough with Billy, right? Now I’m stickin’ my neck out to provide you with the few luxuries we can afford, huh? So let me go back to sleep, alright? Gravy boy will be fine, huh? It’ll only be a few hours before them kids wear themselves out and go grab an ice cream or somethin’, right?”

Princess strokes Dewey’s hair.

“Oh, Dewey, what happened with Billy?”

“Ain’t no big deal or nothin’,” Dewey looks away, “Just accusin’ me of skimping him over, loads bein’ light and whatnot.”

“You ain’t though, are ya?”

Dewey looks back at Princess, “Of course not Princess. That would be irresponsible.”

Blood starts to leak out of the soppy towel and down Princess’s arm.

“God damn Princess go get yourself a fuckin’ cotton ball.”

“Oh, oh god.” Princess stands up and runs to the bathroom. The blood is swelling. She digs through their dirty sink cabinet and pulling out rusty razor blades and boxes upon boxes of hair

dye products before she finds a dirty bag of cotton balls.

Princess tilts her head back and shoves two up each nostril for good measure.

Princess looks at herself in the mirror. It's been a long time since she really took a good look at herself. She leans in close.

It's an odd feeling when you look at your reflection and don't recognize the person on the other side she thinks. When she pictures herself, she sees herself as she was photographed in the framed magazines strung along the living room walls. Her shrine is what Dewey calls it.

Tall, blonde, tan. Perky tits and tight skin. On the cover of numerous men's magazines, she poses in swimwear, sheer gowns, and tight-clad outfits. What she sees now is a monster. This bloated, saggy excuse of a lady, in a dull pink robe. Her hair frizzed and frayed from all the bleach. The skin on her face is wrinkled and saggy, the texture reminds her of mashed potatoes.

Looking at herself now, she feels ashamed and repulsed. Age has not treated her well. She's only 42 but thinks she looks 62. If she saw a person as she looks now when she was in her prime should would've snickered and sneered at them. Remorseless comments would be exchanged among her cohort of friends loud enough for the disheveled to hear and run away embarrassed.

Princess wonders if that happens to her unknowingly while she is out and about now. She wouldn't be surprised if it did. Princess downs the rest of her margarita and steps out of the bathroom silently. She can't tell if Dewey is asleep or pretending to be, but regardless she doesn't want to bother him any more than she already has.

She shuts the bedroom door behind her and hustles to the living space's window.

The kids are still at it.

Resident motel rats. They live in the motel with their junkie dumpster parents.

To Princess, everyone who lives in a motel is a junkie, except her of course. Even though these assholes did it to themselves to end up here, she still feels a twinge of sadness for the little bastard children. None of them ever stay too long. Princess thinks they rotate in and out quicker than seasonal clothing. It's a lazy susan of families, runaway siblings, and pimps and their hoes.

She pours herself another margarita. Her cup of choice is a plastic, purple and red Coca-Cola cup accompanied by twisty, tube straw; the likes of which you can only seem to find at amusement parks and the yearly state fair.

Princess grabs a grapefruit off the counter.

She steps out her front door into the motel hallway. Like typical motel fashion, the building wraps around in a U-shape, and the center has a grim-looking swimming pool. The pool is surrounded by a large, black fence with a cardboard handwritten sign taped onto the entrance gate stating "NO TRESPASSERS WELCOME IN SPA CENTER".

Adjacent to the pool is the parking lot where the children are having an outright brawl. It appears the two who have plastic BB guns have teamed up, taking shelter behind a rusty Buick. They occasionally pop up, take aim, and shoot. Meanwhile, the rest use trashcan lids and sticks as shields and swords respectively.

How barbaric, Princess thinks. She leans over the hallway railing to get a better look at the fight. The smell of weed seeps out from beneath the drafty doors. The scent makes Princess' head dizzy.

Blossom tosses the grapefruit up and down. Her face is as dead as a pitcher who is waiting for the catcher's sign. As soon

as she steps into the parking lot her world is transported to a war zone.