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In A Room

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In a Room

She relaxed back into the bedspread and the matching pillows welled up around her. He lay on his back on the warm floor listening to the sounds one flight below. Distant, apart, and not just because the room separated them. Her long and stiffly thick blond hair did pushups on the patterned pillow, red with little green dragons spitting out gold flames through white teeth. The bright bed lamp burnt about her, etching a halo over her hair and stabbing her face with sharply highlighted yellows, blond hair accented by the rich colour of the bulb.

The green of the carpet resembled the dragons, only it was somewhat darker, like an olive, only the lint spotted the colour, making it seem lighter until examined closely. But the visitor was on his back, his head cradled in his arms. Studying a tarot card on the wall. A large angel, praying. The eyes were confused. Big and wide, but not even: the left eye was too high, and slightly too far to the right, away from the nose. "High 'n' inside!" The face was beautiful and the wings of the angel perched around it in an arc as though to ward off the frame's edge, and the rest of the wall.

He asked: "Why are the eyes on the picture fucked up? Did the artist screw up or something? Or do tarot cards really look like that?"

The golden head lifted out of the bulk that had formed a wall over the lower half of its profile. The brow lost the spotlight first, diving into shadow as the whole face rose up. Strangely, she kept her head parallel to the bed, as though she were still resting against the bed's surface, until she had lifted her neck and shoulders high enough, when she straightened up her neck, visibly contracting her neck muscles, as though her head contained a great weight. For a long moment she stared at the colours and features of the picture, not looking at the whole, but rather at the individual components.

"My mother painted that picture, you know."

He didn't try saying anything — hadn't he made an ass of himself enough already. He just watched her study the overblown card.

After a moment, she added that "Actually people don't have symmetrical features. There is nothing on our bodies that is perfectly symmetrical. Have you ever noticed that?"

"Not really. I never thought about it. I just assumed we were at least somewhat symmetrical . . ."

She explained: "No not really. Actually," (and she drew out the word so slowly, as though it were the beginning of a point that needed to be analyzed carefully as it was expounded) "there's really little evenness to our bodies at all. You know, you should really try taking a photograph of someone's face someday and cut it in half and compare it to the negative of the other side. You might not even see the resemblance."

He looked at the ceiling for awhile. Jesus, had he fucked up. Damn. Her mother. "Yeah, I'll do that someday," he lamely answered. She laughed, the deep, cold laugh she possesses. More an amusing cackle than a laugh, one which might fit a witch with a sense of humour, if such a thing exists.

"My, but you are easy to distress. Poor dear."

He studied ever more carefully a crack in the ceiling. His groin itched slightly.

She hopped off the now-disarrayed bed: a pillow popped into the air and landed behind her heel. Carelessly she placed the needle on the record. Static and Debussy shot out of the tiny speakers until she lifted the tonearm again to create silence. This time she cued the record more carefully, and only noise resulted. After a moment, the orchestra faded into the room.

She laughed. "You look so depressed. Don't you ever have a good time?" A spin of the heel and she corkscrewed herself into a sitting position on top of the bed. "Come on now, I don't know if you'll ever get by if you keep on stuffing everything up inside of you."

He rolled off his back and into a slight fetal position facing her feet. His watch was digging into his wrist and it hurt. He pulled the winder button out of the skin at the base of his hand and moved the watch farther down his arm. A difficult act, for he had his arms extended in front of him as he lay on his side. So it was not surprising that he had completely tangled himself when the intercom exploded into the room.

"---?"

"Yes, I'm here."

"You have a call on second outside."

She acknowledged the call, and laughed at him as he unraveled his body. Still amused, she walked the length of the room, humming along with the record. When she stepped over him, he didn't even bother trying to look up her skirt, and she laughed again.

"I'll be back in a minute."

The door closed and he thought. He got off the floor, turned off the light, and laid down again on her hard carpet. The light at her bed lit up the various dragons frying each other on the red background.

Robert F. Youngblood