

Faceless

by Laurel Landis

People who don't like you will use your drunkenness as an excuse to slap you. You may not know who did the slapping, because whoever it was was probably a coward, and took the liberty precisely because he (or she) thought you wouldn't remember. But even if you're half conscious or blacked out, a physical sensation, if strong enough, forms a memory. The sting of a slap will be remembered, as will sex, or at least a fragment of it, such as the face of a man in your room who tied your hands with the belt of your plush terry bathrobe. You will remember enough to check the bathrobe for damage upon waking because the robe is one of a hotel's little perks, and you haven't finished enjoying it. The slippers are new and white and provide a tiny comfort once you've washed the urine from your thighs and the wine from your hair and aside from the unnatural flush around your eyes, you almost look normal.

Vomit is a difficult thing in a hotel room, because there's no easy way to wash sheets. You could wash them in the tub, but where do you hang them? How long will they take to dry? Whereas urine could be a sign of illness, or a once in a lifetime accident causing the maid to avert her eyes mercifully if you happen to run into her, vomit that carries the sour smell of wine will stain the sheets and repulse her and she will be happy to display her disdain and god forbid, alert the head housekeeper who will keep your name on a list for the duration of your stay.

I believe there is a network in hotels that carries news of potential problem guests, and women, dressed up and drinking alone in the lobby lounge are definitely noticed and marked by bartenders and waiters with wary glances that move out amongst the bellmen and house staff. If you have been in the lounge a few nights in a row, security will make note of your drinking companions and be on the lookout for your appearance in the pool after shut down time.

There will come a time when you will sit in that lounge longer than you'd planned, even after a fit of paranoia inspires you to write the number seven on your palm, in ink, to remind you when to leave. But at six forty-five, a man will sit down and begin to talk to you. He will be tall and strong and comforting and you will rub at the ink on your palm, thinking that maybe just this time you could stay a little longer. It's a special occasion.

Or you will sit with someone despicable; a bigot or a fanatic, and overlook the flaw because they are buying the drinks. Maybe one of them will see through you and this is where, you guess, the slap comes in, though it's not important the next day because by dinnertime the sheets will be new, the slippers soft and fresh and the sun will be setting just behind the bars of the balcony, where a small table waits with a glass half full and a night again full of promise.

