

Funhouse

by Oliver Hunt

Every little baby knows just what I mean- livin' in division in a shiftin' scene.

Rose allowed herself a cigarette. One an hour. Cigarettes were her last comfort vice, the last bad thing she'd allow herself. Outside Larue Carter she smoked and waited for Ty. The day was warm and sunny and the tobacco, when it hit her throat, tasted better now than she remembered. She'd let it linger before blowing it out.

Ty is the son she knows. She'd be staying in his basement, in Gary. He may have landed some domestic stability. Rose knew he was mortgaging now instead of renting. He told her it was actually cheaper and, besides, he was sick of landlords. It was an adult thing Ty did, Rose knew, and it should serve as some example to her. She had a job waiting for her. It was just cashiering at Walgreens, but it might be enough. Maybe she'd make enough she could get a place of her own, eventually.

Rose watched as ember ate away at her cigarette. She was smoking slowly, making a game out of it- trying to make a cigarette last as close to an hour as possible. She was getting better at it. In about a week, she went from two minutes to five. Then she got up to ten, then close to fifteen. She'd make it to at least fifteen with this one. Between cigarettes, things got into her head. She'd jones to find ways to soften, sand or snuff them out.

She'd studied drama at UIC when DNC week happened. She had to be there, she felt it. In all the madness she met the man who, due to mutual freakish mood cocktails of lust, anger and paranoia, spirited her out of Chicago, pretty much the day after they met. She went willingly. Staged theater seemed like such bullshit after beatings and tear gas. All the experience eats big chunks out of you, and it may or may not replace them, but when there's time you're okay with it. The moments were fuzzy and chaotic when she was in them, but her memories were clear and vivid.

The staff at Larue Carter recommended Rose stay in a group home or a halfway house. Her counselor, Beth, said Maybe staying in your son's basement isn't the best idea. How is your son able to supervise you? Rose's trust in Beth, like her trust in any other staff at any other hospital, was limited. She didn't trust them any more than she had to. She knew Ty had his problems, but he was her son. He'd look out.

Rose thought about why she named her son after the man she'd called the devil, instead of after his real father. Maybe because she had to resolve herself with the devil, or with her own demons. Maybe because it wasn't as simple as one man was good and another was evil. Ty's dad was sweet- and more articulate than almost any guy she'd been with for a long time before- but, the fact remained, she'd met him in facilities like the one she was leaving, and it wasn't the first or last visit for either. He was crazy and she was crazy, and they had a complimentary crazy. At least most of the time. Though they were both restless and moved on whims, even after Ty was born. Maybe it was because she knew she had another son somewhere, with the other Ty.

Her first son may or may not be good or bad. She couldn't make herself find out. When she left it wasn't because she'd wanted her old life back, but she wanted some life back. And Ty- the devil- even without trying to force her into a thing forced her into a thing. Maybe he didn't mean to, maybe she got it wrong. Either way, she ran back to her parents. They had her committed. It was her first time but it wouldn't be her last.

Her memories were clear but they existed as clouds and fog. Sometimes they hung over her head, or they descended and became the haze she disappeared into. Like smoke.

A thing about cigarettes: It wasn't just the tarry taste and smell. It was the sound of flame hitting and catching. She loved the sound of flame hitting anything. Things don't catch fire, she thought, it's the other way around. Fire is a living thing, predatory but benevolent. Things grow stronger where it eats through everything. But it's still a thing you avoid, at least until you need it. She'd never

told anybody about her love for fire, but some people felt it from her.

Ty pulled up and honked his horn. Rose took the cigarette out of her mouth, wet a finger and snuffed the flame. She still had half a cigarette left. That had to count for something.

