

Walter Dulle

Ms. Alice's Alleyway.

A huge right hand came thundering toward my face, right after the left had me clenching my stomach gasping for air like a fish out of water. I guess I had this coming. No one runs from Miss Alice unless they are clinically insane or they want to die. But someone who wants to die would probably be diagnosed clinically insane, especially if they wanted to die by the hands of Miss Alice. The punch sent me spiraling to the ground, the cool cement like an ice pack to my throbbing face.

"I am sorry Bobby, ya know I like ya, and if you are still standin' after this I hope you'll still be coming to my daughter's birthday, this is just business. I hope ya understand." Charles said kneeling next to me. "Lift 'em boys, it has only been ten minutes, Miss Alice said we could stop after thirty." A set of hands clasped either one of my shoulders. Hoisting me up back to a semi-standing position as my legs have decided to no longer work. Funny how that works. I have always heard that the more a man is beaten down the stronger he will stand. I have been thoroughly beaten down, and yet I can no longer stand. Why is it assumed that my body is unbreakable, because of the all-so-sturdy appendage between my legs? Or because a couple of rich men, too scared to put themselves in a situation in which they are beaten down, have said so.

One of the men holding me up grabs a handful of my hair and pulls my head back, so I am looking Charles straight in the face. He has a funny scar on the left side of his face from where someone branded a smiley face on him. He removes a pair of brass knuckles from his pocket and slowly slides them over both his hands. "Ya know if I don't wear 'em Miss Alice will

think I have taken a liken to ya. Then I would be in yer shoes. It is just business. I hope ya understand.”

The cool metal leaves my face stinging with each strike. Cuts start to open up on either side of my face where he hits, thin streams of blood dirtying my once pristine face, my fair skin turning various shades that come with bruises, my blond hair glued down to my head by my sweat. My face has gotten me into many favorable situations. Even a couple of unfavorable ones, like this one. Why should I be punished because people find me attractive? Why should I be punished when Miss Alice’s son whispers tantalizing words into my ear that send shivers down my spine like no other man or woman has been able to? Why should I be punished because my lovers are sometimes not the gender people expect?

“Hey, Charlie.” Henry, the man holding my left side up, pipes in between the blows to my face. “Why not take it easy on the young lad’s face? We aren’t trying to ruin his future with the ladies.”

Thanks, Henry.

“Miss Alice’s orders, she says ‘If he be seducin’ my boy and think he can get away with it. Then I want to make sure he be seducin’ no one ever again.’ It is just business Bobby, I hope ya understand.” A part of me does understand. If I wasn’t the one being beaten to an inch of my life, I would have been in Henry’s spot. My job would have been to corner the “wrongdoer”, and bring him to this Alleyway, where Charles would have been waiting. But now that I am on the receiving end, I wonder if the people before me felt that same way. Wondering why what they did wrong was wrong in the first place, Because it displeases Miss Alice? Why does Miss Alice get to decide what is wrong and right? I have seen countless men and women entering and exiting her chambers. Some leave with a bundle of their clothes in hand, running to the bathrooms, with marks on their bodies that could have only been from certain tools and toys.

Yet, I leave a couple of playful marks on someone and here I am. Mind bloodied and body as clear as it has ever been, no wait, my body bloodied and my mind as clear as a muddy river. Only if they knew all the people I have left marks on, it would become more than just business in a couple of punches.

“Don’t worry Bobby boy, only ten minutes till we done. You are doing great. Most people be knocked out by this time. You got a strong body. As a reward, I’ll show you a picture of my daughter.” He pulled out a small polaroid photo of a little girl. Blond hair that falls just above her neck, her skin pale like the belly of a fish. She is wearing a tiny sundress with mud splattered on it as she stands in a puddle. “Look how cute she be. How I ever had a hand in making somethin’ like this beats me. My wife says she looks like her ancestors. Wherever her looks comin’ from. All I know is that she is gonna be a queen when she is older.” With that, he slides the picture back into his pocket, after Henry and the other man holding me, Tychus, send him their appraisal. “You ain’t got nothing nice to say about her, Bobby?” Charles questions.

Well shit. A sane man would spit some nice comment out, suffer through the last ten minutes of his punishment, and hope that the compliment was authentic enough to maybe lessen it. An insane man would say something along the lines of “ I know how your daughter got that beautiful, and trust me, it was not your wife’s ancestors that consist of dung farmers and whores. And it definitely wasn’t you, A man who went bald at twenty and a gut that has more food in it than some of the poorer districts. The fact that you even think that is your child shows the level of stupidity that you are at. Same with your second Henry, and your fifth Tychus, and I gotta say Tychus, your wife is a real handful.” I have also heard that insane men have trouble keeping their thoughts to themselves. Or did I hear that about men on the verge of death? I guess in my situation it is the same.

The three men stand quietly, staring at the broken body that has just shattered all the peaceful marriages they thought they had. The shock on their faces brought to my lips a burst of laughter that last came out when I was a kid. Who wouldn't laugh in this situation? The worlds of three men shattered before my very eyes after I had told them truths that they knew in the back of their minds to be undeniable. I guess most people bury those thoughts in the deepest recesses of their brains. The thoughts that they wish to not be true, for how could someone they loved enough to spend the rest of their lives with, betray them?

I am thrown to the ground, the cool cement the last thing I will embrace. The sound of my laughter is probably the last happy noise that will bless my ears.

"The fuck you say, Bobby. I hope for your sake that was just a joke among friends?"

"If that helps you sleep at night, then yes. But did none of you question where your wives got the money for certain gifts they gave you? Or how they could afford that new dress they wore to all those big events? Now I hope I can still come to my.... I mean your daughter's birthday party Charly. It was only business, I hope you all understand."

With that, the three men began to attack me like I had the last loaf of bread in the world, and none of them had eaten in days. The sound of my laughter was only interrupted by the occasional kick to the stomach. I guess they have every right to beat me, they have been wronged, and they feel entitled to express their emotion, in this case with violence.

Only if they knew how it feels to express yourself and get punished for it. Something that I learned too late in my life. Something that had driven many people mad in Miss Alice's Alleyway.