

Martin
By
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The rain fell softly, little cat's feet that danced on the hood of his red sweat jacket. He pulled his books closer to his chest and quickened his pace. The rain was warm and fell so lightly that it really wasn't wetting anything, but he was in a rush.

Martin turned the corner. On the right stood the old campus building, their grey-green faces looming sick and miserable over the riddled sidewalk. Across the street rose the unfinished lecture hall, its bare steel bones silhouetted against the slate gray sky. Men stood on various levels, caged vultures gazing down at their prey. He followed their stares and found the object of their focused attention. Martin felt sudden sympathy for the girl who walked before him. He had worked construction before, and he knew what was next.

A shrill whistle cut across the soaked air.

"Hey, Baby," the voice, rough and guttered and clogged with smoke. "Why don't you come on up here?"

A chorus of dirty laughter followed and another man called.

"Little girl, you wanna play with my drill?"

The man raised a hand, revealing the small power drill he held, the whirrings of its small motor all but lost under the rain and raucous laughter.

The girl put her head down, quickening her pace, and Martin blushed furiously.

Why, he thought. Why are there so many assholes? He didn't know one girl who would enjoy such attention, yet there they were.

He saw a baseball-sized rock in the gutter and thought, briefly, of grabbing it and knocking the drill-holder off his perch. He had pitched in high school, and though it had been over a year since he last threw a ball, he felt confident he still had a few heaters left in him.

He smiled at the thought, then immediately dismissed it. If he threw the rock, he might hit the guy, maybe even bloody his mouth, but the others would surely run him down and kick the

shit out of him, leaving him on the pavement like fresh road kill.

He turned his back, said a silent apology to the girl now more than a block away, and found his unlocked car, parked as usual beneath the billboard that towered over the campus. The advertisement this month was for some Army recruiting thing and displayed a young man battling a giant with a sword. “The World Needs Heroes” the billboard announced.

He pulled the parking ticket off the windshield and added it to the snowdrift of its brothers on the passenger side bench seat.

“Yeah,” he murmured up at the billboard. “But this one has to get to work.”

The car started on the third try and he pulled away into the rain.