

Trauma Room 477

The room leaned. He didn't even want to look at what was lying on the bed. There was an unnatural aroma of cooked flesh and iodine. If he walked in, he would have to talk to her. What would he say? What could he say? She would never believe that he had saved her anyway. Or maybe "saved" wasn't the best word since she wouldn't have wanted to live had she known that she would end up in a burn ward. It didn't matter anyway because the tabloids had already wallpapered the grocery aisles with stories of her disappearance as being another alien abduction. No one even knew that this crisped patient was once a famous actress. The doctors had forced her to live; the room beeped and buzzed with the sounds of machinery and draining body fluids.

The trauma room wasn't like a patient room. Normally people were not even allowed into this area. Jared had good ol' American clout though--cash. He had given the nurses at the station enough to allow him access as "her husband." He sported cheap sunglasses, substituted flannel for the silk cashmere suit, and some flappy shoes from the nearby second-hand store. How upset Mina would be if she knew that he had even pretended to be *anything* for Desiree again.

There was a sharp noise as the thing on the bed awoke.

Jared approached the stretcher-bed. The patient was in traction so that her wounds would have less pressure on them; the machine turned like a delicate robot arm spinning a morsel of bandage wrapped shishkabob. According to the nurses at the area desk, it was the first day she had even bothered to speak in more than just scrambled words.

"Jared, is that you?" cawed a voice that was now Desiree's.

He strained to speak, but his throat felt smothered in cotton. He moved closer and touched her gently on her nearest arm. Jared's stomach did a nasty flip when he noticed how easily his light touch dented into her charred flesh—or maybe it was just a lot of the cushy gauze.

“Jared?”

No answer. Her voice was becoming more “normal,” as normal as her voice could be anyway from a body that appeared more like a beef roast than a patient covered in scattered bandages. Her face was surprisingly untouched. He imagined she would have protected that portion far more than any other.

“If it isn't Jared then can you call him for me? They won't let me try to use the phone yet.” She grimaced and then continued on more slowly.

“Jared's my agent.” She was trying so hard to sound normal it was bizarre. He wondered if she was in pain despite her continued “acting.”

“I know this looks really bad and everything, but I am just practicing for my new movie. Did you see my last film? I have already been nominated for an Oscar. My Dolce clutch should be nearby. Jared's card is in it.”

Jared moved around the room a bit. He rummaged on the nearby portable tray on wheels, shuffled some papers on the plastic-looking dresser/desk combination, and scuffed around a bit so she would think he was looking for her purse.

“Have the police been by?”

Jared looked unconsciously over his shoulder. The authorities had not yet questioned him about the fire. They would be soon. He supposed that when he arrived at the emergency room with the gristly-looking lump that used to be a human body drew the attention away from

who brought her there. Of course, an ambulance-chasing fan or “innocent” bystander had already sold a photo of him carrying her to the hospital. Fortunately for Jared, the photo showed him only from the back and the burned patient had been checked in as a Jane Doe. With all the scuttlebutt at the door, cries like “One hundred milligrams stat!” , “What’s her pulse?” , “Is she insured?”, “I need a burn kit...” were all mingled and mixed into his mind. No one had questioned him at all and he had left right away to try to find Mina.

“Why won’t you talk to me? I must look a fright right now without my make up. The nurses don’t say much either. I am going to report the night nurse to her supervisor because she is too nasty to me. Do you have a mirror?”

What could he say? Did she really think that she was only in a movie? The last time they had truly spoken face to face she had been wielding a can of gasoline because of Mina. Where was Mina now? She had to now know how he really felt about her. He had finally told them both about each other and all the secrets were released from the screaming manila folder. No time to think of Mina now.

Desiree was so different now, physically at least. What would she do when she realized that her “movie” was probably only from the painkillers?

“I’m so tired. Daddy, could you help me? The sheet is so tight I can’t get out of bed. Dad? Daddy, why are you hurting me?”

Daddy? The IV must be renewing her pain medication. Whatever they were pouring into her really made her loopy. She had never spoken of her childhood to him before.

There was a knock at the door.

“Mr. Graham? Uh, Mr. Graham. There are some police to see you just down the hall., but I told them you needed a few moments with your wife. Mr. Graham?”

What could Jared say now that wasn't the truth?