

Sofia

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SOFIA

*inserted
into Bride Anew
12-23*

I AM NOT ALLOWED TO BE NEAR CHILDREN. HOME CARE WAS MY FIRST JOB WHEN I WAS PAROLED. IT SUITED ME BECAUSE THE LADY WAS RATHER NICE, GRATEFUL, EVEN, FOR MY HELP. AFTER ONLY A MONTH I HAD TO LEAVE BECAUSE THE PATIENT'S GRANDCHILDREN VISITED HER ON WEEKENDS. MY PAROLE OFFICER FOUND SOMETHING SIMILAR MINUS CHILDREN; A NURSING HOME THAT DIDN'T CALL ITSELF A HOSPICE BUT THAT IS WHAT IT MOSTLY WAS. CHILDREN, HARDLY. AT FIRST I DIDN'T LIKE BEING AROUND SO MANY PEOPLE I HAD TO ANSWER TO. I GOT USED TO IT SINCE MY SUPERIORS WERE NOT MENACING ME EVEN THOUGH THEY WORE UNIFORMS. ANYTHING THAT LOOKED OR FELT LIKE PRISON GAVE ME A BAD ATTITUDE. I BARELY SURVIVED THOSE FIFTEEN YEARS. HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR MY ONE FRIEND I DOUBT I WOULD HAVE. WE TWO WERE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HEAP OF MURDERERS, ARSONISTS, DRUG DEALERS, BOMB-THROWING REVOLUTIONARIES. THREATENING CHILDREN WAS THEIR IDEA OF THE LOWEST OF THE LOW—WHICH IS STRANGE SINCE THE DRUG DEALERS COULD CARE LESS ABOUT WHO BOUGHT THEIR POISON OR HOW OLD THEY WERE AND ARSONISTS DIDN'T WARN THE FAMILY THEY BURNED. MY ONE FRIEND, JULIE, WAS SERVING TIME FOR SMOTHERING HER DISABLED DAUGHTER. WE WORKED IN THE SEWING SHOP MAKING

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UNIFORMS FOR A TK COMPANY THAT PAID US TWELVE CENTS AN HOUR. THEN I WAS MOVED TO THE KITCHEN. I DROPPED THE FOOD I DIDN'T SCORCH SO WAS SENT BACK TO SEWING. JULIE WAS IN THE INFIRMARY AFTER TRYING TO HANG HERSELF. SHE DIDN'T KNOW HOW. WHEN SHE WAS RETURNED TO POPULATION SHE WAS DIFFERENT—QUIET AND NOT MUCH COMPANY. I READ A LOT. THAT WAS ONE GOOD THING ABOUT DECAGON—THEIR LIBRARY.

THE VERY DAY I WAS PAROLED ONE OF THE CHILDREN WHO TESTIFIED AGAINST ME—ALL GROWN UP NOW—VISITED ME. I DIDN'T KNOW WHO SHE WAS AT FIRST ALTHOUGH SOMETHING ABOUT HER EYES SEEMED FAMILIAR. SHE THREW MONEY AT ME AS THOUGH THAT WOULD ERASE FIFTEEN YEARS. I BLANKED. MY FISTS TOOK OVER AND WHEN SHE WAS GONE I CURLED UP TIGHT ON THE BED AND WAITED FOR THE POLICE TO COME. NONE DID. IF THEY HAD OPENED THE DOOR THEY WOULD HAVE SEEN A WOMAN FINALLY BROKEN DOWN AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS OF STAYING STRONG. FOR THE FIRST TIME AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS I CRIED.