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Tiger Lily
Ashley White

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It was our first day on the bus, I was nervous. I wore my new Aéropostale sweatshirt and a pair of Phat Farm shoes, attempting to fit in. I did my best to eliminate “y’all” from my vocabulary, and I practiced saying “towel,” not “tal.”

As we stepped onto the bus, I squeezed my older sister’s hand. She gave me a reassuring smile and squeezed my hand back. We sat in the front seat, and I tried not to draw attention to myself, but there was one thing that separated us from the rest of the kids. We were brown.

“He better not say it again,” she said through gritted teeth.

From the back of the bus I heard him say it again: “nigger.”

Her eyes got big, and I knew he was going to get it. She wouldn’t think about what she was going to do next. It didn’t take much to piss her off either. She went straight to the back of the bus and smacked the Yankee asshole in the face with her textbook.

She broke his nose.

Kim didn’t take shit from anyone. Not in Houston, and not in the middle of bumfuck Western New York.

I wish I were like that.

Everyone always said we were two of a kind, two peas in a pod, inseparable.

The truth was that we were nothing alike. Kim was a hell’s angel. I idolized her; she was brave and wild. She could be a hard ass, but when I came home crying because one of the Case boys picked on my accent, she told me it was because he liked me. When Chris Whiting broke my heart in the eighth grade, she made sure I looked smoking hot at the homecoming dance. And when she was moving out at the age of 16 with an older boy, I begged her to stay. She did.

“Just for tonight.”

Kim is my sister, a real hell-raiser, and my best friend. Five years later, where are we?

I lay down on a black leather table, and I wish it wasn’t my turn first. I grab her hand and squeeze it. I hear a buzz. Not the soft buzz of a bumblebee, but a much louder buzz that stings my ears. As it pokes and scratches at my skin, it pierces me with pain. It fucking hurts. The longer the buzzing continues, the louder it becomes and the more painful the sting.

What is the point of this?

I’m going to college in two days. Am I afraid?

Is it art?

Exhibiting control over my own body?

To make our father so angry that his face turns as red as a baboon’s ass?

No, it’s much more than that.

I’m holding her hand, squeezing it.

“Fuuck that hurt,” I scream, waiting for all the pain to cease.

We’re branded together forever. My tiger will always be with me, and her lily will always be with her.