

Not That Nice

By

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1 INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Karen, 30, wearing yesterday's make-up, jeans and a men's T-Shirt, lays in bed face down, looking out into the sun drenched courtyard behind her building. Two small fans whirl around her. Beads of sweat fall from her forehead. A movement in a far away, half-dead bush calls her attention. She puts her slippers on and climbs out.

2 EXT. KAREN'S BACKYARD - MORNING

Karen runs across the yard, leaping over the typical trash that collects in hidden corners of New York City. Careful not to get dirty, she climbs over the wire fence.

3 EXT. BELLA'S BACKYARD - MORNING

Karen crosses the yard: Perfect bushes and a perfect garden. A stark contrast to the one she just came from. She reaches the next fence. But this one is a wall, too tall to climb and nothing to hold on to.

KAREN

Shit.

Karen is startled when she looks down and see's BELLA, a barefoot seven-year-old girl wearing a mask and superhero cape. She's holding a screwdriver, fixing a broken scooter.

KAREN

Hey Bella. Fuck. Sorry. You scared me. Have you seen him?

Bella stares, sipping from a juice box.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I thought I saw him over in that yard but I can't- I can't get over the fence.

Bella stares at her, still sipping from the almost-empty juice box.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Do your parents have a ladder I could borrow?

Unmoved, Bella sucks a mixture of juice and air from the now, empty juice box.

KAREN (CONT'D)

OK. Good talk.

(CONTINUED)

Karen tries to jump the wall but can't find her footing. She almost gets it and scrapes herself, sliding back down.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Fuck

Karen looks back at Bella and finds the same blank stare. She goes back to her scooter.

BELLA

My mom says that people curse because they lack the vocabulary to adequately express their real emotions.

Karen weighs the words.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Shouldn't you be in day care or something?

BELLA

I don't think he's coming back. It's been a really long time.

KAREN

I still have to try.

Beat.

BELLA

James said he'd help me fix my scooter. If I help you find Brian, will you ask him?

KAREN

Why don't you get your parents to help you?

BELLA

They got demoted.

KAREN

(confused)
Demoted to what?

BELLA

Honduras.

Bella returns to fixing her scooter. Karen does not know what to say.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Yea, ok. I'll ask him.

Bella stands and Karen picks her up.

BELLA
There's something moving over
there.

KAREN
You see anything?

BELLA
Brian... Psst Psst

KAREN
You see him?

Bella shakes her head.

BELLA
I see something moving but it could
be a squirrel.

She puts Bella on the ground

KAREN
Fucking squirrels.

She glances at Bella quickly and sits on the ground, taking
in the breeze and the quiet.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Yea, I got it: Lack of vocabulary.

Bella nods and stares ahead for another moment and then runs
off.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Hey! I'm sorry. Squirrels are O.K!
I guess!

Karen, defeated, watches her disappear into the house. She
stands, turning to the fence she can't climb and starts back
to her house.

KAREN (CONT'D)
(To herself)
Stupid.

Bella charges back towards Karen, now with sneakers on. She
stops a couple of feet away.

BELLA

Where are you going?

KAREN

Home. It probably isn't him.

BELLA

What if it is?

Motions for Karen to come towards her. Karen walks over and see's the hole. Bella expertly slides through the hole in the fence.

KAREN

Hey, you don't have to go over there. I can just knock on the neighbor's door.

Bella looks back through the hole.

BELLA

No one lives there.

Bella walks away while Karen sighs and makes an attempt at going through the hole. She barely fits.

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EXT. NEIGHBORS YARD - DAY

The abandoned yard is riddled with broken furniture, a torn up couch, bags and junk strewn about and forgotten.

BELLA

Do you think Brian will scratch me again?

KAREN

Hey, will you come back for a sec?

Bella stops, turns to Karen.

KAREN (CONT'D)

No. He won't.

Bella keeps staring.

KAREN (CONT'D)

He's learned from his mistakes.

Karen waves her arm asking for help. Bella walks back and pulls her. They struggle a bit then she makes it through and Bella starts walking away.

(CONTINUED)

BELLA

How did he get out?

Karen is on her feet, dusting herself off. She has a splinter from the fence on her hip. She tries to get it out and trails behind.

KAREN

It was an accident.

Bella grabs a large tree branch off the ground and uses it as a walking stick.

BELLA

There's a kid in my class named Brian. He always eats my crayons and the teacher still makes me be his line partner.

KAREN

What's a line partner?

BELLA

It's when you have to hold hands while you walk outside.

KAREN

Gross.

Bella stops and sticks out her hand to shake. Karen is surprised but they do.

BELLA

Brian, pst pst pst... Our cat's name was Fitz. He ran away too.

KAREN

Did you ever find him?

BELLA

No. But it's fine. He scratched me a lot and broke my soccer trophy.

KAREN

Fitz sounds like a jerk.

BELLA

Not always. Sometimes, when I was sick, he would sleep with me.

They reach a scrappy looking garage. There's a doggy door at the bottom just Bella's size. Bella looks at it.

(CONTINUED)

BELLA

Brian might scratch me again. He's scared.

KAREN

He's not really my cat. But no, he doesn't.

Bella crawls in. Karen waits outside.

BELLA (O.S.)

Brian... Brian... Who's is he?

KAREN

James.

5 INT. GARAGE - DAY

A beautiful chaos. Dust floats in the light beaming through the dusty windows. An old tricycle is hanging from the ceiling. A half finished wooden dollhouse sits atop a workbench. Bella bumps into a large toolbox and a large duffle bag full of rusted tools falls down.

Intercut between Yard and Garage

KAREN

You ok?

BELLA

Yea.

Karen relaxes; and sits down leaning against the garage.

BELLA (CONT'D)

My mom would be so mad if this was our garage. She says everything has its place, even people.

Bella searches under the bench, behind the cabinet.

BELLA (CONT'D)

But my dad says that you make your place in the world. He also makes the best pancake. My aunt doesn't make pancakes. She makes arepas.

She stops to stare at the dollhouse, picking up a tiny wooden cat.

BELLA (CONT'D)

How did Brian get out?

(CONTINUED)

Karen fidgets with her engagement ring for a moment. Then finds a line of ants walking up the garage, she follows them.

KAREN (CONT'D)

It was an accident. I opened the window to smoke. And James- we got into an argument and I forgot to close it.

BELLA

Is he mad at you? I was mad at my dad when Fitz ran away. Mom said I could get a turtle but then... Then I came to live with my aunt and she's allergic.

KAREN

No one is allergic to turtles.

Beat

BELLA

Is he mad?

KAREN

He is: But not about the cat.

BELLA

Why then?

Karen hesitates. She finds the end of the ant line. Or really it's the beginning. Bella puts down the cat and picks up two more dolls: A wooden mom and a wooden dad.

KAREN

I kissed someone.

BELLA

Who?

KAREN

Just someone.

BELLA

On the lips?

Karen shrugs.

BELLA (CONT'D)

You cheated? Kathy- she's my reading partner, she says that's cheating and that grown ups cheat a lot.

(CONTINUED)

KAREN

Well, yea, adults suck. Anyway. We broke up and now I have to find his cat.

Bella holds onto the dolls, making them hop together from one surface to the next.

BELLA

Why did you do it then?

KAREN

Kiss someone else? I don't know.

Karen takes a deep breath.

BELLA

Kathy kissed Samuel R. and Samuel V. and they did not get mad at her. They gave her bracelets made out of dead leaves.

KAREN

That was big of them.

Bella crouches down falling out of sight. In a corner of the garage, Bella peers under old sheets of plywood and stacked lumber. She puts the dolls in her pocket.

Poking with her walking stick she sees a tuft of fur. Forgetting her fear of being attacked, she lifts the piece of cardboard. It's a black and white cat: lifeless. Bella stares.

KAREN(CONT'D)

I let him out on purpose.

Bella looks towards Karen's voice, takes the wooden toys out of her pocket and looks at them.

BELLA

Why?

Bella leans against the table and looks at Brian.

KAREN

I don't know what I was thinking. I guess I wanted to hurt him back.

BELLA

Brian?

KAREN

No. James.

BELLA

But *you* cheated.

Beat

KAREN

There were other things- before the kiss, smaller things. Things we didn't know were things...

BELLA

Like what?

Karen breaths deeply, closing her eyes.

Bella squeezes the toys in her hands and holds them to her face. She stands the little people next to Brian and covers them up with the cardboard. She gets up and crawls back under the doggy door and finds Karen.

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EXT. NEIGHBORS YARD - DAY

Karen is standing by the doggy door.

Bella shakes her head slightly.

Karen plops to the ground, taking out a cigarette and a lighter. She tries multiple times but the lighter won't catch.

BELLA

That's bad for you.

Karen looks up at Bella. She puts the cigarette back. Bella stares at her then sits next to her and starts picking at the dead grass.

KAREN

Shit.

BELLA

Why did you do that? Why did you let him go by himself? He's just a cat. He didn't do anything wrong!

KAREN

You think I'm awful.

(CONTINUED)

BELLA
Why did you do it?

Beat

KAREN
Have you ever felt invisible? Like
no one sees you? Like you can
hardly see yourself.

BELLA
Yeah.

KAREN
I thought I could get him to stay

BELLA
I don't think that.

The two sit in silence for a little while.

KAREN
I'm sorry you can't get a turtle.

BELLA
It's ok. They smell like shit.

They both smile. Bella takes the toy cat out of her pocket
and gives it to Karen. Karen wipes her face.

FIN