

THE MONSTER AND HER MAN

by
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"What a life!

I've traveled across time and space.

I've seen and done things beyond imagination.

Blessed with friends like Pete and Lana and Jimmy.

And Batman... What incredible adventures we've shared.

What amazing people I've known.

But Lois... Dear Lois.

I loved you most of all."

Superman in All-Star Superman, Vol 2

Grant Morrison - DC COMICS

CHAPTER ONE

The ruins of the Nootka tribe saved a word for a girl like me: *čihaa* (chee-ha).

It means, 'monster.'

The other people who lived with us on Vancouver Island - the good, white, Wal-Mart-loving assholes - called me by a different name: *André*.

As in André "The Giant" Roussimoff.

André was seven foot four and weighed five hundred and twenty pounds. He was sweaty and hairy and drank beer by the barrel whenever he wasn't wrestling. My particulars aren't any of your business, but you can take my nicknames and stack me up any damn way you like. I don't sweat like André did, but he didn't have access to the men's deodorant I do, stolen or otherwise. I only get hairy in the winter, but that's because shaving legs as long as mine requires time better donated to sleep. Beer is out, now and forever, because it turned my father's brain into cabbage. The only area where I'm willing to call André my own, beyond our excessive growth hormone, is wrestling.

I wrestled because it was the one place I could wail on men without being arrested. Honestly, that's what the French giant and I really have in common. We don't take shit from anybody. Ever. The papers on the mainland can spin it anyway they want to, but I'm the only one with the truth. A boy came to the island and I fell in love with him. I kissed him and meant it and held him as he died.

I can't speak for Roussimoff, but I can sure as hell speak for myself:

A monster's heart breaks the hardest.

CHAPTER TWO

The whole mobile home park came out on my seventeenth birthday. Staring at me behind flat smiles while they ate all the chips and cheap pizza that my mother's tips had scrounged up. Our people believe in the raven as nature's great trickster, but that bird pales in comparison to the vultures our tribe has become.

When I was born, my father and his friends came to my hospital room with fire on their breath. Nobody spoke until my father put his hand on my head and declared it was time to pool money for lottery tickets. My dad liked to hold up his hand and remind me of that night. *I couldn't even get my fingers around your big head!* He was the first of many visitors to the hospital.

Children from all over Ukee came to point and laugh. Their parents shushed them, clutching at their hearts as they stared at the *thing* inside my mother's arms. One elder came all by herself just to spit on me. When the nurses yanked her into the hallway, she screamed at my mother, begging her to kill me. As I got older and began to squirm with growing pains at night, my mother would come to me in the darkness to apologize for my first day and every day after.

Yaa akuks suwa (yeah a'cooks soo-wah), she would whisper to me.

It mostly means 'I love you,' but it literally translates to, 'you are my pain.'

I could see the expression in my mother's eyes on the night of my birthday party, a mingling of faces that came out once a year, and not one of them our friends.

My mother came to me and wrapped both her hands around my thick wrist. Her neck was strained of its wrinkles whenever she looked up at me, the portrait of a woman I never knew. "How do you feel about some cake?"

The same way I always did - ready to eat it by the fistful.

I shrugged.

My mother smiled. "Maybe I should wait until everyone leaves."

Darren, the little round white man who managed our park, picked a splat of melted cheese out of an empty pizza box. They wouldn't leave until they'd licked my candles clean. "Just bring it out."

"Alright." She went for our home with her chin tucked and every worried wrinkle scrunched back into place. The screen hadn't even snapped closed before the manager's ruddy wife, Cheryl, came to force her perfume upon me.

"Greetings, Dor-o-thee."

She said my name like she was talking to an alien. It's the great white way in Ukee: when you're dealing with them indigenous, say it slow and smile! Cheryl folded her doughy little hands at the wrist like a praying mantis and smiled so hard that her saliva cracked. "Seventeen, huh?"

My mom's favorite TV show was *The Golden Girls*. It was big in the eighties, I guess. Apparently a show that revolved around three super old ladies was exactly what those neon-loving idiots needed. My mom named me after a character named Dorothy that made her laugh the hardest. A big, deep-voiced bruiser, just like me. Perfect, if not for the fact that there were other teens on the island.

Dorothy? Like, from Kansas? Oz and monkeys and stuff?

No. Like from Golden Girls. Blouses and old ladies and stuff.

I don't know what that even is. And on and on and on, forever and then some.

"So." Cheryl's perfume smelled like someone had lit a rainbow on fire. "Big year for you, Dor-o-thee." She flashed her fingers just in case I didn't understand the word *big*. "Last year before you're an actual adult, you know."

I knew. We all did. There's nothing teachers at school liked talking about more - being young was a prize - *just take the medal and shut up!* But belittling our heartbreak and disappointments was the gateway drug to suicide. They didn't seriously take kids serious. Not ever.

I know things seem tough right now, Dorothy, but trust me - in a few years?

I got suspended for flipping off an English teacher who tried that one.

Dorothy flashed another slimy smile. She always stared at the half of my head that was shaved like it was a pair of bare breasts. When I dyed the other half purple, she started looking at me like the breasts were on fire. "Pretty soon you'll be driving around, picking up boys."

Our car was gutted and propped on blocks behind our trailer.

Cheryl pushed in close. "Got your eyes set on any boys I should know about?"

"Sure." I pointed out the three brothers from my wrestling squad, sharing swigs off a liter of something definitely not soda. "Jimmy, Bill and Roy."

"Really?" Cheryl came in closer, something definitely not soda in her exhale.

"Yeah. Jerked them off right before you showed up." I gave the tips of Cheryl's fingers a friendly, girlfriends-only squeeze. "Cool, right?"

Cheryl pulled her hands away, her entire face flushed straight to ripe.

On the day I won the Asics Cadet Wrestling Championship, the Busching Brothers snuck out in the middle of the night to celebrate my milestone, a first for the island. When *Jigger's* opened up the next day, the owners had to call the police before they fried a single fish or chip. The giant, steel 'Raven Lady' statue that had stood out front for years was dressed in a singlet with a giant cucumber tucked inside its crotch. In case anybody missed the message, "DOROTHY" was scribbled in pink lipstick across her big, steel ass. Their father's sheriff badge gave them the authority to do whatever they wanted, including inviting themselves to my party.

If my mother had named me Blanche, the brothers would have loved me.

Before Cheryl could say another word, my mother swooped in with the chocolate cake, the candlelight a beautiful compliment to Cheryl's rosy, retreating face. My mother was two lines into the Birthday Song before anyone else stopped to mumble along. There was light applause when it concluded, the scraping of plasticware on plates to make room for the final course.

My mother looked at me over the edge of the candles as the vultures pressed in. Her words were an inaudible whisper, the shape of her lips familiar enough for me to read. *Make a wish, łucsac nučii* (boock-sahns noo-chee).

It means *little mountain*, a private name between her and I.

Cheryl whispered to her husband. Accusations that would find their way to my mother and back again to me. I put my lips to the candles. *I'm sorry, Mother.* When I blew, I begged the gods to change our lives or end them. If being a *child* was easy, I wouldn't last a minute as an adult.

The candles went out, topping the gasp of stillness with the stink of burnt wax. As I came away from my cake, the fire I'd snuffed blinked anew in the sky. A flaming comet cut through the blackness of night, a soundless shape no bigger than a washing machine. It picked up speed as it flared and fell and disappeared somewhere around Ukee Harbour.

"Oh!" Cheryl clapped her hands. "You see that shooter, Darren?"

Darren was already slicing into my cake.

"That's going to be good luck for me." Cheryl clapped and cluck, celebrating a moment she thought entirely her own. That red, round woman actually believed in trash like that. Gemstones, auras, luck - the whole sucker bible.

The luck would be mine though, not hers, and it wasn't even a comet.

It was an alien escape pod.