

LYFT KNOCKOUT

My last ride was supposed to be the end of my night, but another request pops up the second I indicate I'm finished.

"Damn." I jab my finger into the accept button too hard for my phone to recognize and am forced to tap it again like an adult.

There's no destination, so we could be going to Kansas for all I know, but at least he's waiting on the curb. His head is shaved on the sides but not on top. A man bun holds up the rest. He's wearing orange pants, a purple shirt, and a white vest. Musician maybe. Probably headed downtown. Not so bad.

"Where to?"

"So I don't know the address," he says. "It's a bar."

"What's it called?"

"I'm not sure."

Silence expands between us. Finally, "So..."

"Somewhere downtown," he says. "Might have to do a few laps, but we're in this together." He starts pressing buttons on my stereo as I drive off, frowning at the silence. I open the playlists on my phone and hand it to him.

"Bluetooth."

"Cool. What do you have?" He scrolls. "Nirvana? Barf." He taps the playlist anyway and mimics Cobain's voice with a gravelly, unintelligible growl. The loudness of his impression sends a shiver of irritation through me.

"Play something else if you don't like it," I say. "There's plenty in there."

"I'm just messing with you, man. What's your name?"

"Dick."

"Dick? Say, I've always wanted to ask why anyone would go by that. I mean, it's a nickname, right? You don't *have* to."

"It's-"

"You could have been a Richard, a Rich, Richy, Rick, but no, I want to be a *Dick*."

"My-"

"It doesn't even sound anything like Richard!" He turns and stares. "Well?"

"It's what my dad used to call me. I didn't like it when I was a kid, but when he died it felt like a nice reminder of him."

He nods briefly, then looks back out the windshield. "So you agree it's a fuckin' stupid name, then? Why would your old man do that to you?"

My jaw tightens. "It's just a name. Drop it."

"It's just weird," he mumbles, then reaches for the volume and cranks it up all the way. He goes into a drum session on my dash. I hear a static crackle in my left speaker and turn the volume down.

"What's wrong?"

"You're going to blow my speakers that way," I say.

“Oh. Hey, what kind of car is this? I feel like I’m going to break this wimpy dash.”

“It’s a Focus, and the dash isn’t there for you to wail on.”

“Just to protect us from a crash? If it can’t handle me it sure as shit can’t handle that.”

“It’s a good car.”

He laughs. “What, did your dad give you the car too?”

“No.”

“It’s okay, everyone has a shitty car from time to time.”

“It’s not a shitty car.”

“Dude, it’s a Ford,” he says.

“So?”

“So, Ford. Found On Road Dead.”

“What are you talking about?” I snap.

“Oh my God, let me educate you before you die in this thing.”

“Let’s not.”

“But it’s not safe.”

“You can get out if you don’t feel safe.”

“Damn!” he says. “You don’t have to be like that.”

“Are we almost to your mystery bar yet?”

“Fuck if I know.”

“Where do you want me to go, then?”

“I want to say one of the walls is an aquarium. Does that help?”

“No.”

“Just circle around then.”

A sweep of lower downtown later we still haven’t found it.

“I need a cigarette,” he says.

“As long as you roll down the window.”

“Got a cig?”

“No.”

“Stop at a gas station.”

“Seriously?”

He pats his pockets. “I’m all out.”

I pull into the closest station I can find.

“Damn,” he says. “You trying to drive up my fare?”

“This was-”

“Just messing with you,” he beams and closes the door, then leans into the open window.

“Be right back.”

“I really have to go,” I say. “Call a friend and find out where this place is, then get another Lyft.”

“What? No! I’ll be lightning.”

“Lyfts are out everywhere, it’ll take two seconds to get another when you’re ready.”

“Quit being such a *Dick*.” He laughs at his own joke. “Seriously, please?” He runs inside before I can say anything else. When he comes back there’s a lit cigarette hanging from his mouth.

I know we're no closer to finding his bar and I know he knows it too when he takes his shoes off, puts his feet on the dash, and reclines his seat.

"Hey, who's that?" he nods at the picture by my speedometer.

"My wife," I feel a little color return to my face thinking about her.

"Can I see?"

I reluctantly hand over the picture.

"What's her name?"

"Rosa."

"Latina?"

"Yeah."

"Well she's a sexy little thing, Dick, me gusta mucho." The wind from the open window catches the picture and pulls it out of his hand. It swirls in the air. I feel my core tighten as I watch him swipe at it and eventually swat it to the floor.

"Damn!" he says. "I almost lost your señorita!"

I hold my hand out for it.

"Wait, I'm still looking."

"I think that's enough."

"Come on, you get to go home to the real thing. I have to memorize the picture if I'm going to beat off to her later."

I slam the brakes. "Get out."

"Oh my God, Dick, it was a joke."

"Just give me the picture and get out."

"Don't be such a baby!"

"Get the fuck out of my car!" He blinks at me like he doesn't understand. I reach across him and open the passenger door.

"Quit it!"

"I said get out."

"No."

I shove his shoulder and realize his seatbelt is still on. I click the release and push again.

"You're fucking crazy," he says. "Someone pays for a ride you give them the ride."

"I'm not getting paid to drive you all over the damn city while you talk shit. Get the fuck out, punk."

"Guess what, Dick, you have a hot wife. Other men jerk off to her all the time. It's called reality."

I sock him in the jaw so hard he topples halfway out the open door. I grab his foot and toss it over his head, then throw each of his ratty shoes at him and punch the gas.