

Someone To Remember Us

By: Ceridwyn2

jlynnsca@gmail.com

Nights inside Her Majesty's Prison Larkhall were long and drawn out and not usually quiet. The cat-calls between inmates often lasted for quite a while after lights out. Inside one of the single cells, one woman sat on her bunk against the wall. The small light that came into the room from the external flood lights created interesting shadows across the room. Introspection was something Nikki Wade was familiar with. And something she had plenty of time to ruminate about.

Days were pretty much routine. The screws came round about seven in the morning. You could hear their heavy steps on the metal stairs and landings and the jingle of the keys. Nikki was always up and ready to be out of her cell the moment of unlock and head to the showers, wanting to wash away the stench that came from having open toilets in the cells. It started her day. Then head to the canteen for breakfast which consisted of the usual greasy slop or sticky porridge. Nikki settled for some scrambled eggs, toast and coffee and a hello to the two Julies running the servery. Nikki smiled at them. They were of the few inmates in the prison that Nikki could consider friends. They were certainly different from any she'd have associated with outside the prison, but their charm won her over. A stickler for the underdog Nikki was. She headed over to a table and sat down with a couple other women she'd befriended, Barbara Hunt and Yvonne Atkins. Prison was difficult enough. At least if you had some friends it made some of the time pass a bit easier.

In the mornings after breakfast there was either chores or classes to attend. For the most part Nikki enjoyed this time, particularly her time in the prison garden. It was time of her own, as much as one has time to oneself in a prison. Despite the starkness of the intimidating stone and mortar exterior walls of the old prison, the greenery of the garden stood in contrast, proof that something good and new could flourish and grow. After lunch her time was divided between free association time and her studies towards a general studies degree. She smiled when she remembered the reason she started on that path. A certain wing governor had asked her to consider the option as a favour to her. Though Nikki hadn't quite realised it at the time, that smile of Helen's would get her just about anything from the inmate. In the evenings there was some more free association time before they had to be in their cells. More time to think. Just what she needed.

With nearly a year on remand awaiting the trial and outcome for causing the death of a police officer and two years since, time was something she had plenty of. Never mind that said police officer was in the process of trying to rape her girlfriend at the time. She just wanted him to stop. She'd been used to various police officers coming into harass them as owners of one of the chic lesbian clubs in London. But this particular cop had been as bent as they come. Nikki had been absolutely furious. She tried to get him to stop but he just laughed and continued on with what he'd started. So she'd grabbed the nearest thing to her, a bottle of wine, and hit him over the head with it. When he laughed again, she saw red and stuck what remained of the broken bottle into his neck. When the other police arrived she hadn't done herself any favours with her behaviour and what she said, which unfortunately went against her in the trial.

What was it Helen had said in the library? Nikki reflected. A life imprisonment. Ten years. Not ten years before they might set her free, but ten years before they even considered if she should be allowed to apply for parole. An employee of the Home Office was killed. They didn't look on that lightly. A potential eight more years before anything could happen. However, that being said, Helen Stewart, Governor and Head of the Lifer's Unit, was on her case to have her case appealed. Thus Nikki was keeping her nose out of trouble where at all possible. Not that it took away her fire, sarcasm and wit. Those were firmly in place should bastard screws like Fenner show his face anywhere near hers.

Perhaps it was because of the impending work on her appeal that her nightmares about that fateful night were rekindled. She began having them shortly after her initial remand period but they'd gone away gradually. Now they were back and for the past few nights, she'd woken in a sweat and a muted scream. She'd begun to take smaller naps in between but it was taking their toll. She was becoming more tired during the day. And as such her acerbic tongue got her some more time in her cell awaiting jurisdiction with the wing governor, Karen Betts.

“What's the matter with you, Nikki?” Karen asked.

“Didn't have my morning coffee today. Caffeine withdrawal,” Nikki spoke with a slight smirk on her face, and leaned back in the chair.

“Cut the crap, Nikki. I don't have time for this.”

“Very well. Put me down the block.”

“For all your intelligence, you can be very stupid at times, Nikki. Ms. Stewart seems to think you're worth pursuing an appeal for. That doesn't come lightly. I'd been seeing some very positive signs from you over the past six months or so. You're doing very well with your studies, and your personal officer has given me some good reports on you. Why screw all that up?”

The steam had gone out of Nikki's fervour at that. She knew that Ms. Betts was right. By all indications, Ms. Betts was okay for a prison officer, even so as wing governor. She trusted her as much as she trusted anyone in authority, Helen Stewart notwithstanding. “I don't know. I haven't been sleeping well.”

“How so?”

“Nightmares.”

“Care to elaborate.”

“Not particularly. Look, Miss Betts, I can't guarantee that this will never happen again but I'll try.”

“Thank you. Normally I'd probably confine you to your cell for a couple days, but I don't think that will be entirely helpful in this instance. You've got friends in there that genuinely like you. Talk with them.”

“Maybe.”

“That will be all, Nikki,” Karen told her, then picked up the phone to call of the prison officers to take Nikki back to the wing.

When Nikki arrived back to G-Wing, Barbara Hunt stood up from where she was sitting talking to Yvonne.

“Nikki, how did it go?” Barbara asked.

“The usual. Just need to keep my gob shut when Fenner's in sight.” At Yvonne's arched eyebrow, she added, “or at least said quieter.”

“Forgive me for saying so, Nik, but you look like something the cat dragged in.”

“Thanks, Yvonne. Nice to know you care.” To deflect some of the sarcasm inherent in that phrase, Nikki smiled with that.

“We do care, Nikki. That's the point,” Barbara pointed out.

“Thanks. Maybe later. I'm just going to lie down for a while.” Nikki headed towards her cell without seeing the looks of concern for her on her friends faces.

“What's up with, Nik?” Julie Saunders said as she and Julie Johnson headed over to Barbara and Yvonne.

“Only we saw her go to her cell and she's not looking too good.”

“No, not too good.”

“I don't know,” Yvonne said. “But we'll find out sooner or later.”

The evening's association time came around and Nikki hadn't come out of her cell. Barbara was about to head up to the threes to seek her out when she saw Helen Stewart come onto the wing. Helen did a quick glance around the wing and didn't see Nikki amongst the crowd.

“Barbara, have you seen Nikki?”

“She's up in her cell, Ma'am.”

“Something wrong?” Helen felt slightly panicked.

“Not that she's said. But she didn't look very good this afternoon.” Barbara didn't like interfering in her friends lives where screws were concerned in general. But she did know there was something going on between Nikki and the governor. But if there was something to make Nikki happy, that had to be a good thing.

Their conversation was abruptly stopped when a plaintive shout came from the top level. Sounding specifically from Nikki Wade's cell. As fast as Helen could she tore up the stairs and around the G3 landing to Nikki's cell. A few of the other inmates followed up the stairs, but a couple of the other officers halted their progress. Once Helen ascertained that nobody else was in the cell with Nikki and she wasn't in any physical danger she stepped out briefly to get the officers to bring the other inmates downstairs. Then she stepped back into Nikki's cell and closed the door.

“Nikki?”

Nikki was awake and sitting back against the wall of her cell, but she wasn't truly seeing anything. Cautiously, Helen crossed over the small room and stood in front of the other woman. She called her name. When there was still no response, she sat down on the bed and drew Nikki into a hug.

“What? Helen? What are you doing here?” Nikki was startled when she came around. Slowly she pulled out of the hug.

"I was downstairs looking for you and talking to Barbara. Next thing I heard was you calling out. What happened?" Helen looked down and placed one of her hands in Nikki's.

"I'm not sure. I lay down a little while ago and fell asleep. And then this nightmare started again. It's almost always the same thing." Nikki settled back against the brick wall again but kept her hand joined with Helen's.

"How long has this been going on?"

"A couple weeks maybe. I've lost track. I'm not getting much sleep. It's frustrating. I wish they'd stop." Nikki stood up and paced the cell.

"A couple of weeks? Why didn't you say anything, Nikki?"

"I don't know."

After watching Nikki go back and forth for what seemed to be the umpteenth time, Helen spoke up. "Nikki, sit down. You're making me dizzy." When Nikki complied, she continued. "Can you tell me what they're about?"

"They don't make a lot of sense. But it usually starts off with Gossard in the club, tormenting or harassing us. Some veiled and not-so-veiled threats. Sometimes it's that other times it's physical intimidation. It usually results in him raping Trisha and that I didn't get there in time. That he's still out there assaulting others like us. I just want it to go away."

"Nikki," Helen spoke softly and placed her hand on Nikki's cheek, gently brushing away the tears that slid down her face. "We'll figure something out. What you've said there has given me an idea of where to do some investigative work. Surely if Gossard had been going after you and Trisha, he had to be doing the same to others. It's generally not a stand-alone incidence. We're working on your case. Claire is looking for some witnesses to come forward. Remember when I asked you if you were still in touch with Trisha?"

"Yes. What does..."

"If she can give us the names of some other clubs around that had been harassed by him that would go a long way in your favour."

"Yeah, sure. I'll give you her number. I'll ring her in a bit to tell her to expect your call. Thank you, Helen. This means more than you know."

"Thank you. And I do know." Helen gave her a quick hug and slipped her a phone card before leaving.

Nikki sat back on her bunk and sighed. It was going to be another long night. After a few moments, she gathered her wits about her and headed downstairs to G1 to use the phone. She briefly told Trisha to expect a call from Helen Stewart about her case, not adding anything about the nightmares as she wouldn't trust many within possible earshot with that information. After that she headed in the general direction of the pool table where Yvonne was playing against a slightly limping Shaz Whiley, one of the youngest inmates on the wing. Barbara was sat back at one of the tables talking with the two Julies.

"Hey, Nik, what was the scream for?"

“You feeling okay?”

“Yeah, Julies. I'm feeling better. It was nothing major. Just woke up from a nightmare.”

“A nightmare, Nikki? What was it about?” Barbara inquired.

“Just something from the past. It'll be all right, I think.” Nikki stood up. “Enough of this maudlin stuff. Now, give me something to cheer up over.”

“Did you hear the one about the ugly overbearing screw and his not so innocent inmate?” Yvonne quipped loud enough for some others to hear; obviously referring to the Principle Officer Jim Fenner and inmate Shell Dockley.

“That's old news, Yvonne. Give me something new,” Nikki replied.

“You didn't hear this part...Fenner's probably the one that put the key in the truck she and Denny escaped in.” Yvonne didn't add the fact that Shaz had escaped as well, since she was caught and immediately returned to the prison.

“How do you know that?” Barbara asked.

“Come on. Who else do you think has enough motivation to get Shell Dockley out of Larkhall and is slimy enough to do the deed?”

A chorus of voices responded: “Fenner.”

“Bleedin' slimeball,” Julie Saunders spoke up.

“I wouldn't trust that bastard as far as I could throw him,” Yvonne stated firmly. A series of laughs followed. The rest of the evening passed in camaraderie without incident and eventually they were returned to their cells on schedule.

In the morning after her duties in the garden, Nikki returned to her cell to get her plate and utensils for lunch. When she glanced down at her bunk, she spotted a sheaf of paper that hadn't been there when she left. Turning it over she read it aloud.

After we talked last night, I went searching amongst my books. I found this:

Fragment 147

*someone will remember us
I say even in another time
– Sappho, "If Not, Winter"*

I know it's not particularly useful with regards to the circumstances of your nightmares, but do remember that I think of us fondly. One day at a time. - H.

Nikki smiled. And tucked the note into one of her books. She was right with regards to the nightmares. Though perhaps not. Perhaps they would come of some good in finding a witness to Gossard's aggressive behaviour. Nikki realised she had some things to look forward to, pleasant memories upon which to dream. She smiled and headed back down to join her friends in the queue.