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The Issue With Vulnerability

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I ran as fast as my legs could take me. I felt the cold wind of the night rush past my ears and the sound of my feet hitting the pavement was getting more and more deafening. I slowed my speed down to a brisk walk as I looked up at the sky: dark, cold, and unforgiving. I let my mind wander, thinking about the earlier events that led me to now. I felt my phone buzzing as I pulled it out of my pocket; it was my cousin calling me.

“What, Reneé?” I said.

“Girl, where’d you go?” I could barely hear her through the music playing all around her.

“I left,” I replied.

“What? You know better than to be walking the streets at night. You know they go hunting at night!” she yelled into the phone once more.

“I don’t care; I’m not dealing with his crap anymore,” I said, feeling my voice crack. “He’s nothing but terrible to me, and then he had the nerve show up to that stupid party. That boy had the nerve to get with me, only to say that he’s dated a black girl. That’s not right, and I’m not gonna be there for it.”

“Eva, I-,” she tried to say.

“There’s nothing to say. I’ll see you at the house,” I said and hung up. I kept walking, slowly picking up my speed again. Reneé really got me thinking. They do go out at night, picking out all the black folk they can in the streets of Alabama. They don’t kill, but they get pretty damn near close every time, and every count against them gets waived because they’re “upstanding citizens.” In other words, they’re as white as the sun when you look at it for too long.

I shook the thought from my head, and I kept walking, hoping to get home before I regretted my decision. My head started ringing, now full of fear. I couldn’t hear anything anymore. All I could see was the street sign leading to my house, and I thought that I was finally home free, but that thought was quickly swept away by yelling I heard behind me. I stood there, paralyzed by fear. I knew exactly who it was.

I felt the truck pull up beside me. It looked like 10 guys: 5 in the truck, and 5 in the bed. I started walking again, hoping they would just let me go.

“Well, well, well, look what we have here, boys,” the driver said, “A fresh one. We ain’t ever seen you around here before.” One by one, they all started to hop out of the truck, and started following my footsteps.

“Please, leave me alone. I’m just trying to get home.” I said, looking down, but still walking.

“Ah, so the monkey speaks,” he said, and all the men laughed. They got closer to me as the driver finally put the car in park and got out. “You gon’ speak again?”

“You can’t say that,” I said, immediately regretting it. The driver grabbed my hair and threw me down to the ground.

“You really ain’t from around here,” he said, kicking me in the stomach, “cuz’ I can say whatever the hell I wanna say.” I winced in pain, as the man squatted to get in my face. I could smell the tobacco and gin, which only made my situation worse.

“Please...,” I said, as I felt a singular tear run down my face. The man wiped it away.

“Aw, lemme ask, where you from?” He looked me dead in my eyes. I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. “I ain’t gone ask you again,” he said, grabbing my neck tightly. “Where you from?”

“I-Illinois,” I told him. He let go of me and chuckled. I looked around, to actually gauge my surroundings. My vision was blurry though; it was like I could see everything, but nothing at the same time. But I saw a face that felt familiar, I tried to put my finger on it--

“Well, then. We gon’ have to give you a proper Alabama welcome, huh, boys?” A murmur of different words came from each of the men. “It’s a shame though,” he said, lifting me up off the ground with ease. “You were one of the prettier ones.”

And with that, I felt the pain of a fist to my face. I was once again thrown to the ground as an array of kicks, knees, and a crow bar were brought to my body with the utmost power and strength. I could feel the blood oozing out and down my face. Lying there, lifeless, I tried not to black out, but I knew that with too many more blows, I wouldn't have a choice. So, I opened my eyes to the best of my ability, while both being hit and swollen. I saw a somewhat muscular boy standing over me with a black crowbar. It looked as if he was getting ready to treat me like a golf ball. And that's when I saw it.

"Marcus?" I managed to get out before the crowbar swung at my face like it was a golf ball.