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Fiction

October 10, 2013

### Go down Joseph

“Rinnng, rinnng,”

The phone stirred up the small apartment. I remember being in the shower. Usually, I went to the shower just to get away from it all. My mother, a single parent, always seemed to nag. So I hid away in our tiny shoe box of a shower. I was singing “I’m going down” to the top of my lungs. That is when the muffled ringing became clear. It became loud. I was no longer able to drown out the sound under the shower head. I felt another presence in the room. I was washing my hair when my mother opened the curtains and exposed my no longer 10 year old flesh.

“Iva! Here take this phone I am trying to work!” my mother not only startled my naked bones, but forced me to get passed the stinging of my eyes as shampoo slowly seeped its way into my clenched eye lids. Through the pain, I tried to make out the telephone number on the screen.

“Arizona? I don’t know anyone in Arizona”

I tried letting it go to voicemail, but the unreliable touch screen answered itself. I nervously said, “Hello?”

“Hello, may I speak to Iva?” the voice of a middle aged man surprised me. I knew that he couldn’t see that I was naked, but I covered up as if he were in the room. I finally let out a shaky... “Yes, this is she”

The man continued “I am the head coach over at Eastern Arizona College, and I have seen your stats. Power forward right?”

I jumped up and down in a huge puddle of shampoo and water. “Yes sir” I was a bit out of breath, due to my happy dance.

He continued “If you are not busy I would love to talk to you and get you out here to play for us.”

I had started to play basketball about 3 years prior. I couldn’t keep a ball out of my hands. Sophomore year when the high school recruits first came into my dance class to “talk to me” I was pissed. I just knew I would never play the bogus game. But, I lost everything. My father had been detained and deported back to Russia. My family and I had no idea that this could ever be possible, seeing as he never expressed that he was an immigrant or that he was a criminal on the run. So it was a huge shock for my mother. She had another kid by the fool and was now left to support a family on her own. She loved my father. She trusted him. After living under the same roof for years, he betrayed her with his false

identity; with his lies. My mom didn't take it well and suffered from post partisan. I felt ashamed of him, but I knew I had to be strong. When he left, he took my mom with him.

When I got to high school, I knew that if I wanted to go to college I had to get past my lame GPA of 2.3. Looking back, I danced my whole life and my no name father proudly videotaped every recital. At first when the recruits came to my dance class I was bothered, but deep down I thought *finally*. I was never a girly type. I always had all male friends. I learned to be rough and tough and mock this normalcy of life. But, when my father left us because of selfish actions, my world turned upside down. I resented everything. He was still present in my mind. Dance was no longer my release. Somehow it turned into a prison. This was a prison that my father never ceased. He was there. He was watching and videotaping me. I felt that he didn't deserve it. When I no longer felt safe dancing, I turned to the recruiters.

Once I touched a ball, it was like I entered a new world. I was now in control, my father was no longer present, and I was resilient. When I played I didn't think about how my mother had gone crazy, how she didn't shower for weeks or comb her hair. I was free of all of that. I was authentically Iva. As the world around me grew faint, basketball remained the same. There wasn't a day I didn't work at it. I wanted to be the best to play the game. I worked hard every day and night. And it has all come down to this phone call. I finally spoke, "I would love to hear all about your program."

"So let's cut to the chase, I've been watching your film and I've even been to a few of your games, and let's face it you are what we need here." His voice made me feel safe.

Without further examination I said “Well then, I guess I’m going to have to come help y'all out.”

We talked more about the school. It was small a town of about 3 thousand and it was only 3 hrs. away from the city. This was deep in the mountains and on a farmland. We arranged for a visit, but I knew that this was it. I didn’t feel any hesitation. The coach presented himself in a way that made me feel safe and at home. Besides, it wasn’t going to get any better than free school and a new leather ball. I committed over the phone, but it was time to tell my mom the news.

I dried my pale limbs and finally put clothes on. When I made my way to my mother, she was watching her favorite show. This meant war. I stood in front of the television and before she could yell at me, I said “I’m going to Arizona!” I was excited, but by the looks of her raised face I knew she wasn’t. “Mom, I was just offered a full ride scholarship to play basketball at a college in Arizona, and I’m going.” My mom jumped up as if she was going to tackle me. She headed in my direction and turned the TV off.

“So just like that? You’re going to just leave? I don’t know that man? You haven’t even met him Iva!”

As I removed the spit that was flickered on the tips of my eyelids, I stepped back. “It’s something I have to do for me.” I headed for my room. I packed all of my things. The next morning I woke up to the smell of eggs and butter. I walked into our small kitchen. My mom acted as if she had cooked for the last 3 years. She sat there, didn’t look up. “I’m going to miss you too mom,” she quickly glanced up at me, but quickly reminded

herself she was too good of a mother to smile. Still in pretend mode, she spat out “You better hurry Iva; we have a long trip today.”

After breakfast, I stuffed my slug bug. We made the best of the poor thing. I had about 2 inches from the steering wheel. I started her up, and we headed to Arizona. Usually a 9hr car ride wouldn't be too bad, but without a conversation or room to sneeze, it's a lifetime.

When we finally arrived to this tiny strip of a town I looked at my mom and laughed! Everyone's house was old or a trailer home. Wal-Mart was this town's mall. Everyone had the same smile and waved in the same rhythm. As we went around town, I became alarmed. It was as if everyone were related somehow. Everyone had the same dry eyes. Trying to avoid my mother's nagging “I told you so,” I pretended to be infatuated by the robotic motion of these people.

When I got to my new dorm, I really had to pretend. It smelled like mothballs and pine sol. Every wall was a mixture of old red bricks and cement. The carpet had a huge green stain under the bunk bed. “This is perfect!” I had to snap out of it. The room was indeed a jail cell, but there was no way I was returning home to my crammed apartment and escaping to the shower once again. My mother didn't have to say a word. Her face was scrunched and her mouth was in a knot.

“Hey, I'm Jody” a high pitched short stalky girl crept into my door.

“Hi, I am Iva, you're new too?” Jody seemed very energetic, but not like the others I've seen through the town.

“No, I am your point guard silly” I was a bit shocked, but relieved. “Come, I’ll show you the rest of the team.” I followed Jody through the creepy all white halls. The lights turned off behind us with every step. With my mother behind me I didn’t want to seem too suspicious. I kept close behind Jody. We entered an unexpected room at the end of the hall. “This is the lobby, and this is your lady Monsters,” everyone seemed just as irritated as I was with Jody’s voice.

Feeling awkward, I decided to speak up “Hey guys, I am Iva,” everyone sat there and rolled their eyes. I was sadly happy to be around people somewhat like me. No well-practiced waives, or eyes that you couldn’t see past, just a group of bitches.

The behavior of the girls all of a sudden shifted. I felt a presence behind me. Assuming that it was my mother, I turned around, mimicking the eyes rolls I got earlier. But, it wasn’t my mother. It was this tall goofy looking man. He wore a black suit and carried a little leather book. The book had a title but, it wasn’t in English. No one else seemed startled. “Hello ladies, as you know I’ve been doing some recruiting, this here is our new forward.” Caught in a daze, my mother shoved me. I smiled and tried to justify my behavior. I knew the voice sounded familiar, but I just knew this wasn’t our coach. He’s a priest. With all eyes on me, I choked up and said “oh, hello coach!” I turned to shake his hand, his hands were freezing. I finally looked to see his face, but they were like the others. Empty. I gave a crooked smile. “Ready to sign your letter of intent?” my coach said. I turned and looked at my mother. I saw the fear in her eyes. She was afraid for me. “Of course.” In this lobby there was a picture of huge building. It was beautiful. It was all

white, and immaculate. At the very top of this palace, there was an angel. This angel was in pure gold and played a flute. I noticed that my teammates had made their ways over to the table. My mother and I hurried over. The coach smiled, and handed me a pen. My teammate's faces were hard to read. But, they were not smiling. I didn't read the papers, but after I signed I felt a violent wonder at what was to come.

After the meeting was over my mom and I unpacked the bulky clustered luggage. My mom decided that she wanted to get out of this little town. She said she was going to leave as soon as I was done with unpacking. I decided to take my time. Actually fold my things unlike the way I did things at home. But, I could only stall for so long without her catching on. It was time. My mom was leaving me. At home it felt as if I was doing the leaving, but at this moment, I felt vulnerable. I didn't feel so independent anymore. She headed for the door. I clenched my eyelids tight together. There were now tears in our home. My mother turned towards me after opening the door, "good luck." She held back the fear, and shut the door behind her. We weren't home anymore. My eyelids had begun to spill over and slice the dirty old carpet. I felt alone. I knew I made a mistake. I had no choice but to be strong. As I was getting ready for bed I opened a drawer. "Oh my god!" I slot back when I saw a black widow climb out of the draw. I opened the next drawer, hoping to find something to kill the thing. What I found was a book. It was leather and identical to the one my coach had. Its cover read "Kleid nach unten Joseph." I opened the book, and there lay that beautiful white palace. A bit surprised, I shoved the book into my

book bag. Unable to fight my sleep anymore, I lay down in the springy mattress and rocked myself to sleep.

“Knock, Knock,” the door staggered. I looked at my phone and it was 3:00 am. Scared, but interested in knowing who was behind the door, I unfolded my drunken limbs, and slowly crept up to the door. “It’s me, Jody.” Realizing that no one in this world could mock the squeaky voice, I opened the door. “Hi!” Jody brushes right past me. “Uh, Jody its 3:00 a.m.,” I muffled.

“Yea I know, did you find a book in your drawer?”

“Yes,” ignoring the irritation in my voice Jody did not shut up. She laid down on my bed, with her filthy feet on my clean sheets. She babbled on and on about German. “I’m sorry, what’s so amazing about German?” I walked towards the door to let the cat back into its alley...when Jody pounced up. I held the door open, Jody walked towards me.

“He didn’t tell you, did he?”

“Tell me what Jody?”

“The picture, on the wall, the book”

I slammed the door and released my steaming frustration all through the room. I knew I felt mesmerized by the picture, but who wouldn’t it was beautiful; captivating. It was almost as if it were magnetic.

“Jody, what’s going on? What is it?”



“I can’t tell you, just promise me that you won’t give in. Don’t let them take you”

“Who?” my heart began to unravel itself. As my heart sunk down to my stomach, I felt the fear that was in Jody’s eyes. She raced passed me and left as quickly as she had come.

It’s been weeks since Jody has made my mind trance. The school seems fine. Practice has been great. My classes are the only thing that’s a bit different. I am the only one in my class that doesn’t cover my shoulders or my legs. I feel like a slut. When I walk into the room the empty eyes danced across my body. Every day I walk in, the people turn in unison and made me feel overexposed. But, I mean I’m 18 years old, and I like strapless shirts and high wasted shorts. Never mind that it was Arizona and 106 almost every day. Somehow that didn’t seem to bother the others. They all managed just fine in there tank tops they wear on top of a t-shirt. And the biker shorts that they wore underneath their arm lengthened skirts served them well I guess. And I had never been around so many young married people before. I think it’s just the culture of this small town.

I was invited to study at one of the others houses. I agreed because I wanted to see what it was like to be in a 18 year old married couples home, and I thought that maybe I could ask them if they knew what that book I found in my room is about. I mean I had so many questions. Over dinner, Jody seemed concerned about the study group I agreed to. But, she didn’t talk much about anything with me that wasn’t basketball related. And after

practice she always goes with coach somewhere. She's always shivering when she comes back to the dorms. I figure he works her out on the track and then she gets into the ice bath like we all do after practice. I don't know though. She just always seemed, different. When I finally made it to my study group, I was the only one there. I guess Sterling didn't know that I was going to be on time. Her door was left open, and I eased in the apartment without making a sound. I caught a glimpse of her. That was odd. In the crevices of her bedroom, she was changing. I noticed she wasn't wearing her undershirt or pants like usual. There she sat on the bed in a tank top. Her skin seemed almost marveled. Her skin was a very faint pale blue. Her scaly bones were what she and the others had been hiding. Her skin began to run and ooze onto her bed. When she stood up, I knew she felt me looking. I had to make a run for it. She wasn't human. As I opened the door all of the others were merging into the room. Scared, I decided to pull out my book. "I want to be like you," my lips didn't match my glassy eyes. Everyone looked amongst each other. "Ok" they said in unison. "J-j-just tell me what' it's about. The book, the picture, all of it," I slowly sat down and pretended to be interested. "What this book says, I mean in English."

Sterling spoke, "it reads "Go down Joseph", and it's about this community. We are all one. We are sealed together to redeem the nation. Iva, we help people. We save them from the others. We get married young because if we don't we can't survive a day past 19. The only way to get past that is by traveling to other parts of this fallen world and teaching the truth. We are the truth. And by the time we are 60, our children will wipe out

this world. Everyone will be one. That's what our leader, Joseph teaches." I was drenched in my own discomfort. I managed to squeeze out a few more words. "What if you are not the truth, what if this book is made up? What is Joseph fooling you?" All of their heads swung in my direction, "We are the truth! We are the truth! We are the truth," they began to chant at me. "Ok, ok, so what happens when I become like you?"

"You will help the nation, show them the right way, and we will all be sealed together; as one"

"And when I die like you?"

"Joseph says we will all be Gods"

"Ok, I'll do it."

"We must go now"

"Now? Where?"

They gripped my arms from each side and guided me into the empty, dark town. I don't remember seeing one star. I wanted to yell for help but, as we passed through the streets, I didn't see a soul. Not one light was on in the houses. I was scared, one leg staggered behind the other as they drug me through the street. I felt my heart collapse all over again.

When we finally arrived to the main road I knew we would see somebody. Not a car passed. This was the same road my mother and I drove. I remembered laughing passing the very place we stood. I saw a thick shadow gliding towards us. I buckled my knees as it got closer. They continued pulling me. Finally there was a short, stalky person before

me. “Jody?” I was excited to see the babbler. But, she acted as though she didn’t know who I was. In her eyes, I saw that she too was now one of them. “Take her to him” they all said at once. Jody grabbed my shirt. It seemed that we were walking into more darkness but as we turned the corner. There is was that beautiful white palace. The angel didn’t seem so sweet way at the top when looking down on me. Jody guided me into the golden doors. When we walked in I heard a very familiar voice. I looked around the all-white room and noticed it was made of ice. As my bones retaliated and I began to shiver all over, I heard that voice near. Jody turned me around and threw me onto an altar. I was on my knees; I looked around at this beautifully iced room. And as I looked up I saw... my coach. “Hello Iva, we’ve been expecting you.”

“Coach? What are you doing here?”

“My name is Joseph. This is my palace; this is going to be my nation.”

I began to hear a rush of water. Still shivering, I managed to turn my head. I couldn’t believe my eyes. There it was a whirlpool. It was the “holy water” that changed all of the others. I was next. I could no longer feel my own heart. I tried to swallow the big knot in my throat, but I felt numb. My Joseph picked me up and placed me in front on this violent water.

“Thanks for coming,” he whispered in my ear. I closed my eyes. He threw me in. As my body circled itself, the room seemed more beautiful. With every spin, it seemed to glow louder. I felt my heart smile one last time.

When I opened my eyes, I felt my body quivering.

“Hey! Hey!”

I felt as if I were being rocked back and forth. “Iva let’s go! They are going to come after us.” It was Jody. As I stretched my limbs I knew I couldn’t let them take me. There was now a star in the sky. I knew that we were almost out from beneath the darkness. And as my legs began to tread on the desert sand and my heart was in its place again. I felt myself glide across the emptiness. I felt the reflection of the few stars in my eyes. Jody stopped running. “Hey, come on let’s go! They are coming,” I said with a mouth full of exhaustion. But Jody just stood there in the distance; she was already sealed to the others. She couldn’t leave. I continued forward as she gave me her practiced waive as before.