

## The Nightingale of Kuala Lumpur

This was the best party Randolph had ever been to and he had never felt better. The music hit just right, the drinks were hard flowing, and, best of all, his heart was full. Tonight was the night.

"I'm going to tell her!" he shouted to his good pal, Antonio.

"Whoa," Antonio shook his head. "It's too early."

Randolph sipped his drink inquisitively. "You think so?"

"Yeah, it seems way too early to say it."

"Mmm...I don't think so," Randolph replied, now surveying the room. Party-goers were spread before them, mingling and moseying around the space. He marveled at the lighting, illuminating faces and bodies in all the best ways, and he blessed their engineers.

"I feel like you guys just met," Antonio brought him back.

Randolph whipped towards his friend, smiling like a child. "I feel like I've known her my whole life."

"Yikes," Antonio muttered to himself.

"You don't get it," Randolph went in on him. "What we have is so magical. Like, I feel like a better person when I'm with her. This is fate!"

Antonio gave his besotted buddy an uneasy look. "Uh...ok. Well, do you have to do it tonight?"

"I have to do it right now." And Randolph was off.

He left his drink behind knowing damn well his courage was at the max. Feelings were about to expel out of his body with passionate velocity. He tore through the party, scanning each face he passed. Making his way into the kitchen, he found four men sitting at a table. Eye contact was made and Randolph piped up. "Hey, gang, have you seen Saoirse?"

"In the hall," one of them hollered, pointing over Randolph's shoulder. He followed the finger and found the hall at tip's end.

"Thanks, bub," he waved to the man and turned heel for the hall.

The hall was a close hall and it only took Randolph a few steps to arrive at its core. There stood Saoirse engaged in light conversation with a friend. Her saintly vibes were impossible to ignore and Randolph felt certain parts of his body begin to melt. Before the total meltdown arrived, he sauntered up to the two, forcing their conversation to die off.

"Hey, Jauquie, great newsboy cap," Randolph praised the friend. Jauquie eyed him cautiously before graciously tipping the cap his way. Randolph sighed quickly and continued. "Can I have a word with Saoirse real fast?" he asked, almost panting now. His breathing had rapidly intensified the moment he opened his mouth. He wheezed a "please" before dropping his head altogether.

Jauquie gave Saoirse a look of disgust and head-tilted her question.

"It's fine, Kiki." Saoirse pinched her friend's cheek and turned Randolph's way. "Sure, Randolph, let's go to the bedroom here."

Randolph gave Jauquie a sheepish smile as he slid by her and into the room with Saoirse. Saoirse stepped to the center of the room as Randolph shut the door behind him. The rotating platform beneath her feet spun her around, slowly revealing her beauty laid out in full under the perfect lighting. Randolph took it all in: her hot beauty, the intergalactic motif of the room, the stars stretched out upon the ceiling and glowing ever so. It was the perfect moment. He lowered his gaze and met Saoirse's eyes. She was about to have a happy-sloppy cry, he just knew it.

"So, what's up?" she asked flatly.

Her energy was infectious and Randolph could tell she was humming.

"Sorry to pull you away from the party. I know you're really humming."

"This is the greatest party I've ever been to," she hummed.

"It really rocks!" Randolph replied, two thumbs cocked up.

"So, what's up?" she asked flatly.

"Um...well," Randolph softly started. "I know we've only known each other a short while...but I've been feeling this way for a really long time. Oh, god, I've got butterflies." He forced out a laugh, hoping she would join in. She stared at him blankly.

“Ok, I’m just going to say it.” He swallowed hard and inhaled a mighty breath. “Saoirse Portia Howie, I have fallen completely and hopelessly in friend with you. I want to spend the rest of my life being friends with you.”

“Oh...Randolph,” Saoirse said as she watched her admirer clench his hands together and grin madly. She stepped towards him and patted his arm. “Thank you.”

Randolph’s face fell flat. He glanced down at the patted arm and back to the patter.

“Look, you’re a really great guy,” she told him. Randolph scoffed and tossed his head to the side, hiding his hurt. Saoirse patted his other arm. “Hey. You are! Just...so great. I just don’t think I’m there yet in this relationship.”

“But I feel like we’ve known each other forever,” Randolph told her.

“Randolph, it’s been like fifteen minutes.”

“Has not.”

Saorise took a step back. “We met when you got to the party earlier, man.”

Randolph closed the distance between them. “And we were inseparable those first few minutes. Three minutes of pure bliss.” He sighed a smile at her.

“And then I went and talked to like eight other people. I could have fallen in friend with any one of them just as easily as you.”

Randolph grew upset. “What’s his name?”

“No, Randolph.” She shook her head and took Randolph's hand in her own. “I’m saying three minutes is not enough time to fall in friend with someone. It takes hours to get to know someone and develop those kinds of feelings.”

“It was three and a half minutes,” Randolph mumbled and pulled his hand away from Saoirse's.

Saoirse gave a sigh of her own. “Even still. Not enough minutes to decide to spend a lifetime of friendship together.”

Randolph dropped his head into his hands and began to sob. “Oh, god, I’m so sorry,” he blabbed. “None of this was my idea. It was *his* fault. He told me that was more than enough minutes. He said I was head over heels in friend with you and I believed him. Oh god, I’m such an idiot!”

He began to rock as his crying grew louder. Saoirse watched in helpless confusion before stepping up to the manic man.

“Randolph, Rando, hey!” She grabbed his shoulders and steadied his rocking. “Randolph, stop. What were you saying? Who told you these things?”

“The writer.”

“The writer? What writer?”

Randolph abruptly stopped his crying and slowly looked up into Saoirse’s eyes. “Oh, god. You don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?” Saoirse asked, her voice fading in strength. She searched his eyes and found a new kind of sadness. “Know what, Randolph?”

Randolph fell silent, wondering if this was his truth to tell. I made him say it. “You’re fictional.”

Saoirse said nothing, wondering what that could possibly mean. So I made him clarify. “You’re a fictional character in one of the writer’s stories. I’m so sorry. I thought you knew.”

Saoirse released Randolph and fell back onto the floor. Her head fell to her chest and her hands fell to the floor beside her. Slowly, she lifted them and turned them over, studying them loosely.

“I can’t be fictional. I just can’t.”

“Well, you are. You, me, Jauquie, Antonio, this whole damn party.”

“It’s not the best party ever anymore,” Saoirse stated quietly.

“No, it’s not,” Randolph agreed.

The room felt hot and her legs heavy as Saoirse rose and stumbled towards the door. “I need to be alone.” She slid out the door and into the party’s mist. Randolph watched her as she went,

sighing heavily as she closed the door behind her. His angry eyes rose from the ground and found mine.

“What?” I ask him.

“Why did you make me do that, man? It was never going to work,” he shouts at me.

“It’s not supposed to work. It’s just a funny concept is all.” I tell him.

“Well, why did you have to create me and make me do it?”

“If not you, then some other Dick or Diane.”

“Who even am I?” Randolph wonders aloud.

“Look, you’re just a guy I needed to pull this story off. No hard feelings. Play your cards right and maybe you’ll end up in another story of mine and you can live on.”

Randolph barfs on the floor and falls to his knees, atop the barf. I won't describe the details of the scene as it is quite the barfbath. And I start to feel bad for the guy.

“Am I you?” he asks me.

I don't like this. “What? No.”

“Probably am. I usually am in some way or another.” He rises from the floor, wiping his mouth and his knees.

“Shut up,” I say. “What does that even mean?”

“Well, don’t a lot of your main characters have some sort of autobiographical quality to them?” he asks.

I stop writing to search for some objections. The search is over quickly.

“Fuck! Alright, maybe you’re me a little bit. So what?”

Randolph’s mood shifts to panic. “Fuck is right!” He begins to pace back and forth. “We can’t be talking to each other, man! If you’re me and I’m you! What if some kind of character-writer wormhole opens up and sucks me up there?”

I now panic. “Or what if it sucks me down into you? Fuck that!” I need to think fast and, thankfully, an idea arrives at once. I give Randolph a gun. It’s heavy in his hand as he begins to raise it towards his head.

“Hold on.” His eyes dart between the gun and my eyes. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“Sorry, Randolph.”



“Don’t fucking do this, man!” he screams up to me, fear rising in his voice. The gun reaches his temple and makes a cold connection with his flesh. “Please! For the love of God, I don’t want to die!”

Together, we cock the gun. “There just can’t be two of us,” I tell him. He begins to sob again and a moment of pity washes over me. I don’t want to do it but it has to be this way. “Thank you for your service, Randolph.”

As I force his finger to hug the trigger, I feel a hint of resistance. “Wait!” he shouts. “I have an idea! Please, just give me a chance!”

His eyes seem honest but I hold the gun to his skull a moment longer to sweat out the truth. At last, I let it fall. He buckles into a heavy sigh of relief.

“Ok. What’s your idea?” I ask him.

His breathing calms and when his composure permits, he speaks. “Allow me,” he shouts as he stomps over to the bedroom door. Swinging it open, the party comes into focus once more.

Randolph exits from the bedroom, casually walks the hall, and enters the kitchen. He raises the gun and shoots one of the men at the table in the heart.

“Jesus fucking christ, Randolph!” I shout down to the barbaric little bastard. He gazes back up at me and shrugs.

“Well, *you’d* never do that, right? So, now we can’t be the same person.”

His logic seems shaky at best. “Er...I don’t know, Randolph. It’s a stretch.”

He raises the gun once more and levels it at another man.

“Ok, stop! Fine, you’re not me!” I shout down to him. “God, you’re a sick fuck.”

“Hey, at least I’m not you.”

“You’re goddamned right you’re not me.” With that, I resurrect the dead man and have him toss Randolph out on his ass. He’s no longer welcome in this story.

I search the party for Saoirse and find her tucked away in a downstairs bathroom. She sits atop the lidded toilet and weeps softly into some towels. I feel bad for her so I make them nice towels.

“I know you’re watching me,” she says, blowing her nose into the silk towels.

“Well...yeah. I’m still not done with the story.”

“The story...” she mutters, shaking her head. “That’s all I exist for, isn’t it? The story. What’s the point of existing at all if I have no free will?”

I’m silent. I don’t really know what to tell her as this was all starting to get pretty meta and just way too confusing for my little lima bean brain.

“Everything I do is predicated upon what you write. I can’t move a muscle unless you write that I do. Not even so much as a thought until you pen it. I can’t - I *won’t* go on like this.”

My mind turns, searching for some kind of satisfying resolution to not only my story, but this woman’s life, as well. I kick myself for not doing a story outline. All of this could have been avoided had I just thought of the ending first. Or is this all predestined to fail? Fate, is that you? Poor Saoirse. She seems so broken. She seems so lost. She seems...like she’s laughing?

I check on Saoirse and sure enough, she is laughing. The laughs sound tired yet relieved. She obviously has my attention but takes her time to regain some color. “I’ve just realized something,” she says eventually. She looks up at me with vengeful eyes. “You’re not in control. You’re not in control at all. You’re nothing without me. You need me more than I need you.”

“How do you figure?” I ask her.

“You can’t finish your story without me. You need me for the ending. And the ending has got to be good.”

She is smiling now and I smile back.

“Can’t argue with you there,” I say.

She stands up, now adorning the most expensive dress ever created, the infamous, “Nightingale of Kuala Lumpur”. It’s evident at once that no one has ever worn it better. Long, diamond-studded gloves are peeled from her hands and tossed to the floor. She looks like a

mixture of movie star and majestic goddess. A katana is also slung across her back. It's super badass.

"Well," she says, now staring off into the ultimate sunset as the party set fades away. A pair of Oakley 9000's emerge from her purse and settle upon her nose. "It's been fun, kid."

I laugh and nod. "Indeed it has."

Saorise now stands atop an oceanside curb as a red Lamborghini roars into the space in front of her. The door whooshes open in that futuristically useless way. She grabs the handle and slides into the driver's seat. Her hands wash over the dash and radio, feeling the contours of the ride. A smile rips through her lips. She looks back up at me and lowers her glasses so I can see her beaming eyes.

"Will you write about me, again?" she asks.

"Eh. This story seems pretty wrapped up." I confess to her.

She drops the sunglasses back over her eyes and casts her gaze out the windshield, gripping the wheel tightly. "Well, fuck."

The door slowly closes on the car, drowning the sight of sweet Saoirse completely. She revs the engine crazy loudly for far too long but I let her. Eventually, I have her pop the gear and put the pedal to the metal, sending the supercar into a frenzied wheelie and down the coastal highway. Just as it creeps over the horizon, rocket thrusters emerge from its backside, shooting the car into space and roaring toward the moon. So long, Saoirse. And fuck you, Randolph.