

## Tinkerbell Gets Made

I met the guy in a patch of rutted dirt next to an onion farm. The hand-off took less than thirty seconds, and when his little Honda tore back onto the empty road like he was late for his wedding, I knew something was wrong.

I looked at what he had given me: a little sausage-shaped package wrapped in a latex party balloon. When I pinched it, the stuff inside didn't feel right.

I tore it open, and bit my lip. It wasn't heroin, it was weed. Pretty good weed, but still.

When I got home, I called my contact. "Uh, this isn't what it was supposed to be, and I'm not risking my ass for a forty dollar bag."

"Yeah, they didn't want to give you the other stuff yet, not until you'd proven yourself."

"I'm not running this in there. No fucking way."

"Okay, okay, it's cool. I understand. Let me make some calls."

The first thing next morning, I met a different guy in the empty parking lot of a hamburger stand. He smiled at me shyly as he slipped the stuff into my palm, his eyes wandering over my face and my tits. He looked confused, until he saw the track marks on my arms. Then he leered, but there was a touch of pity in it.

"You okay?" he asked. "You got everything you need?" He had a tear tattooed on his cheek, the mark of a killer, but for some reason I felt drawn to him. I imagined for a moment telling him no, that I didn't have *anything* I needed. I'd get in his car, he'd get me blasted and fuck me in the backseat, but then maybe he'd discover I'm funny, that I'm good company, and he'd take me with him on his next run down to Juarez. We'd turn up the stereo and tell jokes the

whole way, we'd eat asada tacos at all the best food trucks, and he'd help wean me off the dope because *Thou Shalt Not Shoot the Stash* is one of the commandments of drug running.

We'd save our money and retire before we lost the game. We'd buy a farm in Michoacán and grow old together.

I pulled my head out of this daydream and smiled. "Yeah, I've got everything I need," I lied.

"What's your name?" he asked.

I chewed the inside of my cheek, but for some reason I told him. "Gracie," I said, and this made him laugh. Then he looked at me thoughtfully. "Your haircut is cute, you look like Tinkerbell." He turned away, walked back to his car. "I'll see you later, Tink."

I watched him drive off, wondering if I'd just been given my gangster name.

I did a shot to calm my nerves, my hands shaking so badly that I missed the vein twice, giving myself stinging lumps on my arms. Then I started the car and drove eastwards, sticking my hand out the window to cup the cool morning air. I sang along with Miguel Aceves Mejia on the stereo as the sun spread golden over the desert hills, the dope tickling my spine with warm fingers.

The prison was a slab of concrete amidst wheat fields, the guard tower standing out against the midsummer sky like a curse in church. In the parking lot I put my hand down my shorts and stashed the package. It was more uncomfortable than I'd been expecting, and when I got out and made the long trek to the entrance I was sure I was walking funny. I could feel phantom eyes on me, and paranoia crept in, but I took a deep breath, let it out. *Everything's*

*cool. No one knows.* But it was another thought that truly sustained me: I didn't care if I got busted, because prison would be an improvement in my life right now.

By the time I got to the security desk, I was smiling and chatting with the guards, my fear all but gone. They checked my ID, patted me down, searched my shoes and pockets, and passed me through a metal detector. I was in.

Masa was waiting for me in the visitors' room, and he smiled when he saw me. He gave me a hug. "You got it, *guerita*?" he murmured against my ear. "I hear you had some trouble."

"I got it," I muttered.

We sat down in some plastic chairs, which were laid out in a circle in the middle of the room. It wasn't a normal visitors' day, it was a powwow, a sacred Native American ceremony, and I felt a twinge of guilt.

A man came around with a bowl of burning sage, pouring the smoke over us to purify our spirits. His face was hard and carved up by suffering, but he smiled slightly at me, his eyes kind, almost tender. Masa nudged me as the guy moved on. "That's Daniel. He's serving life 'cause he shot a dude execution style, right in front of his mom while she begged him not to."

"Jesus," I said.

There was dancing, and singing, and speeches, lots of noise and distraction. Guards stood along the walls. The one closest to us, a woman with mousy hair and a generous stockpile of flesh, seemed to be watching me. "That big bitch has her eye on me," I whispered to Masa, and he snickered.

"Who, the Rhino? She probably just has a crush on you."

“If she sat on my face, you’d probably never see me again,” I said, and he hunched over his knees, laughing.

Then I gathered my courage and stood up stiffly. “I’m going to the bathroom,” I said.

He quit laughing. “Have fun.”

I approached the Rhino, starting to sweat. “I need to use the restroom,” I said, and she looked me over with tiny brown eyes, her stern expression softened by the dimples in her cheeks. I followed her out through double blast doors, noticing how the fabric of her khakis stretched taut over her meaty ass, thinking she had a lot of nooks and crannies in which she could smuggle things, if she wanted.

She patted me down, running her hands along my sides, my legs. Then she let me into the bathroom.

I locked the door and pulled down my shorts, sitting on the stainless steel toilet to extract the package. I stuffed it in the heel of my boot and flushed the toilet, my heart galloping. Would she check my shoes before I went back to the powwow? I ran water at the sink, staring at my reflection in the polished steel mirror and sending up a prayer: *Please don’t let her check my shoes.* I imagined God up in Heaven, looking up from whatever he was doing - reading *The New Yorker*, probably - and smiling down upon me. “Go forth and deliver thy drugs in peace, blessed child. I’ll tell the big lady not to check thy shoes.” I watched my lips twitch in the mirror, then shut off the water.

The Rhino was waiting for me outside the door, and I smiled at her. Sweat was running down the back of my neck, trickling all the way down my spine. *Please don’t check my shoes. Please please please.*

She told me to lift my arms, my shirt sticking to my sweaty skin as she ran her hands down my ribs and caressed me under my breasts. Then she checked the pockets of my shorts, her thick fingers pinching the creases in the denim. I held my breath, the drab walls seeming to press in closer.

“Okay, you’re good,” she said.

I was dizzy with relief as she let me back in the visitor’s room.

Masa was trying to look cool, but his eyes were a little wide. “You get it out?” he asked, and I nodded. He let out a breath and grinned lopsidedly. “Which place were you keeping it in?”

Unaccountably, I blushed. It was ridiculous. He grinned wider. “Your *pussy*?” When I nodded he laughed. “It’s gonna bring a good price in here. Where you have it now?” My eyes darted to my boot, and he looked down. There was a bulge in the side where the dope was, and he cursed under his breath. “Everyone’s gonna see that, *guerita*.”

I leaned down and pretended I was itching my foot, trying to pull it out, but it was wedged in tight against my heel, and wouldn’t budge. I tugged harder. “Tsst!” Masa hissed. “The Rhino!” I glanced up to find her watching me, and had to gulp down the acid that foamed into my throat. I sat up again.

“You’re not smooth at all, girl,” he said, and I told him to shut up, wiping sweat from my upper lip. The Rhino looked away, and I bent down again.

I yanked hard, stretching the latex until I worried it would break, but the fucking thing still wouldn’t come out. I cursed. The lady sitting next to me was watching me with a horrified

look, but I ignored her. The Rhino was talking to the guard next to her, her dimples showing, and while she was looking away I tugged desperately, feeling that by now it must be blisteringly obvious to every semi-astute person in the room what I was doing. *Please don't let the guards look over at me, I prayed. Please please please.*

God looked over his reading glasses and winked. Finally, the dope pulled loose and I palmed it, passing it frantically to Masa. He sucked in his breath as he took it.

I sat up quickly. The lady next to me looked disgusted. A couple of the prisoners across from us were smirking openly. But none of the guards seemed any the wiser, and I leaned back in my chair, the tension draining out of me. It was Masa's problem now. "I've gotta go get this thing up my ass," he announced quietly, and got up to go to the bathroom.

They were serving frybread and stew, and I went to get some while he was gone, cheerful and giddy with relief. The guy in front of me in line smiled. "You Masa's girl?" He had a swastika tattooed on his neck and his eyes were loose in their sockets.

"Naw, we're just friends."

He grinned wider. "What's your name?"

"Tinkerbell."

"Tinkerbell! That's cute."

I got some food for Masa, too, and handed it to him when he came back. He had a weird look on his face as he sat down. "I know, it's big, right?" I said, and he laughed.

"Tasted really good, though."

"Fuck you, Masa."

“Just teasing you.” But he probably wasn’t.

“It’s not going to bring such a good price after where you put it now.”

“Don’t be so sure,” he said, and I snorted into my stew.

After we all finished eating, Daniel stood up and explained that part of the potlatch tradition was to give gifts, and he came around handing out little trinkets the prisoners had made. When he got to me he handed me a pair of tiny, beaded moccasins on a leather cord, and smiled meaningfully. “Thank you for coming,” he said, sounding truly sincere, as if I’d done a heroic deed today.

When I got back out to my car, I hid my head in my hands and laughed. “I just did that shit,” I muttered to myself.

I did another shot, then started the drive home, giggling as I imagined myself with “Tinkerbell” tattooed on my neck in sprawling script.