

“Poe: Nevermore” – Rachel M. Martens

Head Injuries

I didn't know how far Frost's precinct was from The Heights, but he made it in under five minutes. I suppose being a cop made traffic violations seem much less risky. I heard the roar of an engine and uneasily pulled myself upright to a dazed seat on the curb. The last thing I wanted was to imply that I had been lying on the sidewalk ever since I called him. When I saw the black Viper raging up the street, I blinked a few times to ascertain that I wasn't hallucinating, only believing that Frost really owned a Viper of all things when he slowed and parked beside the curb, jumping out of the driver's side and dashing around the front of the sportscar to stoop beside me, eyes wild with concern and mild panic. “Jesus Christ! What the hell happened to you? There's blood all over...Jesus. Come on, get in.” He put his arm around my shoulder to help me slowly up and into the car. Even as I fell into the passenger seat, I grimaced and thought of how badly all that blood was going to stain such an expensive car. Before I could protest, though, Frost had slammed the door, the noise rattling my brain, and made it around the car and into the driver's seat. Instantly, he put the car into gear and tore down the quiet suburban street at easily twice the speed limit. “So? What happened?” he asked.

“I slipped on the ice,” I lied. “There weren't any homicide detectives around to catch me today.”

Frost looked at me piercingly and my eyes went wild. “Dear God, don't look at me!” I shouted. “You're going fifty-two in a twenty-five zone! At least watch the road!”

He rolled his eyes and obliged, replying grimly, “And how did you smash open the back of your skull and break your nose in one fall?”

I gritted my teeth and shut my eyes against the spinning traffic lights dazzling me. I could hear my heart pounding like a massive drum in my head. “You’re giving me a migraine.”

“Judging by the injuries you’ve incurred, I’d say you’ve done that yourself.”

“I did not do this myself!” I snapped. “Why in God’s name would I do this to myself?”

Frost looked at me again, something very dark in his eyes, as if I had said something he hadn’t expected. As if I had told him a horrible secret I hadn’t intended to and he sympathized with it. “Then who did it to you? That’s the mark of a ring at the corner of your mouth, Poe.”

I touched my mouth and winced at the pain where the bruise from Mr. Aaron’s ring was no doubt displayed. I back-pedaled, trying to get my thoughts straight even as I realized that my jean jacket and shirt were drenched in blood, as if I had showered in it. “The ice.”

“What were you doing here, Poe? Who were you seeing?”

“Coworker,” I moaned weakly. My head was pounding like he was beating it with a sledgehammer.

“I don’t believe you.”

“God damn it, Frost, I’ve lost at least a few pints of blood, I’m concussed, and I’ve been lying on the sidewalk for ten minutes. Are you here to help me or interrogate

me?” I snapped at him. “And for God’s sake, stop running red lights or we’ll both have head injuries!”

He tightened his eyes in frustration and stopped for the next red light, the silence and tension a living presence in the car. “Why didn’t you ask your ‘coworker’ to take you to the hospital? Or even better, call 911?”

“Shit,” I muttered. “I can’t go to a hospital. Your father’s a surgeon. You must know enough to stitch this up, right?”

His icy eyes lit on me like I was clinically insane. “Poe, you need an MRI. Even if I could stitch you up, there could be serious brain damage.”

“I’m insulted.”

He snorted harshly and gunned the next light slightly early. “Very funny. You know what I mean. Now, answer the question. Any question, really.”

“I can’t afford medical bills.”

“That’s a lousy reason. You don’t have insurance? And I’m sure your landlord would understand that you need an MRI. In any case, aren’t your foster-parents around? Can’t they loan you money?”

I groaned. “Stop being so damn logical, it’s pissing me off. My landlord would not understand and my foster-parents would not give me a loan.”

“Then I’ll foot the bill. Who were you meeting?”

I gazed at him through the concussion-induced fog descending over me in mild disgust. “You are not paying my medical bills. Clearly, judging by your car, you have daddy’s money to throw around, but I am not a charity case!”

“No, but you are important to me.”

Those words were enough to deaden every argument in my brain. They melted my sense of logic ten times as much as the concussion had. “I don’t understand.”

“What’s not to understand?” he asked quietly. “You’re my friend, I care about you, and I want you to get an MRI. And fine, I have money to spend. Think of it as me paying the hospital to satisfy my worries about your possible brain damage. It’s not helping you, since you’re obviously not concerned. It’s for my own sake.”

I shook my head, immediately regretting the motion. The entire car seemed to do a cartwheel. “Why am I important? Why do you care?” The concept simply did not compute. No one had ever cared.

Frost pulled up at the curb beside the hospital, cutting the engine and turning to face me head-on. The ocean-depth beneath the ice in his eyes showed me once more how foolish I was to try to lie to a man like this. He knew I was broken and I was pretty sure he knew how it had happened. What was the point in hiding from someone so empathetic and so intelligent? “You were visiting your foster-parents, right? They made you miserable as a kid, they showed you that people don’t give a damn, and they did this to you.”

I shut my eyes to escape his words and the kaleidoscope effect of my concussion. “Poe,” he whispered. “I want to help you, but keeping it bottled up when that clearly doesn’t work isn’t going to save you. There’s no point in being strong if being strong nearly kills you,” he gasped urgently, pleading with me.