

The Nightingale

Shontelle wasn't too comfortable letting the children go trick or treating by themselves but her son was almost 11 now. Surely, he could keep an eye on his little sister, right? She heard them laughing as they stepped into the chilly night, with the crackling of leaves under their feet.

Less than an hour later, she heard someone at the door once again and expected to see ghosts and goblins from the neighborhood. However, it was her children. The children silently walked past, handing her their candy bags for inspection. She walked to the kitchen table and dumped the contents of her daughter's bag on the table.

That's when she saw a nightingale stiff with rigor mortis drop from the bag and hit the table with a thud. Shontelle gasped and quickly retracted her hands from the table, her long-nailed fingers resembling the shadow cast by the barren tree limbs outside her window.

"Marina! Victor! Here! Now!"

Victor appeared in the kitchen archway first and Marina sulked back in a beat after him into Shontelle's view.

"What is this?!" Shontelle asked motioning to the bird.

"Don't know," Victor blurted out without blinking.

"Mhm," Shontelle shifted her gaze towards her daughter. "Marina?"

Her daughter was looking down, kicking her foot. "Ayedunno," she mumbled.

"Marina, look at me." Her daughter didn't move. "Marina," she said sternly, snapping her finger. Marina slowly looked up at her mother, turned her head to her brother who was staring back at her relatively composed, but with the hint of a snarl on his face, then turned back to face her mother.

"Umm, it waaaasssss... I was gonna, um I— Victor shot it with his slingshot— I wanted to save it!"

"Ugh, twerp!" Victor shoved his sister's arm, and she hit the doorway with a thud.

You couldn't see who she grabbed first with how quickly she sprung up, but in her one arm she wrapped Marina into a protective hug and held Victor in a talon-like grip.

"Marina, are you okay?" Shontelle asked. Marina whimpered out a muffled *mhm* into her mother's chest. Shontelle's gaze narrowed on her son. "You don't ever touch your sister like that again, understand?" Victor nodded in response. "Then say it."

"I understand," Victor replied.

"Good, then go bring me that slingshot," Shontelle released her grip from Victor.

"Now."

Victor blinked. "I'm sorry, Marina..." he said, backing out of the archway.

"It's okay," Marina sniffled.

Shontelle rubbed her daughter's back and then turned around and walked over to the counter. She grabbed a Ziploc and filled it with some ice.

"For your boo-boo, sweetheart." Marina took the bag in her hand and pressed it on her other arm hanging by her side and walked out of the kitchen. Victor came back arm outstretched with his slingshot. "This is why I never wanted you to have it; I knew you would get into all kinds of trouble."

"But, it was Dad's and he said-"

"Dad is gone. You listen to me, and only me now."

"Bu-"

"Don't even. Just say 'okay.'"

"Okay."

"Better," Shontelle said setting the slingshot down. She reached for another Ziploc and turned it inside out to grab the nightingale. "What did you do with the bird, Victor?"

"I didn't touch it."

"Victor, don't lie to me."

"I didn't touch it! I just went and got my slingshot like you told me!"

Shontelle paused. "Marina?" she called out looking into the halls. She looked down and saw tiny puddles of water from where the bag was dripping melting ice trailing down the hallway. She started walking the path and Victor followed behind.

The two followed it around the corner and into the dining room where they saw Marina kneeling on top of the table with chalk in her hand. When Shontelle got closer, she saw candles burning and the dead bird inside the center of a chalk-drawn pentagram.

"What are you doing?!" Shontelle shouted as she grabbed her daughter off the table and held her.

"Victor hurts. But it's okay, 'cause I can make it better."

There was a gust of wind and the dining room shutters blew open; a hissing sound filled the room. The pentagram was empty. Shontelle looked around the room and perched atop her china cabinet were two nightingales; one ice-white, one pitch-black, both with a red mark on their chest from where Victor's slingshot hit the bird.

"What... how... Where did you learn how to do that?" Shontelle asked.

Marina smiled at her mother, "Dad showed me."