

“Claire TV”

A short-story by Mary Margaret Park

The ER is frantic. A woman named Claire has just been brought in through the ambulance bay. She’s lying on a gurney, whipping her head side-to-side; disoriented. She’s dressed in a ratty pair of gym shorts and a green tank-top. Her eyes widen as she stutters, struggling to speak. She rises up on her elbows, “Out of here, get me out of here.”

“Can’t Claire, haven’t received your orders yet.” the orderly replies.

He disappears; Claire inches her elbow towards a pair of scissors.

I’m not waiting any longer.

She carefully scoots the scissors towards her right-hand, where it hangs straining and useless, bounded by a narrowing circle of steel.

*F*cking cop, f*cking asshole...*

She’s about to grab the scissors when another orderly enters. He narrows his eyes,

“What are you doing?”

Claire smiles, lighting up her face, (but not her eyes).

“Nothing...um...”

The orderly looks down at the scissors, shaking his head disgustedly. He stows them in a nearby drawer.

“Ma’am, you aren’t supposed to be touching these things.”

“Oh, uh, sorry, listen, I have to use the restroom. Can you help me?”

She shakes her arms, rattling the handcuffs for emphasis. The orderly shakes his head,

“I’ll have to go check with the doctor first.”

She rattles the cuffs violently against the gurney’s railing, “God damn, I have to pee, I’m going to piss all over myself. You’ll have to clean it up. Come on; just undo the cuffs, okay?”

The orderly ducks back into the hallway, calling back over his shoulder.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

Claire zones out, wagging her head like a bobble-head doll; as if her essence is being drawn further into her expressionless eyes. Her mind dives, deep into a faraway hollow; her thoughts dance crazily, just out of reach.

My mind...got to get it together.

Oh God, my babies, I’ve lost my babies... she remembers.

A renewed sense of anguish washes over Claire; the circling thoughts become dim, receding. She tries fixing her mind on other things, but it’s useless; these wisps of logic are literally running away from her, disappearing, one by one. The orderly returns,

“Okay, I’ll take you to the bathroom. You’re not going to pull anything on me are you?”

Claire smiles, tucking a strand of stringy dark hair behind her ear, “Of course not, just let me pee, please?”

The orderly steps out into the hallway, motioning to a police officer.

“I need you to open these -- the lady has to use the restroom.”

Claire rolls her eyes.

*F*cking cop, f*ck, f*ck, f*ck...*

She rocks her head faster, her eyes widening.
Focus, Oh God, my kids, get it together.

Her expression grows determined – *Focus.*

Claire exits the bathroom; the orderly clasps the cold metal rings over her wrists once again. When she gets back to her cubicle, the camera-man is waiting. Her shoulders hitch as she sobs quietly. She hurls a water pitcher at him, “My God, where is your f*cking decency?”

Oh God, my Mattie and Sally, I've lost them, they're gone.

Claire's mind circles down, spiraling to earlier in the day... She and her husband Bob met with Doc Reynolds, the Producer of American Kidnapping to withdraw from the reality show. The publicity had pushed the kidnapper over the edge, further endangering the kids. Doc wouldn't take no for an answer, said the contract was binding. *Oh my God, what have we done?* She pulls her thoughts back to the present, a second camera man has joined the first and the general hubbub is growing as the crew of American kidnapping floods into the small room.

Her heart stutters in her chest when two police officers enter the room.

Oh God, they've come to question me again.

She glares at them accusingly; the grim determination draining out of her face. The older officer steps forward, his face grave.

“Claire, we found Matt and Sally.”

She freezes, her circling thoughts threatening to snap.

“Are they okay? Are my babies okay?”

The officer looks to the side, unable to meet her eyes.

“I'm sorry, they're dead.....Matt and Sally are dead.”

Claire pushes her knuckles into the ridge of her cheek. She's not dreaming; sickening sadness coils into her stomach. *Oh God my babies, I've lost my babies.*

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