

BEFORE THE FLOOD

by Kirby Ferguson

I hadn't been drinking, but the deafening volume, bumping bodies and flashing lights of the club had numbed my senses. I solidly slammed into a very large person. He didn't move, except for his beer, which toppled from his grasp and exploded silently. My gaze rose from the shattered bottle and climbed his body, my heart beating faster the higher my stare went without encountering a head. He stood around six-five and weighed a solid two-twenty.

"Shit, man, I'm sorry," I yelled, knowing I'd never be heard over the thunderous dance music. The giant didn't respond for around ten seconds, only glaring at me, and when he finally did I heard nothing but lip-read 'fuck' many times. Suddenly I couldn't stop my eye from twitching. Realizing I no longer had control of myself as I like to, I decided to retreat and pull myself together.

"I'm really sorry," I hollered. I turned and retreated back to my table on the upper floor, from which you could look down on the dance floor. I walked to the edge of the balcony and saw the large fellow, along with a few friends, standing in a large mass of men surrounding the dancefloor because, of course, men can't dance together. He now seemed absorbed in making salacious facial expressions at women passing him. I assumed he'd found a new distraction and approached my friends' table feeling more at ease.

"What took you?" Lisa asked as I handed her her drink.

"I ran into some big asshole and smashed his beer. He--"

"That wouldn't happen to be him," she interrupted, pointing down to the dancefloor area. Sure enough, there he was, pointing up at me, casting sideward glances to his pals and muttering something.

"Oh Jesus. How am I gonna avoid this? I have no interest in fighting this guy."

Lisa chuckled.

"Yeah, ha ha. C'mon, let's... run away."

"Mmmm, tough guy"

"We'll take the back exit," and I bolted up. "C'mon, guys, let's go." I yelled, turning to Charles, Andy and Mark, the rest of our friends.

"It's only one!" Mark cried.

"Well, we're leaving." I took Lisa's arm and headed to the exit.

"Hey, Nick!" Charles called to me. I turned. "We'll be out in a couple minutes. We'll just finish our drinks."

"Super."

We emerged into the cool, quiet night with our ears ringing. A light rain had begun to fall. "Well, well," I heard someone shout to our right. I turned, knowing who it was. Good speed for a big man, I thought absently. The big fellow and his pals were now about a half a block away and walking unsteadily toward me. He stopped only inches away. Warm, alcoholic gusts of breath blew in my face as he spoke.

"Ya owe me a fuckin' beer," he groaned in slurred, almost incomprehensible speech.

My fear had transformed into disgusted impatience by now.

"I'll get you a beer for Christ's sake, now will you cut out this shit? Grow up, ass--"

A massive fist crashed into my nose like a boulder and sent me teetering back. My nose throbbing and head spinning, I felt Lisa put her arm around me as I regained my senses. I looked up with darkened vision and saw him walking swayingly towards me, muttering, "Shoulda watched where you were goin', clumsy, fuckin'..."

Jesus, I'm going to get humiliated right here in front of my best friend, I thought. In a desperate attempt to show some kind of masculinity, I lunged forward at the giant, but he simply grabbed me by the shirt and threw me to the pavement. I lay there face down awaiting the blows, but they didn't come. I heard a rustling struggle above me and looked up. The giant was gone. All I saw was a line of my friends kicking and punching. The big fellow and his friends were now a block away running. I was shocked at their cowardice.

"Get that, asshole!" Lisa screamed from my side. The dull smucks of fists hitting face and back and guts were the only sounds on the deserted street. Despite my humiliating exit from the bout, I felt proud at our revenge on the jocks. Just when I began to get concerned that my friends might kill him, the line parted and revealed the hulk writhing on the pavement. The street sparkled with falling rain about him. My friends whooped and yelled insults at the broken giant. "C'mon back to the club, Nick," Charles called to me as they headed back. I didn't respond and only stared at this man rolling around in a huge puddle of blood. He now struggled up to a sitting position, his legs spread wide apart, and looked around with swollen, bleary eyes, blinking slowly. His nose was swollen to bursting it seemed, dark blood poured from it and down his chin, beard-like, and covered his pastel coloured shirt.

"Oh God," Lisa murmured.

He attempted to stand but stumbled awkwardly back down.

I rose stiffly, turned with Lisa and walked away, the rain coming down harder than ever, chilling and drenching us. We reached her car; I went around to the passenger's side while she went to the driver's. She leaned back on the side of the car, her head back, eyes closed. Her shoulders trembled. And still the rain came down harder.

"He's trying to wash us away," she whispered.