

Facebender, Nina

START

NINA. I was out of my mind.

FACEBENDER. When we come to these competitions, it's OUR space, get it? It might smell like old sweat and stale beer in here, but it's supposed to be safe.

NINA. I didn't mean all that stuff you heard me say to David. That wasn't the real me! He . . . he turns me into a rage monster. It's really gnarly. It's like I took a time machine right back to our breakup. But I'm not that person anymore, I promise. I'm a million times sorry, okay?

(FACEBENDER is unconvinced.)

NINA. Hey, remember San Diego? Remember when I calmed you down, and we all worked as, like, a killer squad, and then you absolutely slayed? And then you added me to the group text? That's the real me. That's The Nina.

(FACEBENDER regards her for a moment, then relents. His demeanor softens. His façade is still dropped.)

FACEBENDER. Do you want to know how I got into air guitar?

NINA. I would love to know.

(During this speech, FACEBENDER walks behind the bar and grabs himself a drink, before joining NINA in front of the bar again.)

FACEBENDER. I work for the County of San Diego.

NINA. What do you do? None of you ever talk about your jobs.

FACEBENDER. Because when we're here, everything outside is irrelevant. Except for right now, when I'm telling you this story.

NINA. Got it.

FACEBENDER. Do you know what a Public Guardian is?

NINA. Like . . . Batman?

FACEBENDER. *(laughing)* No. Nothing like Batman. If a person, usually a poor person, dies, and there's no family or friends or will that can be located, somebody still has to clean out their apartment, and bury their body, and tie up their loose ends. That's my job. The apartment-cleaning bit.

NINA. Whoa. How do you get a job like that?

(Note: During the following monologue, it's important that FACEBENDER does not feel sorry for himself at all. These are the

facts of his reality, and communicating them to NINA will make her understand why air guitar is vital.)

FACEBENDER. Well, it was a match made in heaven. Nobody wants that job, and at the time, nobody wanted me. I was bumming around, couldn't find anything steady. Had run up some sizeable debts. I heard about this job from a buddy, and it sounded easy enough, so I applied. And I got it. You basically just have to be willing to walk into disgusting apartments.

Sometimes we have to wear hazmat suits and bootees. These people can be dead for weeks, or months, before anyone finds them. Before anyone cares. Sometimes there are flies, or roaches, or mice. Lots of times, people's apartments are just full of wall-to-wall junk. This one lady last year, died standing up and stayed that way. There wasn't room in her place to fall over.

We work in pairs, to keep us from stealing. It's weird, seeing what strangers kept in their closets, what they ate, what movies they watched, what kind of toilet paper they used. We go through everything, looking for signs of relationships. Is there an address book? A business card? A computer? Who are the people in these photographs? Are they still alive, would they care that this person is dead? It's the most depressing kind of archeology, but somebody has to do it. And that somebody in San Diego County has been me, for the last few years. I've been through a lot of partners. But I'll tell you one thing.

NINA. *(rapt)* What?

FACEBENDER. When I die, somebody is gonna know. Right away. Lots of people. I used to go through my life like I was gonna live forever, but now I know. It could be any day. But I won't go out anonymous. No stranger is going to have to pick through my stuff, wondering if there's anybody out in the world who'd care to inherit the \$300 in my bank account. Before I started playing air guitar, I hadn't seen my daughter, or her mother, in like six years. I felt like too much time had passed, and I was embarrassed to reach out to them. Now, we hang out at least once a month. It's totally awkward, but it's happening. It's getting there.

(Unseen by NINA and FACEBENDER, GOLDEN and SHREDDY enter.)

FACEBENDER. My list of friends gets longer and longer. I text them every day. I hug them every time I see them. When I die, there are gonna be so many broken-hearted punks playing sad, sad air guitar solos at my funeral. I put it in my will.

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