



## Whitewash

Another Sunday came and went for Justin Storm.

The time was 12:55 AM. It was Monday.

Several cans of paint were scattered around apartment number 254-614. A disheveled drop-cloth was messily draped across the floor. Paintbrushes were strewn about the place in all directions, as if it were a maniac's workshop. The walls, originally a drab ochre-hue, were festooned with color. One side of the wall was lovingly and professionally smattered with a bright-red coat. The paint was a savage, wild color, like arterial blood mixed with the chemicals in a glow-stick. As the wall went on, however, the painting became more sloppy, then sporadic, and finally a mere disinterested smear across the wall.

Chenine lay on her side, clad only in a tight white halter-top and flesh-toned underwear. A blob of paint graced her porcelain-white cheek. A few stray droplets also dotted her bare stomach. She lay motionless with her pale blue eyes half-open. Her breathing was deep and rhythmic.

Eventually, the front door opened.

"Oh, hell..." her boyfriend hissed with his dark, booming voice. He stepped around all the paint cans and used brushes, kicking one empty bucket over in frustration.

"Chen!" He almost screamed.

Slowly, Chenine slid her arms under her body and pulled herself up into a sitting position, emerging from behind several paint cans and the ratty drop cloth.

The man bit his lip and breathed loudly and rapidly through his nose. It was clear that he was restraining himself. "Goddamnit, Chen. *Goddamnit!*" He barked.

The bleary-eyed girl didn't look him in the eyes. "I... I just thought, you know, that the walls would be... nicer-" she stopped talking, as if she didn't even have the energy to finish the sentence. Sitting on her haunches, she put her hands to her head and groaned quietly.

Her lover's hands were spread out towards the wall. His face was beet red as he struggled to form a cogent sentence. He suddenly dropped his hands and backed away from the kneeling girl.

"You know what, Chen: Fuck it. Just *fuck it!* You told me, you *promised* me, that you were over all this. Just like you'd promised me last time. And the time before *that!*" He shook his head. "That's it, you hear? That's it: it's over!"

"No, wait!" The girl cried as her eyes flittered with desperation. She jumped up quickly, with the reflexes of a Raiden-pilot. "I can fix it. I mean, I meant to fix it. I'll make it just like before, okay?" She raced over to the man and grasped his hands tightly. There was obvious anxiety in her eyes. She fixed her lips into a false-smile. "Come on, please..." Chenine traced a finger teasingly across the man's chest. "I'll... I'll do that thing you like... you know what I mean..." she tried to make her voice silky and seductive, but it quivered and oscillated like a songbird's.

He was having none of it. He broke away from Chenine and moved towards the door.

"Please!" She cried, her hands clasped to her chest. "It's not a big deal!"

"It's *never* a big deal, is it Chen? It's not a big deal when you fuck-up the apartment, it's not a big deal when you damn-near *assault* the neighbors' kids, it's not a big deal when you sleep like a ground-slug on one day, then go out and hit the clubs until 4:00 AM the next day. Well, you know what: it *is* a big deal! You got it? Do you *get* that?"

Chenine's eyes were downcast, a train of silver tears streaked down her paint-spattered cheeks.

The man sighed and looked up at the ceiling, trying to calm himself. He looked back at the tearful girl and shook his head. "I can't do it anymore, you understand? I'm gonna have all my stuff out of here by the end of the week. You can keep the place, if you can afford it." He folded his arms as he surveyed the pathetic girl, splattered in paint and sobbing in her underwear. His eyes softened, if only a little bit. "I..." he began tenderly, almost conciliatorily, but then he simply mumbled: "I can't do this anymore..." He went out the front door and slammed it shut behind him.

Chenine flopped back down on the tarp and held her head in her hands. When she looked up again there were no tears, though her eyes were red and puffy. She sniffled and wrapped her arms around her body. The empty apartment was suddenly very cold to her.

After several minutes, she rose and pattered into the bathroom. She downed a few chalky white pills from her medicine cabinet and flopped onto the bed. She lay sprawled in the oversized bed, at times shaking her head and muttering to herself. After one agonizing, sleepless hour she pattered back into the bathroom and downed two more of the bland white pills.

Finally, after hours of hand-wringing, sobbing and squirming, she fell into a cold and joyless sleep. Curled-up in a compact fetal ball, Chenine occasionally mumbled and twitched as she slept through the night and well into the next morning.



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