

## *Super Nevada* (Excerpt)

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### **Super Nevada (Extrait)**

*Dans cet extrait tiré d'un roman, la narratrice vient d'apprendre que son diagnostic révèle une maladie maligne d'origine mystérieuse. Elle se rend à l'hôpital pour être soignée et subit l'aliénation et la médicalisation de son corps dans cet environnement paternaliste. Se sentant trahie par ce corps, qui mourait secrètement cellule par cellule, elle se soumet au traitement. On lui dit qu'elle ne sentira rien mais elle découvre non seulement que le traitement est douloureux mais que les effets secondaires le sont aussi. Les circonstances potentiellement dangereuses de la réalité de tous les jours deviennent menaçantes du fait de sa vulnérabilité. Une fois chez elle, en attendant que les médicaments anti-douleur agissent, elle regarde un documentaire sur les salles d'urgence à la télévision. Elle compatit avec les patients mais elle est aussi prise au dépourvu face à l'incapacité de la profession médicale à soulager la souffrance des malades. Elle commence à analyser certains mensonges de notre culture qu'elle était amenée à croire. Elle considère aussi le plaisir que lui procurait le fait de les accepter. Elle se sent nostalgique du temps de son enfance où elle croyait en son pouvoir personnel, en la possession de son corps et en son droit inhérent d'exister sur cette planète.*

I waited on the corner for the streetcar and the damp air seeped in at the frayed cuffs of my men's overcoat. The birds suddenly made a riot in the trees, breathlessly they rose up as one and flew away. The streetcar came and it was suffocatingly hot which was still better than standing in the rain. I arrived a little late. The steps up to the front door were slippery though they had been sprinkled with salt. I walked into the lobby which was nearly empty and got on the elevator and pressed the button for the fifth floor.

There was an orderly in the elevator talking to himself. Yes sir, he said, Everybody knows old Alf. Just ask anybody. I've got friends all over the

place, go on up to Orillia and ask anybody, everybody knows me. Yes sir, I've got friends there and everywhere else.

You're lucky, I said. Orillia and everything.

Yes, sir, he said. Everybody there knows me.

The doors opened at the third floor and he got out of the elevator pushing his rack of laundered gowns down the hall. As the doors were closing he said, Just ask anybody about old Alf. I've got friends all over the place.

The nurse at the reception desk asked me my name and told me to have a seat. There would be a wait though she couldn't say how long it would be. Several other women were waiting as well and passing the time by looking through magazines. One of the women, a pregnant young girl, smoked a cigarette and hummed to herself as she poured through the pages. I picked up one of the magazines as well and when I came to the quiz at the back, mentally answered the questions, truthfully, and added up my score. *You are a romantic by nature and sexually adventurous. Your confidence and compassion lead you into happy, healthy relationships.*

The nurse came up to me and asked me to follow her. We went down the corridor and into a small room and she closed the door behind us. The room smelled strongly metallic. I put on a paper gown. I was trying to stay calm. I sensed sharp surgical instruments hidden behind cupboard doors. The nurse asked me to lie down on the metal table. It was cold, antiseptic, and met the contours of my body with resistance. Minutes seemed like hours as I looked up at the brightly lit ceiling which appeared two-dimensional and bleak and I began to shiver starting somewhere at the heart of myself. The nurse moved silently around behind me in the room. I felt threatened by the simplest things, her green skirt, the box of latex gloves, a small noise in the hall.

Awful weather, she said.

Yes, it is.

I didn't know it was going to snow, she continued. I ran out of the house this morning in just my raincoat. I was nearly freezing to death at the bus stop and all these people were looking at me like I was crazy.

Yes, it's miserable, I said. It's the first day of winter.

She looked at me and seeing the expression on my face, said, Don't worry, I see it all the time. Don't worry. It'll be all right. Even in your case, you'll see.

So, she knew my case. Thanks, I said.

No, really, she said. At this stage we don't really even call it cancer. It's not until the next stage that it's cancer. Stage three, it's cancer.

The doctor came in then and began his preparations for the tenth time that morning. He was bored by cleanliness and disease. I started to cry and he looked at me compassionately, for a moment, for as long as his very busy schedule would allow. He gave me a soft, proprietary latex caress on my naked thigh. I wanted to tell him not to do that, not to touch me, to get his filthy hand off my leg, but I didn't dare. If I said so much as one word he'd think I was hysterical and then he'd call in the psychologist and then I'd really be in trouble. He explained the procedure to me saying that they didn't give patients any pain killers and wouldn't be giving me anything as I didn't have any nerves there anyway and I wouldn't feel a thing.

I wanted to believe him. My tears were tears of trust.

Strange activity had been taking place in an unknowable and malignant place. I had been falsely soothed by the invisibility of the process and by its silence. My body had committed a simple act of mutiny, it was dying, cell by tiny cell, never calling out in agony, never calling out a warning.

The doctor described in detail the act he was about to commit and then he wasted no time in committing it. Afterwards he repeated the procedure to ensure that I was safe from my own body which had betrayed me as completely as my lover had betrayed me with his unbroken silence on the nature of his illness, giving it freely like kisses, to the women he loved.

The truth, my doctor said seriously when I was diagnosed, ... is that nuns never get this. It doesn't happen, he said. And in spite of myself I laughed, and then the laughter gave way to something else.

After the doctor finished his work he reminded me to get a check up in six weeks and then another after that in three months. Don't forget he said, giving me a look, as if I would.

I won't forget, I promised.

He left the room without another word. After he left there wasn't anything to take the place of his attitude which was something like, you get what you deserve, or else, that will teach you. The nurse looked down at me with sympathy. The light shone through her soft curls as I looked past her at the white tiles above me. She was very kind and carefully pulled the sheet over me in an effort to stop my trembling. She put her hand on my forehead. My skin had erupted in little bumps.

Don't get up too fast, she said. You may think you feel all right but you better be careful.

Don't worry, I'm not getting up, not a chance, I said. I had a hot flash. You're very flushed, she said.

It was really hot.

Some women feel that, she said. Anything else?

I have a headache.

A lot of women mention that too, she said. Funny, isn't it?

No, I said. It's not. It's not funny at all.

I didn't mean it was funny, I meant that it's strange, you know.

I know what you mean but it's not really. It's all connected you know, I added, as if she didn't.

She wrote something in my file which she was holding in her hands.

He was wrong, you know, it really hurts. The freezing wasn't the worst part though, I said.

You have goose-bumps. She pulled the sheet up over my shoulder.

You know what the worst part was? The worst part, I said, the worst part was thawing out.

She looked at me silently and then turned away, she didn't want to talk about it, she'd already heard everything there was to say about it. She finished writing in my file and put it down on the desk and then left me there to rest until I felt that I could stand up without fainting.

I paid the cab driver and opened the door and slid my legs out but I didn't have the strength to stand up. The driver waited for a minute. He looked at me. I looked back at him.

What's the matter, lady? he said.

Do you think you could help me?

He muttered under his breath as he got out of the car. He held me tightly by the elbow and helped me stand.

Do you mind? I said.

At first he looked annoyed but then he remembered where he'd picked me up. He shrugged and helped me walk to the house and up the front steps to the door.

Thanks, I said.

Yeah. Sure, he said. Are you going to be all right? he asked, suddenly taking an interest in me.

Yeah. I'll be fine, thanks. I smiled. I opened the door.

Don't you keep that door locked? he said, concerned.

Sometimes, I said.

You should keep that door locked at all times, lady. It's not safe.

Thanks, I will.

No, I mean it, he said. You should keep that door locked.

It's too late now, I said, and laughed.

He didn't think it was funny and frowned at me. You can't be too careful, he said.

I went into the kitchen and got myself an orange and a glass of water. Then into the bathroom for the aspirin. I took two. I took them with me upstairs to the back of the house where my room was. Ten minutes later, two more. The nurses wouldn't give me anything at the hospital and had refused to argue with me about it.

I took off my coat and threw it on the chair. I turned on the TV, and went over to the bed and crawled under the covers, pulled them up around me, and stared at the set. They were showing a documentary about Emergency Rooms. An elderly man was being admitted. They had him lie on a table. He looked like he didn't weigh more than ninety pounds. He was wearing a gown and his thin brown legs were bare. They wheeled him into a room filled with monitoring equipment and hooked him up. He was tied down with tubes. He looked like he wanted to run away, that if it weren't for the camera crew filming him, he would have tried. They would have found him after, in a closet, out of breath and crying. The man had trouble breathing and took short, raspy breaths. When he inhaled his look of panic swelled and then when he exhaled he relaxed a little. Every time he turned toward the camera terror crossed his face. He was very scared. I felt sorry for him. They said he had pneumonia and that he died later.

They filmed another man walking into Emergency. He looked to be about sixty and had greased back hair and was wearing cowboy boots and had his cigarettes rolled up in the sleeve of his greasy white shirt. The orderly smiled for the camera and asked the man what his problem was.

He said, I have hurting sounds.

The orderly was surprised, Oh, he said. He tried to be professional. Um, could you tell me where you have them?

They're in my arms and legs and chest, all over. They're all over my body. It gets real bad, the man said. Real bad, you don't know.

The crew filmed the man having a cigarette while he was waiting to see the doctor. He looked at the camera suspiciously. In the next shot he

was lying down while the doctor examined him. He'd taken his boots off and his feet lay black with dirt, abandoned to their fate on the table. He'd forgotten all about everything outside of his pain. He stared into the doctor's face willing her to heal him.

I just thought I'd admit myself into the hospital for a couple months, he said. A couple months should do it. I'll be right as rain after a couple months.

I'm sorry, said the doctor, but you can't admit yourself into the hospital for a couple of months.

Oh, he said, thinking. How about for a couple weeks, then?

No, I'm sorry, she said. You can't admit yourself at all. Only I can admit you. Can you tell me what you're suffering from?

Sure, yeah, I've got hurting sounds, he said. See?

You're better off out of there, buddy, I told him. You should have seen what they did to the guy who was in there before you.

Shivering, I pulled the covers up around me closer, and took two more aspirin.

I loved lies. And in complicity with them I hid my sorrow.

There were no words in circulation that I could use to express myself. Certain favorite ideas of mine were so unrecognizable to others they stayed hidden in plain view. Within the labyrinth of ordinary behavior I discovered the absolute joy of keeping my thoughts to myself.

Already, when I was a little girl with my eyes screwed up against the glare of the sun and my sock fallen around my ankle, I was as stingy as a rich old man.