

Excerpt from *Tough Beauty*, written by Finegan Kruckemeyer. Not to be presented without official licensing. To enquire, please go to: finegankruckemeyer.com

Warning: Coarse language

Scene Six

Mika stands and watches the knife block in the kitchen, deliberating. Her sister Natalie stands and watches Mika. Her mentor TK sits and watches Mika.

TK: I was the one taught Mika never to be scared. When I seen her first, she was getting beat up out the front of the shopping centre, and she was curled up in a ball, tryna hide, you know. You don't try to hide, I told her.

Ever.

The girl that was beating into her was fat, so I kicked her in her fat, and then she backed off. But I don't let people back off, that's another thing I taught Mika. If they start it, then they're not allowed to finish it. You finish it. So I kicked her in her fat some more and then that girl never beat up Mika again – not just never again that week, but *never*, never again. Plus she had to learn to write with her other hand, is what I heard. I don't know if that's true, but.

NAT: My sister was honestly nice – that's what most people don't believe. When we were younger, she was so nice with me. But... then when she started hanging out with TK, then she wouldn't be nice to me, not in front of her. And then not at school either. And eventually not even at home, not even when we were alone. It's like... *[Beat]* Like first she worried TK might see her being nice, and think she was weak. And then she worried if *anyone* would think she was nice, and weak. And eventually I think Mika worried she'd see *herself* being nice – like, even if no one else was around. And *she'd* think she was weak... And I don't think she could handle that.

TK: Mika started off weak. But I got her strong. She was scared of people, scared of them being better than her, smarter than her, prettier – fucking stupid bullshit like that. And all I said was: *Mika, ya dumb slut, it's simple – just weigh it up. Like, put a smart one and a tough one in a room – and see what happens. Put a pretty one in there too, fucking sit back and watch. See who comes out best. I'm not sayin' nothin', just – just watch and see.*

And she watched. And she seen. I just taught her how to. 'S easy.

Mika leaves the knife where it is, and exits. Natalie watches her go.

NAT: And even under it all, I can still see it – I can still see her niceness. It's not out on display, maybe, and she doesn't show it to hardly anyone, and she definitely doesn't show it to me. But it's there.

Like, sometimes I watch her in the playground... and she'll see something beautiful. She'll see a couple of Year Nines kissing. Or she'll see a big kid sitting with his little brother, and them sharing lunch, something like that. And I'll watch her face... and it'll smile. Not her mouth maybe – but her eyes. Her eyes will smile.

And then I'll see what she does next. I'll watch her brain go into that defence mode it does, and I'll see her switch that smile off. I'll watch her face go tough again, watch her go tough again.

Beat.

NAT: But it doesn't matter, not to me. As long as I can see that smile come out sometimes – as long as I know it's still in there, underneath the other shit – then I believe it'll end one day. Then I can let myself think that Mika won't always be like she is now.

That some time later on, I'll get my sister back.