

I laid frustrated under my sheets with an obscene video playing on my phone. This had become a typical and soul-crushing routine since I started at Peltzer Oil and Co. I've tried medications, therapy, and even hypnosis, but ever since I started there, I cannot get erect. Anytime I attempt to, my excitement finds itself short-cut by the image of my boss's smug face, and I become overwhelmed by the shame I feel working for such a soulless corporation.

As I lay in bed feeling like **a pathetic excuse for a man**, my boss's contact popped up over the porn on my screen, and I let out a sigh. I slipped on the T-shirt next to me, sat up, grabbed my glasses from the bedside table, and answered the call.

My boss's large face and thick mustache suddenly appeared too close to the screen, his jowls sickeningly bouncing as he walked.

"Thomas, I have big news for you. There's an annual party tomorrow, a lot of people in our industry will be there, and I want you to come with me." He said in his deep Southern accent, panting breaths parting his words.

A party tomorrow? Why would he drop this on me so suddenly?

"I don't know, sir; I'm not much of a party person."

"That doesn't matter; you do an excellent job, Thomas. I want to promote you, but there's more to it than hard work. You've got to play ball; we have to ensure our interests align."

"I don't know, it's kind of short..." I said before being interrupted.

"Thomas, I need you to go, this is not negotiable."

I relented to this, mostly out of fear of upsetting my boss, but also because a promotion and some new connections could help me to find a less morale-crushing job.

I didn't have many options when it came to dress clothes, and with the party being tomorrow, I decided I'd have to make do. I found an old polo and a pair of khakis from college that I set aside before getting ready for bed. I went to my medicine cabinet, opening my bottle of antipsychotics, but there were none left. It was going to be a long day tomorrow.

On the day, I struggled to fit my khakis, pulling the narrow inseam over the small fold of fat on my hips. The skin brightened to a vibrant red as the pants strangled their way up me. I let out a sigh of relief and disgust as I finally fixed the button.

I followed my GPS off from the highway and onto a road tunneled by thick forest. I felt my anxiety building as I watched the wind blow the massive sentinel trees away from my direction, seeming to beckon me to turn around.

As soon as I broke from the forest, the right side of the road was blocked by a white stone fence that stood at least ten feet into the air and stretched as far as my nearsighted eyes could see. Upon approaching the massive black gate, I found it closed. Looking past the strange symbols formed in the bars, which I could not identify but looked like an Egyptian cross topped by a crescent moon surrounded by a series of small circles depicting the lunar cycle, I saw no cars.

I checked the time and it was 7:50, ten minutes before my boss asked me to be here. I was baffled. I thought I must have typed in the wrong address and wondered how far out of the way I had sent myself.

I called Mr. Peltzer, but it went straight to voicemail.

“Shit.” I exclaimed as I slammed my hands onto the steering wheel.

I sent him a text, typing it out and erasing it multiple times, unable to find a phrasing that I felt couldn’t be misinterpreted.

After about 4 minutes of this, I finally sent, “Hey, I followed the address you sent me, but there’s nobody here.” before setting my phone onto the dashboard.

I took out a cigarette and lit it, feeling it ease my nerves from the first puff. The smoke filled around my car, tingling my nostrils as I nervously waited to get a text back. As the cherry neared the butt, I looked out my rearview mirror to see a car approaching. But as it drew nearer, I realized it wasn’t just one but an entire parade of cars approaching in a hurried but synchronized line that could have stretched a mile. I looked at the clock and read “7:57.”

“Talk about punctual.” I said, as I placed my butt into the ashtray.

The massive black gate in front of me opened outward, like a cryptic jaw unhinging to let the throng of luxury cars past me. I watched as the immense crowd passed, quickly filling the massive driveway and stretching out into the streets. There was something unsettling about this; it wasn’t like a party or parade. They drove in reverence, looking like a funeral procession.

The building was enormous, four stories tall and a couple acres wide; it was old, antebellum. It had gothic architecture and looked like a massive cathedral, like some

archaic mega-church, with massive red stained glass windows that had a black stone frame around them lined with a series of upward-facing triangles. At the top of the cathedral was a massive clock tower spired above the already massive building.

I watched the elderly crowd getting out of their cars and flooding the entrance at the speed of cold molasses and suddenly felt more underdressed than I'd anticipated. They were all dressed in black, the men wearing fancy suits, the women in padded full-body dresses.

I wanted to turn around and leave as soon as I saw this, but the thought was interrupted by the tapping of glass.

"Hey there, son, glad you could make it." I turned to see my boss's fat face, his stocky frame taking up the entirety of my window view.

"Yeah, I was a bit early."

"Better than late."

"Sorry, I wasn't sure if there was a dress code."

"There isn't for you; you're a guest." The words were punctuated by a gong of the massive clock tower that sent a shiver down my spine. But my unease was abruptly forgotten when I saw a tall woman with long black hair; dressed the same as the rest of the crowd, but her beauty stood out especially in the otherwise ancient crowd.

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Walking in, I was mesmerized; red light washed over the otherwise dark room, while speakers played maddeningly slow orchestral music. I could tell the music was slowed, the horns blew longer than a single breath could hold, the percussion loomed in the air, the slow piano sounded deep and ominous. The smell in the room was musty and sweet, like mothballs coating the stench of mildew. The walls were dark brown, the red light turning them the color of fresh blood. The paneling lining the wall had a pattern of a circle with a dot in it along its length.

I wondered how the light coming from the windows could be so radiant with the sun so dim in the sky before I felt a slap on the top of my back.

“You look on edge, son; have a drink to ease your nerves.” Michael said as he handed me a glass of red punch.

“Yeah, thanks.”

I downed the cup and was immediately revulsed; the bitter liquid burned down my throat and made me gag.

“Oh fuck, that’s disgusting.”

“Ha, yeah, fine liquor is an acquired taste.” he said with a smirk.

“I guess.” I said, massaging my stinging throat.

While I’m not much of a drinker, I had never tasted something like this; it was nauseating to get down.

Despite my burning throat, the drink did seem to have the desired effect; I felt a near immediate numbness wash over my body and chill my nerves.

At the center of the room I watched partygoers dance slowly, in rhythm with the music.

We were approached by a tall and slender man who looked to be about sixty; he had a balding head of dyed black hair, with a pathetic attempt at a comb-over.

“Ah, hello, Michael, and who is this delectable specimen you’ve brought with you?” He said with a quick lick of his lips.

“Uh, I’m Thomas.” I reached to shake his hand and was immediately hit with the overwhelming stench of cologne that burnt my nostrils. It smelled like sugar cubes dropped in gasoline.

He looked at me as if to say, “I wasn’t talking to you.” before grasping my hand between his thumb and index finger and lightly shaking it.

“Nice to meet you, Thomas; my name is Reginald Talbot. I’m the CEO of Cleaner World Today.”

“Oh wow, I’ve heard great things about your company’s aid in cleaning oil spills in the Pacific. It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir.” I said excitedly, feeling that if I could impress him, it may be my opportunity to find a more ethical position.

“Yes, charmed, I’m sure. I must say, young Thomas, you shame the rest of us with your outfit.” He said with a snicker.

“Ha, yeah, thanks. Well, I wasn’t told there was a dress code.”

“Don’t worry, Thomas, by the end of the night many of us will be wearing nothing at all.” He punctuated this with a brief laugh, ending it abruptly and giving me a look of hunger.

“Ah well, I think I’m fine with what I’m wearing.”

Reginald snickered and walked away with a smug look, like he took pride in making me uncomfortable. That was unusual, but I knew I had to impress him.

“Make sure to make a good impression with Reginald; we’re planning a bit of a merger.” Mr. Peltzer said.

“That would be great. I think it’d go a long way if we start working towards more ecologically friendly solutions and...” I started to say before my boss called to someone on the other side of the room and left me standing there.

As I walked through the crowded room, I was surrounded by a cacophony of posh laughter and eyes subtly shifting down at my 5’5 frame. Just my anxiety, I told myself.

Nonetheless, I could feel the tension building in my shoulders and at the bridge of my nose; the tingling I recognized as the onset of an anxiety attack. So I decided to step outside and grab a smoke. I’d not taken notice of the doors when I first entered, but they were magnificent, ten-foot-tall ebony mahogany; with six encircled stars with six points, each point with a small dot next to it, in each of its four panels. I pushed the door, but it didn’t budge.

“Sorry sir, I’m afraid the doors stay locked until midnight. Part of the rules.” A decrepit voice called from across the room.

I looked up to see a rail-thin old man in a suit, who looked to be a servant or butler, he stood at the bowl of punch filling glasses. His face was deflated and gray; his skin sagged over his gaunt face as he wearily stared at me.

“Oh, uh, ok, I guess.”

“Why do you need to step out so early anyways? You’re not a smoker, are you? That’s a sign of weakness, they say.” He said with a weary half grin.

“Uh no, I just needed a bit of fresh air.”

“What kind of party is this?” I thought. This place was odd, and I could already tell it was going to be a miserable night. I was going to need a lot more punch to get through it.

I made my way to the punchbowl, where I was approached by the woman with black hair.

"Hey, my dad didn't make you too uncomfortable, did he?"

I was frozen for a moment, lost in her gray eyes. She stood nearly a foot above me, her black hair draped regally over her back and stretching to her tiny waist.

"Oh, you mean Mr. Talbott? He's definitely, uh, eccentric, but I mean, his company's done a lot of good for the world."

"Yeah, I guess. But it's nice to see someone my age here. You should take a drink with me."

She got close to me and poured the drink into my mouth, and I felt hot blood begin pumping to my groin; the cool, intoxicating drink swirled with the heat and made a storm surge inside me.

"I'll see you around," she said with a wink. My heart panged in my chest with excitement as I play that moment over in my mind. I looked over to catch the servant looking over at me, before snapping his head away.

Suddenly feeling elated and brave, I downed another cup; my throat felt numb, and I began to feel like I had made a horrible mistake. I decided to return to my boss; making my way through the party, I saw expectant eyes shiftily gazing at me and felt my balance starting to waver. I began to notice the music seemed just a bit faster than it was when I first entered.

"Are you okay?" Michael said as he noticed my awkward gait.

"Yeah ... yeah, I'm fine; I just need to slow down a bit."

"How about you burn some of that off and come dance?"

"I don't really dance, sir." I said.

He ignored my protest, grabbing my arm and dragging me towards the crowd.

I tried my best to maneuver around the slow-moving bodies of elderly business types that swayed at a comfortable distance from the others but looked at each other intently with what seemed to be desire. Once we'd gotten to the center of the crowd, I began to tentatively mirror the same swaying motion the rest of the party was making.

My vision started to become hazy; the shadowed bodies' motion was traced by red light. This illusion had a dizzying effect that began to worsen my nausea from the drink. But I began to find a bit of pleasure in the simple swaying dance; it felt oddly natural and made me feel like I belonged even if I couldn't mimic its intricacies perfectly.

The bell tower cried out once again; this seemed to give the crowd a restrained excitement. I could see calm faces suddenly broken into wry smiles around me as they all packed slightly closer together.

This sudden tightening made me feel claustrophobic; I needed to get some space, so I awkwardly made my way through the crowd. The interference in my vision was getting worse, the tracers were getting stronger, and it was as if there was a translucent film across my eyes that was thickening by the minute.

"Well, it looks like you have been enjoying the punch." Reginald said, as I broke out from the crowd holding my head in my hands.

"Too much it seems." I said, forcing an awkward laugh.

He placed his bony palm on my shoulder and began to lightly rub at it. This made me uncomfortable, but it also felt weirdly good, which made me even more uncomfortable.

"Where's the bathroom?" I asked, suddenly feeling I could no longer hold the contents of my stomach.

"Through that hallway. And will you be needing any company?" He said through his sleazy set of crooked teeth. His grin seemed impossibly wide, and his teeth looked sharp and predatory.

"No." I said, hurrying off with my hand muffling my mouth.

I hurried through the hallway, bursting through the door and rushing towards the toilet. I could feel vomit rushing to escape, feeling acid burning in my throat. I made it to the toilet just in time; thick, hot liquid began pouring out my mouth. The taste of the punch was more revolting than when I'd put it down.

When I was done, I leaned my back against the cool porcelain rim. I didn't know if they allowed smoking, but I needed a cigarette desperately. I found one placed behind my ear, removing it and placing it between my lips. I lit it and felt immediate relief as I watched the hazy cloud lazily blow from my circled lips. I watched the transparent smoke distort the room around me, refracting it like staring into a body of water.

Once again the clocktower gonged, sending a jolt through my body as the smoke floated up and dissipated in an instant.

The door flew open, and the servant stepped through. In the LED lighting I could see him more clearly; his skin sagged off his gaunt face, his pigment was that of a corpse, and his eyes were bloodshot and droopy.

“Mr. Thomas, are you still in here?” He said, his dreary voice carrying as much concern as it was capable.

I looked down and realized there was nothing in my hand. Had I dropped it? Where did the smoke go?

“Are you okay, Mr. Thomas?” The words reverberated; they seemed to vibrate in my eardrum.

“Yeah, I was just...” I looked around again for the cigarette. “Getting some air.”

“Mr. Michael and Mr. Talbott asked me to fetch you; they have big news for you, they said.”

“You should hurry out to meet with them.”

I could barely comprehend what was happening, but I knew such a deal would be great for me and my future, so I forced myself to follow.

As I stood up a wave of vertigo hit me, the fluorescents were like a blinding heavenly light that burned my unworthy eyes.

As I emerged from the bathroom, I noticed the music was different, it was the same notes but played incredibly quick and loud. Insanely I thought it sounded like a strange yapping beast, the drawn out horns sounded like deep guttural breathing, the rapid percussions were the boisterous beast banging its chest, and the piano was its manic laughter. The magnificent beast seemed to sing from the center of where the crowd gathered.

They danced much more feverishly than before; it was bordering on a rave. They were right on each other now, not quite touching but only inches off and staring at each other with what looked like mad lust. It was much harder to make my way through the crowd now, both because they were packed so tightly and because the punch's effect had only grown stronger. I thought at first the lights seemed to move, but something told me it was not the light moving but the shadow. A massive shadow moving around the crowd and displacing the red light.

I found them in the crowd, the music was deafening here.

“Hey, I heard you guys needed to talk to me.”

“All in due time, just enjoy yourself for now.” Michael said.

Looking through the crowd, I spotted her again; she stood illuminated in the sea of shadow, beckoning me with her finger.

“She seems to like you.” I felt Reginald's hot breath against my neck as he yelled this into my ear.

I slid past sweat-soaked bodies as I made my way to her, feeling them graze against me, but it was no longer a concern; I anticipated and felt relief at every brief acknowledgment of flesh against my own. When I got to her, I started to put my arms around her hips, but she pushed them away.

“Not yet.” She said as she dragged me closer, closer but not touching, painful longing centimeters apart.

The light roved around the room; in the fleeting moments, I could see them. The people around us were sickly and deformed; their sweat-glistened, wrinkly skin looked like it was melting. I watched as it sagged lower each time it was brought to light. Somehow this felt fine; I felt pity for their miserable forms, but not disgust, I felt as though I owed them something.

The motion was heavenly, like I was dancing in a dream, and when the light covered us, I felt like I was the single most important being to ever exist in that moment.

Her hands barely off from my cheeks, her lips moving in for a kiss.

The clock tower once again gonged, and through the roving light I watched as the partygoers began to strip bare and clench onto each other.

Her lips touched mine as her hands cradled my neck, and I felt a bliss I had never known.

I began to feel more hands; they reached through the crowd to caress my body while I was trapped in her surprisingly strong clinch; some grasped at my clothes sensually, feeling the coarse polyester sliding between their fingers and tugging at it. They felt good, but I didn't understand it, and I was vulnerable and frightened of how it made me feel.

I grabbed one of their wrists and began to nudge its grip off of me, but as I did, I felt it tighten and had to pry it away with all my strength. Like a hydra, two more hands clasped at me the moment it loosened.

I pushed her away, and as her butt fell to the ground, she began to laugh wildly, with the rest of the crowd joining soon after. I retreated from the grip of the hands around me.

I tried to maneuver through the crowd, but the unintelligible scramble of light quaked my equilibrium and blinded my vision. Their bodies blended together in the chaotic blur.

I finally stumbled off the dance floor, falling to my knees and holding my hands over my eyes to abate the bleeding headache that crippled me.

I felt hands grasp my arms and turned to see my boss and Reginald standing naked at my sides holding me. They began stripping me down; I felt Reginald's bony fingers lifting my shirt, sensually rubbing my torso as he did.

I didn't want it, but it felt orgasmic.

I felt Michael's bloated fingers eagerly pulling at my khakis without unbuttoning them; they tore at my hips before finally giving and falling to my ankles. He then slipped off my shoes and began peeling off my socks as I felt Reginald slip my underwear down to my ankles. I looked down to see myself fully erect.

Lastly, they took off my glasses, which took all the effects out of my vision; I could, for the first time, see clearly. This was not an orgy made of individuals but a massive metachromatic organism whose limbs were the same as its sexual organs, where small gaps were orifices meant to be intruded upon.

They led me to the beast; its limbs grasped at me and pulled me towards a cavernous gap that salivated for my entry. Her head slowly came out from above the opening.

"Now," she whispered.

They no longer needed to guide me; I began to put my head inside. I was immediately overwhelmed by a blend of a thousand different musky sweats and various perfumes and colognes. I heard her moaning as I my head breached into the orifice, orchestrated by countless mouths slowly panting. I felt its soft walls form around my head; it was moist, soft, and warm. Another moaning voice below hers, something deep, strong, something not human that moaned with pleasure every inch I furthered myself into it. I felt the bodies around me vibrate when my upper body had entered; the moans turned to violent, choking shrieks, and I felt the hands go from a gentle coaxing into abrasive yanking and pulling me deeper into the mouth. I knew at that moment I had been

rejected; I was not worthy to be a part of this magnificent creature; I was too weak. I felt mouths form around me, their teeth pressing through my skin, and they began to suck. I was unworthy to be a part of it, but I knew that as it consumed me, I would be a part for a time before it shat me out like the waste I am.

A gong let out, followed by a moment of complete darkness with the sounds of wetness muting all other noise in the room. When the lights returned, I looked down to see my emaciated body in a pool of sweat. Around me I saw the other partygoers looking at me with disgust as they put on their clothes. I felt hands scooping me off the floor and looked up to see the servant.

“Let’s clean this up, Thomas.”