

-SYLVIA-

The last pin clears the cylinder. I gently open the door and slide inside. No alarm, nobody on the other side. I guide the door shut behind me. Just as planned I waited for nightfall which is comes early enough in November so that they haven't got the guard up, but it still makes good cover for my arrival. Even in the encroaching darkness picking the lock to the boiler room was a cinch. At this point my biggest advantage is my biggest problem. I can be evasive enough in this huge hotel to not be seen, but finding this Curosa fellow in all these rooms and halls is going to be a challenge. Just logic says I want to be checking the largest rooms first. First I have to get out of this boiler room.

I fumble through the humming machinery taking cover behind large boilers and pipe works. The only lights are the overheads for the machines, so I take it nobody is home, and nobody's feeding the fires right now. All the same I sink into the shadows, prowling for the exit. I come across a door in the dark, and push it in. the first step I take hits tiled floor. Oh, this is too good. I hit the lights. It's a restroom. Perfect. The boiler room is now my fall-back. It's dark, secure, and it has just what I need to stay cooped up in this hotel all night. I turn off the light and go back to prowling. The door I find as my way out is marked by a narrow line on the floor where light peeks in from the well lit hallway beyond. I open the door slightly to peek out. It's a stairwell. Nobody's here. I get out into the stairwell and look up. It appears that past the third floor none of the lights are on.

Going up.

I head up to the fifth floor as quietly, as quickly as I can. When I open the door out to the hallway the darkness is total. The only light are some minor floor lamps and the glowing red indicator lights of the emergency floodlight system. I pull out my clip-on LED flashlight, but I don't turn it on just yet. To calm my nerves I'm humming Everlong by the Foo Fighters.

I got a pretty good look at the terrain before coming in. Moreover, I got a pretty good look at the layout of the hotel. The large crested glass at the entrance spanned the whole six stories. This strongly suggests that the lobby is one wide, tall open room. It's only my best bet. Especially if the lights are off on the upper levels, as they are here. It's the main entrance as well, so If Curosa is coming home, he's coming in right through there. Arthur assured me that he is out to work at the moment managing his publishing empire.

I desperately need cover right now. The boiler-room is my best bet, very dark, lots of crevices lots of cover. It's six stories down. No go. I test a door to one of the rooms, and it's locked. Probably they're all like this. I make my way down to the end of the hall. To my right; double doors. It's pretty well lit on the other side, I can see. I push one of them open, and it leads to the balcony overlooking the lobby. The open-air center of the hotel. I'm real lucky. The lights for the lower three floors are on, but all of the upper levels are out. It's dark up here, and bright down there, which is only the best situation for spying. I approach the banister of the balcony overlook. I hear music.

I do hope mom is OK, I gave her everything she'd need while I was gone overnight. I felt bad because she kept on yelling, but she couldn't stop me. I even called off a night of work for this, and I was lucky that I didn't have to reschedule a stud. The break in could not have come at a worse time. Fucking thanksgiving. Everybody is boarding their dogs for thanksgiving.

There is a glass pane at the corner of the balcony that frames the corner with the banister and I make my way to it. Looking down from here I'm ready to see the furnished lounge. I was totally unsurprised to see the guards on walkie-talkies, patrolling the lobby down there. I was a little surprised to see the hot-tub installed next to the hotels decorative fountains. I was completely surprised when I saw the five girls down there, lounging around like they owned the place. Two of them are in the hot tub, just chatting away. Two more lounge about on couches country music plays out of the stereo of a girl with dusty brown hair who has her hair tossed over to one side as a masseuse kneads her shoulders, and rubs in oils. I am amazed at how well sound carries in this lobby. It's like an amphitheater. I can hear them all talking, but it is a little bit vague as to what they are saying. I make my way back to the stairwell, and go down two floors to the third floor, which is just dark enough to still be useful to me.

Getting to the floor I head over to the same spot three floors up, rather than five, and I am given a huge bonus. A pair of chairs lined up for lounging on the balcony corner make for some stupendous cover. This with the lights out can make me pretty much invisible. Better yet, from here I can pretty much tell what everyone three floors down is saying. The only detracting sound is the trickling fountain, and the light playing of the music from the stereo.

"Roger!" The blond haired girl on the couch asks

"Yes Madame Amanda?"

"I'll have a dry, dirty vodka martini."

"I'll call it in right away." He clicks on his walkie talkie "Attention kitchen, madame Amanda requires a dry, dirty, Vodka martini."

The two girls in the hot tub recline chatting and drinking champagne while they snack on what looks like paté. The girl getting a massage turns her stereo up.

"Angela. I thought I told you to keep that hillbilly shit down." Says the brunette who is on the couch with the martini-wanting girl.

"Go fuck yourself, Amy, I can barely hear it."

The security guard from before steps up.

"Is there a problem here, ladies?"

“Yeah. There's a problem. Angela is playing the music too loud, and I CAN'T focus.

Whoa. The way she shouted “can't” She might even be more moody than Arthur. That was explosive. The security guard steps over to the girl with the dusty brown hair.

“Madame Angela; could you abide Madame Amy and turn your music down, or perhaps put on headphones?”

“I don't have my headphones, Roger. They are in my closet.”

“Suppose I have them retrieved for you? Would you be willing to put them on?”

“Whatever” She says. “Sure.”

He clicks the walkie talkie again “Housekeeping, attention Housekeeping. Please fetch madame Angela her headphones from Madame Angela's closet. Make it quick.”

I'm entranced. It's like every bad dream I've had about models. All of these girls are the twenty-something gorgeous kind. They are all of them catered to hand and foot. They have no worries, no problems, and hence no motivation. The sight and sound of it makes it feel like I'm watching a play. There's no way something this surreal can be happening. To fact, though, this was going on before I got here, and will keep going on after I leave. It's not the real world. It's supermodel reality.

A butler enters with a martini on a tray. The girl who ordered the drink picks it up, sniffs it, and puts it right back on the tray.

“That's Constable gin! I can smell it! I only drink Martelle gin!”

“I'm terribly sorry, madame Amanda!”

“Didn't Roger tell you that I, that Madame Amanda required a dirty martini? Do I ever drink any gin other than Martelle?”

“With respect, Madame Amanda, I did not mix the drink myself. I only brought it up from the kitchen.”

She picks up the glass and splashes it in his face, before setting the empty glass on the tray.

“Now you could have done your job, gone and got me a fucking correct drink from the kitchen when I told you it was wrong. Instead you opened up your shit-eating smart ass attitude. Otherwise you wouldn't have that piss all over you. Don't you ever talk back to me. Now go knock some sense into those retards down in the kitchen and get out of my face you dumb nigger.”

The butler is white. Two nearby guards are black. Even from stories up this feels awkward. The butler bows – Wow – and goes off on his merry way. As he goes off I hear a ding of an elevator arriving. I look to the main concourse where a door opens and a heavy-set maid steps out. I use my binoculars to see what the deal is. She has the headphones.

“I was told for to come with headphones.” She says in broken, Spanish accented English.

The girl getting the massage raises her hand. “right here.”

When she plugs in the stereo headphones the country music dies abruptly and I can hear the light chatter of the girls in the hot tub along with the rising boiling bubbles. Nothing is getting me closer to my target. I need access. It's six o'clock. In twelve hours I'll be out of here. I'll be stomping through thick forest thicket in my camouflage hunting suit. I need that key and I need to be out.

Stadium speakers at the top of the hotel come on with a sudden jolt that makes me jump. Holy shit, it's unexpected.

“Attention, everyone.” a gruff male voice says. I hope this is not about me. “Mr. Curosa has just entered the outer gate. He is arriving now. Will all the Madames please assemble at the front entrance.”

The girls in the hot tub stand and put on bathrobes whilst still chatting to each other. The girls on the couches stand also even the girl on the massage table does up her top and throws her hair behind her. Yet another girl appears in the hallway. Two more arrive. Two more after that. This group assembles at the entrance to the hotel. In all, ten girls have come to greet him.

The large heavy wood door opens and in steps the grandfatherly looking Marvin Curosa.

“Welcome home, Sweetie!” All the girls say in enthusiastic unison. They cheer, and then clap. Oh, my God. They've rehearsed this.

“Hello, my Cute kittens!” He raises up his hands. “Come to me my little birdies. Give daddy a hug!”

The ten girls swarm him and shower him with hugs and kisses.

I hiked through the woods. I made it over the fences. I hustled it past the perimeter under dark. I've slipped inside. I've scouted the main lobby. I've cased his little harem of mass-consumption sexuality. Now I see him. The shallow old dying man who's made himself the center of a wet dream for high-school nerds. Inside one of the pockets of that self-made geriatric God is the key I need. I slip back into the shadows. I will get to moving around after midnight over five hours away.

Back through the double doors, and back down the stairwell. I'll go silent for a few hours, and maybe take a quick nap If I can find someplace safe. I can't mess it up. I only have one shot at this. This is for you, Arthur.

-DAVE-

Couldn't steal again. This was worse than before. I couldn't steal anything. Not junk, not easy meat, I was out all day and I stole NOTHING. Opportunity was teeming everywhere. Three days from thanksgiving everyone was out on a buying spree; last minute groceries, reserve turkeys, cider. Wallets and purses and cars were all beckoning me to steal them. My job never gets that easy and I have nothing to show for it. The tense knot in my stomach tightened moment by moment.

Happy thanksgiving.

So I called Arthur and he took me out to a club. What the hell?

The pit of my stomach sours as I take a slug back of Lemon Vodka. I set the glass down, wary and off kilter. It's at least my fifth. I had more before that too. Blink my eyes. Wary and off kilter. I hold them shut and the blurred and distant world of drunken colors and streaks go black. Here we go, immersed in liquid awareness that holds its shape and form for a moment against the pounding noise of the clubs PA. Smack my bitch up is playing. I have a sense of up and down for a short time with my eyes closed, but as I hold them shut the it begins in my head. It goes from throbbing to shifting. From shifting to stirring. From stirring to spinning. Now I my head can't tell which way is down, aside from concluding that it's under my shoes. Up goes down and back again in a rolling cycle of drunken haze in my mind. I open my eyes. That's my drunken self test. Does the room spin with my eyes closed? I'm done for the night. Water from now on.

My belly feels ten times more sour than it did before as I step to my feet off the bar. Suddenly, just as fast as my mind, my stomach loses it's ability to tell up from down. I don't know if I can make it to the bathroom in time. When I reach out it's Arthur that has my hand. The bar is a cascade of violet neon with a dance floor filled with dancing boys and girls who are all having a great time. I have to get through them.

The wall of flailing idiots narrows to a thin corridor between me and the bathroom.

I weave and push and stumble. They bounce and grind and laugh. I'm almost there. Praise God. Let me make it.

With a push of the metal frame wooden door I'm inside and I have to pull back to get my bearing. I make my way to the first stall. It's coming. The stall is locked. I choke back and press the second stall. Locked. I make it to the third just as the vomit I can stop pushes up in my throat.

The third stall door is open. It's empty. My face goes straight down into the bowl

and the foulness comes up out of me heaving from my face, and mouth and nose.
I'm coughing in it. I'm just puking and gagging.

Dammit, Sylvia. Don't you dare get caught out there.

I'm crying. I don't know why.

-ARTHUR-

I could not get him out of that club fast enough. He stopped drinking. He was going to be sober pretty soon. It killed me not to drink tonight, but I knew I had to stay chipper. Martha drives us and I have my arm over his shoulders in the back seat.

"She's gonna get caught, Arthur!"

"Sh-shush-shuuuuush."

"When she goes down, we'll all go down. This is the dumbest thing I've ever done."

"What's the dumbest thing?" I ask.

"Just joining sides with you."

"Don't underestimate her just because she's a teenage girl."

Martha flicks on the radio and changes channels until she finds something with the Linkin-my-chemical-thirty-seconds-to-mars-volta sound.

"Mary Shelly, man." She calls back.

Dave leans his head against the glass of the passenger window and breathes in deep, drunken pants.

"What's that, Martha?" I ask. She turns the radio down.

"Mary Shelly. She wrote the first science-fiction novel ever. She invented the Mad-scientist genre. Mary Shelly wrote fucking Frankenstein."

"OK, well, thanks for the trivia."

"Arthur, when Mary Shelly wrote Frankenstein, she was 18 years old."

"Damn." I say. "You're shittin' me."

"It's a fact. Like you said; never underestimate a teenage girl."

"God damn. Eighteen? What have I been doing with my life?"

I watch the lights of the city cruise by us in the darkness and tell Martha to head to her

place. It's close. Its neutral. It should do just fine.

The car ride is uneventful. Dave is not going to be sick again; he's totally purged. He lies there being silent, looking like his mind is going over the possibilities ahead. What will happen if Sylvia gets caught. What will be his part if she succeeds. There are so many things on his mind. I can tell-because there is only one thing on my mind. I still feel rowdy from this morning when I had Sylvia begging me for a touch of sweet fleshy pleasure. I know I'm a mack. It's no big deal. Besides, I like helping a girl with her needs, but I have needs too. Right now I think Dave might be in a state of mind to understand that.

So we get to her place. Dave crashes on her couch immediately and does nothing but stare at the screen. I signal her to come in the kitchen. Martha throws the remote on Kens pants and gives him the OK.

"Watch whatever man." then she comes and joins me, and we whisper.

"What do you think of him?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I thought maybe the three of us could..."

"The THREE of us?" She still says this in whispers

"Well, yeah, I mean."

"Look, Arthur you asked me that before, remember? I said no."

Oh, yeah, she did. I went off and had sex with What's-his-name anyway. Fuck.

"Look, Have you ever been in a threesome before?"

"Yeah. Girl-Girl-Guy. Not that it's your fucking business."

"How was it? Would you try it again?"

"Pretty damn great; and probably, yeah. It would depend on the circumstances."

"What have you got against getting with two guys?"

"Surprises."

"Ooooooh. I see."

"Yeah, and I don't know what he might do drunk. I'm just not into it, Arthur."

There's no way I can get my foot in the door on Ken without this leg up. Come on, Martha. Throw me a bone here. He is calmer now. He sits half-aware as late-night sales-pitch style commercials flick by him on the living room screen.

"Look. He was drunk. That's true. Most of the sauce is out of his belly, along with anything else that could make a mess. He's just got a healthy glaze now."

"Donuts have a healthy glaze. He is going to be a walking migraine."

She can stall me a bit more. If I do this too soon I'll feel like I'm taking advantage of him. Too late and he won't let me.

"Well, Martha, he's pretty nice, right?"

"He's OK, I suppose."

"Well, then warm up to him a little bit. I won't push I swear." I put my hands up in a surrender. "If you don't click, that's the end of it."

She pouts and looks over at the cute lug staring hazy at cleaning products being shout-pitched by a bearded bear of a man. Right now he is dead to all but TV, and it's so cute.

"Hand me some whiskey." She says

I open her cabinet where she keeps the stuff, and pull down a pint bottle. I open the bottle and take a quick swig of it before passing it off. She takes a shot, caps it and hands it back to me.

"That's all you wanted?"

"Don't know why you said I had to be the designated driver. You didn't drink anything tonight."

I uncap the bottle and hit it again before stocking it.

"Really, Martha, what do you think of him?"

"Little rugged. Little childish. Not really my type."

"But cute?"

Her one side of her lips, and her cheek pull back in a smirk.

"Yeah. I guess so."

"Trust me. This could be fun."

She sighs reluctantly. "OK, Arthur. I'll do this. Let me take him to my room. Ten minutes. Don't bother knocking, just come on in. If nothing happens, that's it. Too bad." She goes out to him, takes him by the hand.

"Hey. Come here for a second."

"What?" He asks groggily "What is it?"

She gets him on his feet an stumbling, guides him to her room and shuts the door. I sit on the couch where he had been sitting. It's too perfect. It's just now ten to two A.M. I flick around the channels until I find an old Home Improvement episode to wait out. When the credits roll, I kill the set, and the lights and toss off my buttoned shirt and my undershirt in the dark. I open the door silently. She's naked on the bed, sitting up with Dave laying across it with his mouth apparently buried in Martha's muff. I know this will be good. I have him right where I want him. Martha smiles, pleased.

"You owe me so bad for this."

I kill the lights and jump into the bed.

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to:

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