

The Promotion

By

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There's this guy named Ted, who's around twenty-five, on the late side of that actually, pushing thirty in two or three years, and it's after work in the dead of winter, 5:30, the sun has set.

He's stayed later talking to Darrell, an exec at I Tell & Tell who's pulled him aside to tell him that things are going good for the Company and what goes around comes around. And he knows that this is true because Darrell is smiling at him with that special after shave smile that says "I. See. You."

They travel down the elevator together in the mirrors and the LEDS and the soft circulated air, and Ted knows for sure something's on the rise. The elevator doors slide open and Darrell steps out and shakes his hand, shakes his hand! and says,

"Be seeing you."

And Darrell smiles at him knowingly, knowingly.

"Yes," Ted breathes.

Yes, yes, in such a way to let Darrell know he's casual and yet, really there for him.

And Darrell turns without looking back and heads for the revolving doors on the eastern side of the building and Ted does too but in the opposite direction and at just the speed to show that he's not too excited, all the while, his heart beating in the shadows and

flashing LEDS and digits, and the building breathes and checks the air.

"Goodnight," he waves at the Security Guard at the desk.

"Goodnight," he hears Darrell echo.

"Goodnight," the Security Guard answers.

"Goodnight," the Security Guard echoes to Darrell.

Yes, yes, it's going good, it's going good.

Darrell's Farragamos clapping on the marble.

Going good, going good.

He doesn't even look behind, doesn't wait for Darrell's doors to revolve, but moves through doors of his own into a...

Yes, yes,

...blast of frigid air...

It's good...

...steaming cars and passers-by.

...Darrell's not so bad either.

And he's walking through this after work evening heading for his car. And he's thinking about all the wonderful things he's going to get with this raise, with this for sure, bird-in-the-hand, bacon on the table, shoe-in promotion. He's been working hard. He's been doing his part. He's kept his space. Hasn't over-reacted. He's bowed to the right dragons. And now the hands are reaching out to him.

He stops for a moment and looks out into the snowy night.

All these people...

He sees the car lights bouncing cozily over the snow.

All these people...

He sees the secretaries huddling near an opened bus.
*...will be different for me tomorrow. There'll be new
relationships and new people to meet, and yes, there's ...
...Cecilia.*

I've got Cecilia, Cecilia...

*We'll eat out tonight. Don't care if it's Monday, we'll make it
a new thing, every Monday, after the first day of work, we'll put
aside our IOS devices and eat out. Postos! Le Cirque! Mareas!*

Got to get to Cecilia.

Yes, yes, Cecilia.

Gonna eat out tonight.

*And we'll bring wine home with us, yes, wine. We'll stay at
my place tonight.*

*She'll be so proud of me, no -- she'll see me as an equal, we'll
walk together, no -- we'll run through our separate executive
corridors, Mine at I Tell and Tell, hers at Switch and Leavers...*

He dances down the concrete ramp into the glow of the
underground garage.

I.B.M. blue, his Beamer glimmers under the bare bulb's gauzy
glare.

Mine by July!

His teeth gleam in the windows.

"Ha! Ha!," he laughs and reaches into his pant's pocket
thinking of his warm-lined Cecilia, *Cecilia...*

"I'm a monster," he laughs, "I'm a monster!"

Wait.

No fob, his BMW 7 Series key fob

Wait, his jacket, yes.

No, his coat...

(...couldn't be his coat, always puts it in the right-hand drawer, then into the left-hand inside pocket of his jacket before his noon jog then back into his desk drawer.)

Darrell!

He remembered it...

Darrell strolling with him at the end of the day, an exec and his protege. And his protege is thinking,

"Yes, if Darrell wants to go, I'll go with him, now, without my ritual (it would seem probably strange to him, my reaching into the right-hand drawer to get my fob so I can put it in the left-hand inside pocket of my jacket, idiosyncratic, perhaps doddering, like I might sink into this new position and occupy it forever). No, I'm going with you, without taking the fob out of the drawer and putting it in the left-hand inside pocket of my jacket so that NOW I'm standing here next to my car in the garage, 45-minutes later than usual, without my fob, my god, I'm going to have to go back into the building, up the elevator and into my office, I'll have to, in fact, pass the Security Guard after I've said "Good night!"

Oh Christ, I must do this right. I must do this right.

I'll tell him I've forgotten something. It doesn't matter. He doesn't care. After all, I work here. Get used to taking control. Do it casually. Don't say anything. Just give him a nod, a little smile. Should I text her? No, no, call her from your office, yes, call her

from up there. Tell her your plans. Be crazy about her. She can take it, once she hears what's happened.

"Yes, yes," he says and rubs the shiny fender of his Beamer,
"Be right back."

And so he turns around and begins his trek back to the building. His footsteps echo on the concrete. He stops and turns around. The garage is empty, there's not another car in sight, except for his Beamer, his German baby blue. He walks up the car ramp.

It has stopped snowing. The air is still and cold. The streets are almost empty. A few pedestrians huddle near the bus shelters. It is much darker.

It is night.

The buildings sweep up like checkerboards stacked on high. He crosses the street against the light which lingers on him like a long red kiss. The brass and golden light of the foyer shine through the revolving doors. He pushes himself into the interior of the building.

It's OK, count your footsteps.

Thonk-thonk-thonk-thonk.

Look past the Security Guard and smile "slightly."

Thonk-thonk.

Think of numbers...thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four.

There's the Security Guard. Just walk by and say it casually.

"Forgot my fob."

He didn't answer, Good, just keep going.

"Sign in, please."

"Just came out, remember, with Darrell?"

Don't say anything, just sign in.

"Sure. There you go."

Doesn't say anything, doesn't even smile. The Building Manager will hear about this! Just go up and get it done. Get your job and text Cecilia. She'll be waiting for you. You always text at seven. No, I'll phone her. She hates talking on the phone. No, I want her to hear my voice when I tell her of this promotion. The elevator's open, just walk in.

"Thunk-thunk," says the soft-matted elevator floor.

He swears he can smell Darrell's cologne still lingering in the air and their meeting comes to him afresh.

"Woo-woo," the elevator says, he swears he can hear it say, "woo-woo."

It seems darker in the elevator somehow, as if its light were being drained away or lit by some subterranean battery, as if the elevator itself were different somehow after work, yes, the walls of wood seem wetter, fatter, like skin. And the fragrance, the fragrance of flowers, night blooming jasmine in the air as if injected by some forgotten thought.

"Woo-woo," wails the little cab rushing up the shaft...twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four and...

here it comes, his floor...

twenty-five and *swash*...

...the doors slide open.

Strip-lights overhead shine with an anemic glow. The doors are all ajar.

Three doors down and to the right. My office. (My new one will have windows.)

He swears he feels the carpet move under his feet like a quiet river of skin. He can smell ammonia coming from the closed bathrooms, or is that rose water?

"It gets dirty after a day," he finds himself thinking, the doors slipping by him, black and magnetic, cubicles and monitors like windowpanes reflecting a dead white sky.

There's his office. He reaches for the light switch, it's not there. He sees his desk and moves toward it through a lake of darkness. He reaches for his fob.

Should he get his fob or call Cecilia first?

He looks at his watch, somehow it's already 7:15!

Should I text her? My god, I'm already fifteen minutes late!

No, I'm calling her!

626-6269.

"Hello."

"Cecilia?"

"I'm not..."

"Are you there?"

"...here right now."

"It's me. Pick up."

"Leave a message."

It clicks off.

A shadow is standing in the doorway.

"Calling your girlfriend? I don't like texting either, hurts my thumbs."

Darrell?

He can't understand it, this feeling of abandonment, they always text each other at seven on Mondays. He wants to cry.

Darrell?

But he can't, not now with Darrell there, but he feels it, this lump in his throat, this hot lump...

"Forget something?"

He should say yes, yes, but he can't somehow, he can't.

He puts the phone down.

"I forgot my car fob. Can you believe that? What a stupid thing to do. Shall we go down together?"

This is fate. It wasn't any accident that he left his fob up here. Should he tell Darrell that he's forgotten his car fob too? If Darrell and he are going to start a dialogue it shouldn't be based on mutual mistakes. And he is the boss after all -- he could be testing him.

"Yes, I'll go with you." Ted answers (*"yes," in such a way to let him know that he's easy in a chat, not too personal, unless you want to be, ready to hear gossip tabula rasa, pass no opinion, yet be there, be there.*)

Darrell and he walk down the halls, almost hand in hand, the rugs, he swears, are now covered with foam. There is the sound of distant fans.

"Look at me. How old do you think I am, Ted? I'm older than you think. I have a son at Williams. My daughter's a senior at Horace Mann. She's stacked. I hate forgetting things. It's

embarrassing to have to go past the guard twice, isn't it? It makes you look stupid and suspicious. And I don't like people to suspect me, it makes me feel under suspicion. Makes me feel like I've done something wrong. Like they'll catch me for something I did in the past and thought I got away with, but you never really get away with anything, do you Ted? I don't think so. That's why I wanted to walk down with you, somehow if we're both together, it doesn't seem so wrong. Do you understand?"

Meanwhile, strange noises are coming from the bathrooms, sloshing sounds and grunts.

Maybe the janitors are talking to each other, preparing their mops.

Darrell's moving very fast, he can barely keep up with him.

"This place gives me the willies at night" says Darrell, "I hope the elevators are still working."

"What?" almost escapes Ted's mouth but he closes on it like a sour bubble and follows close on Darrell's heels, now at a run.

There is a screeching and rumbling, the floor is vibrating.

"Here it comes!" Darrell shouts gratefully.

He hadn't even pushed a button.

The elevator doors fly open, then slam shut, then spread again, but slowly this time, with a scraping sound.

The elevator has stopped three feet from the floor.

Darrell eyes him briefly and smiles, then jumps.

"Jump down."

For a moment Ted totters on the edge, hesitating...

"I've been to parties like this," he thinks to himself.

He looks down the hall, the bathroom doors are open and the lights are going on and off. He looks down into the elevator. It's Darrell, after all.

"Come on jump down, I'll catch you."

And Ted, Ted with a certain dainty grace hops over the edge into Darrell's strong arms.

"Let me down," he wants to say, but the words don't come, only a sputtering.

What he wants to say is,

"I can't come down here, I've left my job upstairs, I've got to let it all out, I've got to tell you. I'm lying. I'm a jerk. I know you're checking up on me. But I'm good, I'm good, I'm anything you want me to be, just let me be it."

But this he can not say.

"There it goes," Darrell shouts as the elevator lurches into motion.

"Should be OK now," Darrell says, setting Ted down.

"Scared?"

"No."

"Good."

He looks up into Darrell's face. He's ogling Darrell, openly ogling him. He hears himself thinking in a faraway voice,

"You cocky, overbred son-of-a-bitch, I'd do anything you asked me to do."

The elevator is falling and jolting and Darrell is looking not just pleasant, he's looking grim and pleasant.

"Think of it, Ted, all these buildings."

Ted sees the buildings row-on-row, sticking up in his mind like spikes in the night.

"It takes a lot of widgets to build a building like this."

And Darrell laughs, he laughs and laughs as the elevator jerks and jolts, falls and shimmies. And Ted thinks about it as his stomach churns.

"Widgets, yes widgets," says Ted. The elevator is lurching from side to side and his stomach is beginning to feel like a mix-master.

"Yes, yes," he chuckles in such a way as to let Darrell know that he doesn't notice Darrell's eyes are shining in this dark way like there's some kind of color negative fire blazing in his head.

The elevator slams to a halt and Ted finds himself suddenly on the floor looking up at Darrell.

"I know your girlfriend, Cecily, or something."

"Cecilia."

"Yeah, she's a looker, great bod, tight skin, nice tan. Met her at the Xmas party. You introduced us. Never forget a face. You must be a real Alpha-Wolf to have a girlfriend like that."

Ted doesn't want to look at him, just wants to throw up.

"Yeah, she's just been made VP at Switch and Leavers."

"I know."

How does he know, how does he know?

"I wouldn't want to disappoint a girl like that," Darrell says, looking down at him, grinning. "Oops, let me help you up."

Darrell's larger than he thought, he's a very big man.

"Oh, that's OK."

And his hair seems longer.

"Sure you didn't forget anything?"

A shadow of a beard is already appearing on Darrell's face.

"No, no."

"Be seeing you," Darrell says, his heels winking at him in the dim light of the foyer, his back like a wedge of stone striding toward the Security Guard's desk.

"Alpha-Wolf," Darrell calls behind him to the prostrate Ted.

"Top of the heap. Heap. Ha ha."

"Goodnight," Darrell says to the Security Guard.

"Grrrrr," the Security Guard answers.

There is nothing to do in a situation like this but get up and act naturally.

Ted notices an acrid smell coming from his chest.

Good god, I've boffoed. Don't touch it, just leave it there. Get up, go past the Security Guard, say "Good night."

Rising, rising in the sultry darkness, Ted vaguely finds his feet and not too soon for the elevator begins trembling as if poising for a leap. And Ted, Ted begins to move through the swelling darkness,

"Pap-poom pap-poom," his heart and his feet moving in time toward the looming shadow of the Security Guard who he swears has grown larger.

"Goodnight," Ted says, reeking of vomit and waste, yes waste. He'd have to change, yes, get a hotel room, but how could

he get a hotel room smelling like this? He could text a locksmith, but he couldn't reprogram a fob fast enough. He could text Amazon, they deliver by drone. Wait! his jogging clothes, they're in the back of the Beamer, he could tell them he's a night jogger. Has he forgotten something? *No, nothing, nothing.*

The Security Guard hovers still as a sleeping judge, LEDS winking about him, and Ted feels very small, very small as he approaches the point where he'll make his turn toward the western exit and his beloved Beamer. Oh, god, what is he going to tell Cecilia? *Tell her nothing, nothing. She wouldn't understand.*

"Goodnight," he says again, utters it because the Guard hadn't growled back at him the way he had done with Darrell.

Darrell, that name brings back, brings up a queasy uncertainty.

He swears he smells a gamy odor coming from the shadows.

"Where are you going?"

"Out."

"Sign out."

The guy wasn't an animal, see, he can talk.

And reaching, reaching for the register in the red light of the control panel Ted swears he can feel an animal heat as if some large-mouthed creature was breathing on his arm.

"I was with Darrell."

Silence, but for the rolling of the ballpoint pen as he scrawls his name with the buttery black ink.

He looks at the his watch, 9:30, *impossible!*

"Cecilia," his heart cries out as he bites back the tears and writes down the time.

"Goodnight," he says cheerily, yes, cheerily, and he hates himself for it but he can't help it.

"Grrrrrr," the Security Guard growls at his back and he can feel his hairs prickle.

"Pap-poom pap-poom," his heels and his heart keeping time.

"Pap-poom pap-poom," the revolving doors revolve and shift him into the Rain! Yes, a torrential rain, a rain of psychotic intensity, a hot rain battering the streets and bashing against the sides of the buildings, a rain that soaks him through and through in a matter of seconds.

The streets are flooding. Cars move through them like half-sunken submarines. There are no pedestrians in sight. No one's waiting for buses. He runs toward the garage, or where he thinks it is for he can't see it clearly in the rain.

He feels a flush of comfort, seeing the same single light bulb shining over his car. At least that hasn't changed. Has he forgotten something? *No, no, nothing.* He looks in the back window. There they are, his jogging shorts and shirt, his dry running shoes.

And then a terrible understanding comes to him. He *has* forgotten something. His fob.

Is his car locked? Of course his car is locked. Of course he has locked his car. Is he crazy? He tries the door. It's locked.

Instinctively he grabs for his billfold. It's soaked. He opens it. He gasps. His billfold is filled with white pieces of paper, the ink has run out of his money, and his credit cards have melted.

Acid rain!

He glances at his car. The surface looks like cracked mud. Pieces of dry blue paint stick up like skin from his Beamer. He runs his fingers over the hood and chips and flakes come off in his hands exposing the whale grey primer beneath. A groan rises from him. He brings his fists to his face and screams,

"Not my car!"

The light bulb above him bursts, raining glass and darkness over his face, and for the first time he feels this strange emotion; perhaps he's not an Alpha-Wolf after all. So what? Should he walk the streets with his pants full, puke on his chest and glass in his hair? His car should be protected. He's paid for the space in this garage. A man without a car is a man abandoned to the vicissitudes of the general public without buffer, without shelter. It's his car, after all, not his really, but he's paid a lot of his salary into it and it's registered in his name and nothing is going to keep him from driving it, even if the paint is peeling off. So what if he doesn't have the stuff Vice Presidents are made of, he needs his fob.

He hears things moving in the darkness, chattering and whispering, scratching and grunting. His heart pounds in his chest, his wet feet squeak in his shoes. Gradually, as his eyes grow accustomed to the dark he can discern the dim glow of the exit ramp.

"Ae! Ae! Ae! Ae!"

His car bursts into life, the lights going on and off, his horn blasting as if his Beamer was screaming from a burn...

I've triggered my alarm!

He runs for the dull glow of the exit ramp, runs from his very own car.

"Ae! Ae! Ae! Ae!"

The rain has become a fine mist, steam rises from the gutters in the streets. The stop lights have turned off, the street lights are out but all of the buildings, everyone of them he can see, are on, lights on every floor, on, glowing like jewel-studded spikes rising in the night, their tops buried in an iron grey fog.

The streets are filled with even black rivers, flat and silent.

Across the river the foyer glows with a burnished amber, a dumpster parked in front of it like a soup-eating bug.

Below in the garage his car still screams.

"The weather's been really weird," he thinks to himself.

If I could get my job, I could stop the alarm, I could drive home, it would all be over.

He looks at his watch,

11:30, unbelievable. Cecilia.

He feels a flat black question mark.

She doesn't even like me.

He's only slightly shocked when he feels his feet dip into the silent river as he crosses the street to the building, his building, his company, after all he's still an employee, why not go back in, there's really no place else to go.

The force of the current is strong and even.

The water is black. It moves around him, not trying to take him with it but seeking a destination of its own, bypassing the sewers completely as if it was a liquid life form.

It isn't that she doesn't like me, it's just that I don't have anything to give her, I'm still just a naked employee, without promotion, and I deserve one, now, tonight.

His feet find the curb again, he notices only casually that he is without shoes.

I can't believe tonight.

The dumpster lid flies open and a pair of guys scramble out, "Motherfucker!" one of them screams.

He feels the man's spit spray his face and he watches them run between the dark buildings, through the silent rivers.

"It's late," he thinks, the black water seeping under the revolving doors, past the seals, pouring down the stairs to the silent black rivers.

"It's late," he thinks as he pushes against the webby door realizing suddenly that his heart is pounding wildly as the doors revolve him into the building's mouth.

The foyer glows Egyptian green, beams floating up in the immensity, like the beams of a great ship, or the cupola of a sea urchin, a mutation of melted stone, metal, and plastic mottling its surface like some alien Braille.

No doubt it was always like that, he just hadn't noticed.

I won't even say anything to the Security Guard,

"Slap-slap, slap-slap," say his bare feet as they crack the film of black water that covers the floor of the foyer.

If he wants to say something, I'll answer him. If not, I'll just go up the elevator and get my goddamned job.

But the Security Guard is nowhere in sight, nor is his desk.

"He must be somewhere in the building." *Great thought.*

Hell with it, five minutes, ten at most, I'll be driving my car out of here, his mind in his car driving towards his bathtub, listening to soft rock and scraping barf from his chest.

I'll call Cecilia, I'll leave a message. She'll be wondering about me.

But in his heart of hearts he knows she won't be wondering about him. And it angers him somewhere below his thoughts, where he sees Darrell and her dancing among the server banks... or is that dancing?

He feels a heat moving through his body. He fears his suit, suddenly dry, might fall off of him and indeed the rain has eaten the binding molecules from the fabric of his suit. Already his underwear have broken in his pants. His hair, which the rain has streaked with a bleaching white is now falling on his shoulders, leaving shiny plots of skin, but this he does not see, moving as he is through the darkness of the foyer, the smell of rotting wood and the guts of trees around him. There is the soft sound of bare feet as a pack of naked children run down the corridors.

He sprints after them.

"Hey! Hey! Are you going up?"

But they're nowhere in sight.

He looks down and sees a curious marbling in the floor, bones and heads and eyes, tongues and teeth, fur and feet, tails and wings, paws and backs, beneath a hardened surface as if a still pool had suddenly frozen in time; eyeballs and bits of hair, flies clustered about an organ, all this as if a switch had been thrown and by a simple shift, could become liquid again.

The elevator doors fly open, black water gushes out in torrents, and emerging from it, as if floating, is the Security Guard, transfigured, a crocodile head with eyes of phosphorescent green.

"Sign in," croaks the Security Guard.

And Ted screams, but no one can hear it in the screaming, for the Guard is screaming and the floor is screaming, and the deranged trees are screaming, and the water is screaming, and the space rushing through the corridors is screaming, but all silent like the touch of napalm and mortar fire and blazing guns so bright that daylight becomes night and sound so savage it is silent. The Guard steps out of the elevator onto the floor and melts, absorbed into the glaze.

I'll get my job first, I'll call her cell. God, she'll be mad, she doesn't like me to call her cell, she only wants to text and only at certain times and he feels a twinge of pain thinking about his promotion, *He'll never give it to me now.* And yet, somewhere he feels hope, knowing that he's come back into the building, "like you're supposed to," says the voice that sounds like his voice.

The elevator doors are open, The elevator is dry again. It looks, in fact, "normal" and it waits for him. There is a humming of machinery coming from it.

"Woo-woo," the elevator says, "woo-woo," smelling clean as a fresh jet as it whistles up the shaft. And Ted whistles, he whistles like a guy getting up to a unused Saturday morning.

It's gonna be OK. It's gonna be OK, even if it is still Monday, Monday...

And all the Mondays that Monday can be circle round in his chest like crippled dancing girls. And somewhere something black in a cage gets out, foraging in his organs, nosing through the undisturbed sediments, and Ted feels sick, as if his skin was a delicate paste.

...Monday, Monday, I never want to see Monday again.

But somewhere he knows it will be Monday forever, the clock's fingers creeping ever closer to midnight.

"Darrell, I want you," this voice, that is his voice saying, "Darrell, I want you," with such a sudden burning, hotter than sex, hotter than love, "Hot as only hate can get hot", he says, and he says this aloud, "Darrell, I want you."

All the while whistling while the elevator wails. But he doesn't know this, nor that his suit has fallen from him, that he stands there naked and enraged.

The elevator opens, steam rises from the halls, white steam, fresh as steamed white shirts, and Ted, Ted enters the hall, his eyes set and buried in his head, his fists clenched.

I'm gonna get my job first and then I'll call Cecilia.

He does not see that he is naked.

Cecilia, Cecilia.

Nor does he see that his hair has fallen out...

Soft-lined Cecilia...

...that his body is white as sugar...

...with her deep pockets filled with gold...

...that his eyes have turned pink as baby toes.

...gold-veined Cecilia.

He moves down the hall like some ancient god, but he doesn't know this, like some alien secret god come home, the doors about him opening and closing, fanning him like a moth fans an egg. Everywhere there is light, white light, scrubbed clean, cleansing light, bright enough to burn the dead out of itself.

"*So this is how it's done,*" he thinks to himself as his office door swings open before him, his room bright as the others, the keyboards powder white, and black monitors unblinking.

"*It's so easy,*" he says, and he says this aloud, "*It's so easy,*" the drawer appearing below him. "*I should have done this before, much earlier.*" And there it is, his fob, its gold and black shiny sheath, its blue embossed letters like a code to a magic vault, B...M...W...

"Ha ha," he shouts, "I'm an animal." And all about the building the janitors shout with him, "Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

"Cecilia."

Reaching for the phone in the ivory glaze, he feels Darrell's gaze, and his pink eyes shift through the milky glare.

"Darrell." He hears his voice in the clean dead air like an ether patient waking in his sleep.

"Darrell." Not a question, a naming.

"Darrell." Three times as if calling him up from the dead.

And Darrell answers,

"Forgot your fob."

Not a question. An implication.

And Ted suddenly realizes he's not alone. Every desk is filled, every corner occupied by the corpses of the dismissed; administrative assistants, phone solicitors, transcriptionists, headhunters, layout artists, lab technicians, engineers, investor agents, floor-prowling managers, looking up at him, smiling smiles of silent secret misery; Xerox operators, supply clerks, messengers, librarians, personnel assistants, art directors, mail clerks, information and user support staff.

"Tell him, Ted, tell him for us," they shout.

And Ted hears this voice coming from him like rattling sticks and it seems the whole world is shaking, even his bones are shaking, his eyes are breaking apart.

He opens his purple lips and he says,

"Yes."

And he rises from his chair, Ted rises from his chair, he rises reaching up into the blinding light for Darrell's black shadow, Ted rises reaching for Darrell's dusky mane, reaching into the floodlights for Darrell's streaming umbra and Ted thrusts his fingers into Darrell's dark moon face and he feels a wetness there.

"Yes, I forgot my fob," he hears this voice, that is his voice say, and with his fingers he tears into Darrell's face and there is a flooding of black oil down his arms and there is a screaming, like

the shrieking of a jaguar and Darrell's head explodes, showering the room with clots of black, living oil and Ted bites into Darrell's arm and rivers break out, pouring trees and wet monkeys on the office floor, rhinos break from Darrell's belly, auks, and elephant birds and ostriches fly into Ted's face and the people cheer, the gawky, awkward, noisy, insolent, maladjusted, ugly people cheer as Ted takes Darrell, still exploding in his arms and dances with him like a detonating 4th of July scarecrow.

The sprinkler system goes off as Darrell's hands blow apart and snakes pour from his arms, and there is a joy and abandon in Ted's heart, a delight.

"Ha! Ha!" he cries, "I'm an animal."

"Ha! Ha!" the unemployed cry with him.

And Darrell melts into his arms like a spent lover, seeps into his skin, moves into his body and the dove of Ted's soul flutters with excitement as if Ted's ribs might break apart and let it loose. And Ted is cleansed by the water from the sprinkler system, the black oil is washed away and the unemployable sink back into their desks and the world becomes quiet again.

"Hello?"

"Cecilia?"

"This is Cecilia."

"This is Ted."

"I'm not here"

"I know you're there"

"right now."

"I'm coming over."

Click.

And Ted, Ted, rises from his chair, he rises from his chair and mounts the hall, naked, fob in hand.

The building feels his presence move through it, transformed, made equal, the animals the building's killed scramble between its walls as the elevator spreads its doors for him and Ted feels no fear as he floats through the white light blowing up from the shaft.