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REFLECTION

It was the lipstick. Not just anyone can pull off lipstick like that. Bright red. It perched on her lips, the perfect complement to her creamy complexion and her deep brown eyes.

She strolled over to the knot of people I was standing with and gently laid her hand on his arm. He turned to her and bent to kiss her on those full red stained lips. When he pulled away, not a smidge of color was out of place.

"Sorry I'm late, there was terrible traffic."

"Not to worry, we've only had our first drink," he replied, holding up his glass. He slipped an arm around her waist and with that movement brought her into our circle.

The group was slightly too large before she joined and, as the evening progressed and the amount of alcohol consumed increased, became unwieldy. He introduced her as his fiancée and she leaned across the circle to shake my hand when we were introduced. I practically had to shout my name to be heard but I could tell from how her eyes moved on to my colleague next to me before I'd even finished the entire two syllables that she wasn't going to remember it anyway.

Her name was Zariah.

He said nothing of the nature of our relationship. It would have been inappropriate at a work function to discuss it but they didn't even exchange so much as a knowing glance when he introduced us. "He must never have told her," I thought.

The topic of conversation shifted from forecasting to Zariah's job as an emergency room doctor. "I bet you have the best stories," said Patty, from accounting. Zariah shared a few. He nudged her on, reminding her of the funny one about the guy with the potato and the nurse getting locked in the morgue. She was a captivating storyteller. One of her stories involved a Ukrainian man and the conversation shifted back to work, discussing assets the company had looked into in that country.

"Political risk analysis is a difficult area," said Mark from the pension risk section. "We have a solid group though."

"Yeah, who does the Eastern Europe for stuff us?" asked Deb, also from pensions.

"Is that Claudia?" Deb asked.

"No, no Claudia does Southern Europe," said Mark.

"Do you mean me?" I said, louder than I wanted to.

The group paused for a moment before Mark laughed nervously and apologized. "Sorry, I didn't realize you were standing there."

The event photographer stopped by just then and grouped us together for a few photos. "They look great!" he said before moving on to the next group. I used the disruption to excuse myself to the bathroom. In the hallway there was a poster advertising the conference and at the bottom, it noted a code you could use to get your photos from the cocktail hour. While I used the bathroom, I checked the website.

Instantly uploaded apparently. There we were. Me, in a blazer and flats, my face nearly covered by the shoulder of Peter from HR. Zariah, smiling broadly, bright white teeth contrasting with her skin and that lipstick. Her white shirt was bright against her high waisted but short a-line skirt. Her heels were patent leather and gleamed.

I looked at myself in the photo. My jacket looked grey. I swear I had put on a black one that morning. I looked at the sleeves of my jacket. Grey. My pants also looked lighter. "Must be the lighting in here," I told myself.

Glancing in the mirror as I washed my hands, I noticed my face looked a bit grey as well. Perhaps I was getting sick.

I returned to the conference room, stopping by the drinks table for a glass of wine on my way. I walked up to the bartender who was looking behind me. I turned to see what he was staring at but it was just a crowd of people talking amongst themselves. I turned back and cleared my throat. The guy looked around before focusing his eyes on me. "Oh. What can I get for you?" he asked.

Glass of wine in hand, I walked over to chat with some people from the forecasting department. They were talking about the likelihood of flooding in Manhattan after the repairs from Sandy. I said hello but the prospects of flooding were being very hotly debated and none of them even glanced my way.

The crowd around Zariah had grown. She was stunning and, of course, on the arm of our company's CEO. It made sense that people would want to talk to them. It seemed as though 100 people were gathered around them. The noise continued to rise until I felt I had to shout to even ask a question to Matt, who was standing next to me. He couldn't hear me at all over the people.

I let my eyes wander. I spotted a woman walking around with a tray of hors d'oeuvres. She eventually made her way to our group but just as I reached for a cracker with a tapenade, she walked off, nearly hitting her tray against my shoulder as she did.

I excused myself to the group, who said nothing in return, and headed for the elevator. I wanted to take a hot shower, go to bed early and hoped I felt better in the morning. I pushed the call button for the elevator. It didn't light up. I pushed again. Still no light. I pushed harder and still nothing. "The light must be out" I said aloud to no one and stepped back to wait.

As I stood waiting, two men walked up, both in suits, no one I recognized. One of them reached for the button and I said, "Oh the light on the button doesn't work," but as his finger pressed against it, it did.

"That's weird." I said to them.

They continued talking to each other about what time breakfast was in the morning.

The elevator arrived a few seconds later and we all got on. They selected the fourth and sixth floors and I reached to press for the fifth. Nothing happened. I pressed again. Nothing.

I looked at the two men. They were both now looking at their phones.

"Excuse me, since you seem to have the magic touch, would you mind selecting the fifth floor for me?"

Neither looked up.

"Excuse me," I said louder.

One of them leaned over to show the other something on his phone. "Did you see what Janice posted?" They laughed.

"EXCUSE ME."

The elevator arrived at the fourth floor and the guy getting off jostled me as he pushed past. I stood there, shocked. As the doors started to close, I reached out to hold them. I would get off and walk up a floor to my own. Rather than sensing that there was something between them, they slammed onto my arm.

"Ouch. Fuck." I pulled my arm back. The doors closed.

The guy behind me never looked up from his phone.

I started to cry. Huge tears rolled down my cheeks. I rubbed my arm, which was red and sore. What the fuck was wrong with this guy? A second later the elevator chimed and I

stepped off. He followed quickly behind me, passing me without so much as a glance, and headed down the hall. I stopped to calm myself down.

Across from the elevators were two armchairs bookending a long table with a vase of flowers. On the wall above the table, a mirror was mounted. I sank into one of the chairs, head in hands and cried.

After a few minutes, I calmed myself down enough to head back to my room. Tonight wasn't anything a hot shower and raiding the minibar wouldn't fix.

I stood up and looked into the mirror to check how bad I looked.

The mirror only reflected the elevator doors.