

The Drive of Distraction

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TWO STORIES DOWN IN A SECURED COMPUTER DATA CENTER WITH NO windows is where I found myself working on a Friday night. The hum of equipment was background music to the steady clicking tempo of terminal keyboards. It was raining outside, but I would have never known had it not been for the security cameras that allowed me brief glimpses of the outside world from this sterile dungeon—glimpses of a world in which I was a voyeur, observing yet rarely enjoying.

As I looked at the monitors, I remember wishing that I'd chosen a different career path, one that was more earthy and less technical. Having unsuccessfully attempted to major in music in college, I had positioned myself within the surging communications industry upon the realization that I couldn't take my funky jazz chops to the bank. I've been since commiserating with quiet yet sympathetic beverages the line of thought that has brought me here to this point in my life.

I found technology to have its rewards though. Case in point, was the doubling of my productivity to a level where I could still pull off my maintaining previous levels of efficiency, while still finding time to pursue my most fanciful ambition—that of being a writer. With 32 Megabytes of RAM, 4 gig of storage, and a Pentium Pro 180 I've cranked out some pretty mean stuff: cabling specifications, technical illustrations, network schematics; the lot. Yet, all the while constantly in the background, lurked my unwritten novel, my magnum opus.

It was while working on this latest attempt at literary greatness when I caught myself staring at a blank page of my word processor—my brain devoid of thought. I'm not sure if this affliction could officially have been diagnosed as writer's block, as I knew that beyond this mental impasse there lay an empty mind just begging for a distraction.

I looked around this spiritless chamber, antiseptic and air-conditioned. My body shivered as I imagined the fluorescent lights slowly sucking the life through my skin. I needed an espresso, bad.

Richard, a client of mine, sat upon an ad hoc work area nimbly clicking through an endless collection of nudes he'd recently downloaded off the Internet. His official title was "network support specialist," yet his expertise and interests lay obviously in another more "refined" genre of communications.

“Man. Ooo, that’s a keeper.” Richard prefaced or ended everything he said with “Man.” Sometimes both.

He was gazing in lustful contemplation at his PC screen, while effortlessly devouring a ninety-nine cent Jumbo Jack with one hand—his other deftly maneuvering his mouse.

“I’m in love, Man.” he pined through a burger-filled, lecherous grin. Richard was also a pig.

“Lemme see,” I said.

He turned the screen to unveil his most recent and obscene discovery. Stunning she was and talented too, I might add.

“Your kind of girl, Dick.” I said in all seriousness (more serious about the Dick part, anyway). At this he grunted with a far away look in his eyes as he continued to leer at this 2-dimensional *femme-fatale* still chomping away at his Jumbo Jack. Richard had “fallen in love” many times in the days that I’d worked with him but never with anything human.

I glared again at the blank page before me. *I’m working in a data center on a Friday night, and my only companion is a techno-perv*, I mused. I had already finished my voice system traffic analysis for the client and was inwardly seeking inspiration to begin this elusive process of writing. Instead, I felt the raised computer floor reverberate in the rhythm of the data center. The spaghetti-piles of cable and wire that lay beneath me came to life, writhing and seething like a den of angry asps. I must have looked deranged, for Richard rescued me from my delusion with his stylish, blunt inquisitiveness.

“How’s, your book, Man?” he asked.

I sighed with the frustration of a person interrupted. Although in truth, I was silently relieved by the distraction.

“Doin’ all right,” I lied. My reply was curt in an attempt to mask the mixture of modesty and insecurity that surrounded my little venture.

“C’mon, Man. Don’t play shy. What’s it about, Man?” He persisted.

At this point, I truly didn’t know what the hell I was writing about; but one look at Richard, and I smiled and said, “It’s a love story, man.”

“Man! Ya, right!” He laughed. “Oh Man, what do *you* know about *love*? You see this?” He turned his screen back around. “Now that’s love. Look at you, here, in a cement bunker 40 feet from the morgue. Man, you better have one hell of an imagination to be writing about love.” He was cackling at his own wit when choked on the last bite his 99 cent dinner. He grabbed for his Diet Coke with his mouse hand.

Good, you should choke, I thought.

I was about to bring his attention to the fact that he wasn’t exactly an anointed Harlequin romantic himself, when I felt an abrupt need for fresh air.

As I pulled from the parking garage, it had fallen dark, the moon had yet to rise, and the stars shown bright against the black silken canopy of the night Hawaiian sky. I drove through the streets so vexed by Richard’s mockery that I felt a burning determination to prove him wrong. Admittedly, it had been some time since I had been out on the social scene. Maybe, Richard was right. Maybe, that fat, grease-eating, nerd knew more about love than I did. I was distraught by the very idea of it.

Safe within the confines of my computer consultant’s wannabe street prowler, I cruised the avenues of the city with trepidation. I could still hear Richard saying: “Man if you want to score, you got to go to Kalakaua. That’s where the action is, Man.”

I was in search of something called love. The type of which for some men is all the love they’ll ever know. I passed a blond-haired Japanese guy in white polyester slacks. He played an endless blues riff on a tenor sax as tourists thronged about the beach walk in and out of the Waikiki storefronts by the hundreds. Some dropped change in sax-man’s hat. It was Friday night in Waikiki. It was a carnival on the edge of paradise.

At a stop light, I witnessed this spectacle protected by smoke-tinted car windows. From the crowd, she approached. I gazed with fascinated horror as she walked with the sturdy, sensuous gait of a seasoned professional. A divine creature, she was a schoolboy’s dream. She was my dream, and I was the schoolboy.

Dressed head to toe in things black, tight, and shiny; she came to me upon stilettos made for the kill. I panicked and reached for the door lock but, to my own surprise, rolled down the window instead. The window slid; the curtain rose to reveal the stage; the show had just begun.

“Looking for someone?” she asked.

I swallowed hard and attempted a smile. The smile just felt stupid.

“I think you need a date,” she said.

There must have been something in my look of dumb amazement that told her this was so, because before I could utter a word, she was sitting in the passenger seat beside me.

“Green light,” she said with a girlish giggle. Her smile was perfect.

I smelled thick perfume combined with the scent of the leather that covered her body. It stirred me. She reached over and drew her fingers up the nape of my neck and into my hair. I hit gas with a jerk.

“Mind if I smoke?” she asked as she exhaled the blue cloud from her deep red, well-penciled lips. I just nodded and smiled my lame smile. Eyes fixed on the road ahead.

“Let’s go to my place. Turn left up here.” She said. I was at her mercy and followed her every direction. I was driving Miss Daisy, but this was a rose.

She lived in an apartment off the Ala Wai canal. Her lair was decorated in the Spartan Japanese style. I felt Zen.

We lost our shoes at the door, and she led me by hand to her bedroom where on the floor lay a rich red and black futon neatly patterned with white cranes in flight. There was something Escher about it—the way the birds met the clouds. She adjusted a small wood-framed, paper box-lamp to light the room with a subtle golden glow. She then lit a cone of cloying incense to burn in a small bronze vessel beside the lamp. Its lazy smoke rose in tendrils to form clouds that piled up against the ceiling.

“Let me help you get comfortable.” She reached over to undress me. Her slender, skillful hands deftly unbuttoned my shirt and pulled it off. She reached back behind an intricate *shoji* screen for a hangar and placed my shirt out of site.

“Don’t you want to…” I began, but she silenced me with her finger upon my lips then dealt with my pants in the same adroit manner as my shirt. I stood there feeling adolescent and naked before her, my whiskers bristling like a mouse sensing some unseen serpent. I was transfixed.

She undressed herself, and I attempted to help. I was of absolutely no help, of course. Nevertheless, I imagined that she appreciated my efforts. She pushed me back upon the unyielding mattress with the firmness and grace of a Judo artist. I took the fall and breathed in more of her wonderful scent as she climbed on top of me and pressed her hands against my chest. She tossed her black mane over her shoulder and brought her pendulous breasts against me. We kissed deeply and our bodies coupled together as things of man and woman are meant to do...”

“Pendulous! Man, what the hell is pendulous?” Richard gasped. Diet Coke shot from his nose.

I was snapped from my erotic reverie when Richard sprang to his feet.

“Man, I told you. You don’t know shit about love! “Oh man! Baby, your breasts are so...so pendulous,” he raved.

I looked back at what I had written and rubbed my eyes in thought. Well, at least I had his attention up to pendulous. I saved, powered-down, and stuck the floppy story in my shirt pocket. It was time now to go.

As I left the building’s confinement, I noticed that the rain had stopped. The damp smell of the road was fresh; The night inviting. I’d drive with the windows down, at least until I got to Kalakaua.