

## **CELEBRITISM**

Matt flicked the front page of the paper open.

### LAST OF THE SEVEN CRUSADES OPENING NIGHT FLOP

Goddamn it, another bad review. Matt scratched his chin, a little stubbly; he would need to shave before his meeting.

"Babe, can you grab me a towel?" came a voice from the en-suite shower.

"Sure thing hon," Matt said, pushing open the linen drawer and taking out a freshly-pressed white cotton towel. His eyes glanced over her body. From where he was standing, he could make out water droplets falling down her slight and slender back and running onto her buttocks. They hadn't had sex in over three weeks and, fixating over her figure, Matt could feel himself starting to grow hard in his pants.

He handed her the towel and kissed her wet lips, which she brushed off a little too quickly. "Maybe once you're done there we can lie down a little, you can put on one of those little lacy things I got you last week?" Matt propositioned. He could do with cheering up,. He had just been withdrawn from the casting shortlist for the new David Leitch film.

"What, you mean now? No babe! Sorry, I'm just... in a rush," Lucille replied.

He left her to get dressed, put her make-up on, carry out her nasal irrigation and tidy her nails - her daily morning routine he had become so accustomed to.

"I don't know if you saw this review," Matt said while handing her the paper.

Lucille glanced at the headline, crestfallen, then handed the paper back.

"Oh babe. What the hell happened? I thought this was gonna be your big comeback."

"Tell me about it. I mean, all the initial critics seemed to really like it. I literally worked so hard on that role," Matt replied, looking for any sign of comfort in Lucille's eyes but failing to spot any.

"Uh-huh, I know, it's such a disappointment," Lucille said, flipping through the mail next to the door to check for anything interesting, already on her way out. "Well, we'll talk about it later, yeah? I've got a meeting with Gina and I really shouldn't be late."

Clumsily, she landed a kiss on his cheek, then gave a small squeeze at his cock, as if she didn't know he had blue balls, , winked and closed the door.

Matt watched the door close. He needed to work out his next step. How could he get back on that casting list? Did he know anyone who might be able to talk to Leitch about it?

---

"I'm sorry Matt, but there's just nothing I can do," Tommy said, touching the big bags under his eyes.

"Look, I've seen the reviews, I understand it doesn't look good," Matt pleaded, "Maybe if I ask Sean to speak to Leitch for me? I worked with Sean back in 2004, he can vouch for me."

"Well you can try," Tommy said, "But leave me out of it, I can't keep getting associated with this stuff. You know how this reflects on me? I mean, I'm sorry and all, but I'm gonna have trouble booking more clients."

Why did Matt get the feeling this was all his fault?

"If I was you, you're looking at making some sort of big comeback," Tommy said, getting out a cigarette.

"This was supposed to be my comeback!" Matt said.

"Well what do you want me to say? You need to boost your public appearance ratings, you need to up your press mentions. God, Matt, you don't need me to tell you this, you need some goddamn positive press," Tommy ranted, puffing out on his cigarette.

"Well... what do you suggest?" Matt asked.

"Use your goddamn head, Forster! I don't know, Christ. I don't know how we're gonna recover from this, but you need a fucking miracle in the press to turn this thing around. You know I had you lined up for six auditions in the next two weeks. Big names. Big producers. And now my fucking ass is on the line, they all want to pull out. You know how that's gonna look for my other clients? Let alone new ones, I'm already just fucking forgetting about that," Tommy said, stubbing his cigarette out on a \$600 glass ashtray his mistress brought him from Japan.

Matt thought long and hard about this. It's true, it hadn't been a good time for Hollywood press at the moment. Especially not men. He hoped his bad reviews would be swept up in the general disdain for perverts, sexual fiends and men. Matt sometimes wondered if something would come out about him. In general he thought of himself as a pretty respectful guy. Okay, maybe in

his earlier days, before Lucille, there were a couple of times when he used his fame to get girls to blow him off.

*I'm a movie-star baby, I make like six grand a day even if I don't show up.*

But no, he had never raped someone. Not even close.

"Okay, I'll think on it, okay? Sorry for all this trouble," Matt said, gathering up his things.

"Yeah, just make sure you turn this thing around or we might have to talk about a suspension of your contract," Tommy said casually.

"A suspension of my contract'???" Matt repeated, incredulous. "Are you serious? Tommy, it was just a couple of bad reviews."

"Not a couple Matt, it's fucking thousands! I've got Lions Gate calling me up asking about my credentials, so don't even think I won't cut your contract if I have to, cause I will fucking do it in an instant! I'll find a way!" Tommy bellowed, red in the face and, at this stage, reeling from all the coke he ingested several hours earlier.

With that, Matt left the office and headed towards Lions Gate. His whole day had just been turned upside down. Wasn't his agent supposed to be the one doing damage control? Bracing himself for what was about to come, he walked through the sliding doors and into reception.

-----  
"Hi! Matt Forster. Got a meeting with Dave and Lynn at one-oh-five?" Matt smiled, showing his pearly white teeth.

There was a wave of recognition that passed the secretary's face. Matt Forster, he was voted worst actor in that new Seven Crusades film, the one that turned out to be a major flop. She remembered hearing Dave talking about it in the lift this morning.

"Oh right, hi Matt! So yeah, turns out there's been, like, a scheduling change? Dave and Lynn are fully booked up until two. So you can just like, wait here until then?" the secretary said.

"Really? Cause I had this appointment arranged with them two weeks ago," Matt said, trying hard to look positive, making sure to smile his pearly whites, but the reality of everything was sending anxiety pulsing through his veins.

"I know, they said they're, like, really sorry. Can I get you a coffee?"

"No thanks, I'll just, uh, wait here."

“Great! Thaaanks,” she said, picking up the phone.

“Lions Gate studios, Melissa speaking.”

Matt walked over to the waiting area and sat on one of the many black leather chairs. New editions of US Weekly, Hollywood Now! and Time Magazine were placed on a low glass table in the centre of the room.

He tried not to look but he could see a text box peeking on the front cover of one of them.

SEVEN CRUSADES BIG DISAPPOINTMENT, KRUGER SAYS

Oh Jesus. Matt kept his head down.

He thought he could see a few people he recognised waiting with him. Yep, that was the kid from the old Apocalypse Now. Although, he wasn't a kid anymore, he looked pretty handsome and rugged and made Matt feel old. Across from him, two little blondes, probably models he thought, they didn't really seem like the actress types, they lacked a certain flair. Swinging through the doors, more famous types were ushered straight up, no waiting involved; Tiffany Evans, Ralph Fiennes (what was he doing here?), Akshay Kumar, Amy Ryan, Mila Kunas – her tits were cradled in a cowl neck dress and looked incredible. He knew Mila pretty well, in fact he had been angling to get her into bed the last time he saw her. But he wouldn't draw attention to himself, he didn't want her to see he was being made to wait.

What felt like centuries later, Matt was called up.

The lift doors opened and Dave and Lynn were there, engaged in a serious-looking hushed conversation.

“Matt, hi!” Lynn said, suddenly aware of his presence.

She air-kissed him on each cheek and gave his arm a light squeeze.

“Matt, we meet again,” Dave said, holding out a hand to be shaken. Matt obliged, making sure it was neither too hard a squeeze and also not too limp and pussy-like.

“Shall we head over then?” Lynn said, making a gesture towards the room at the end. There was a much nicer glass-walled room in the centre of the corridor, but instead they went to a room nearer to the back which had an incredible view over the Santa Monica harbour, but with a real wall on the back side of the room to ensure their privacy.

The room was set up with tea, coffee and fresh exotic fruit.

“They can also get you a soda if you want it. Or something stronger?” Lynn said with a shadow of a smile.

“A sparkling water is great thanks,” Matt said, and as if from nowhere a half-full glass of water appeared in front of him. “Thanks.” Damn it, he was saying thanks way too much, he thought. He needed to get his nerves in check.

“So, let’s get straight to it,” Lynn led the conversation. “The critics didn’t exactly love your film did they? In fact it was an absolute “flop” from what I saw. Right, Dave?” she said, encouraging him to continue.

“Yeah Matt, don’t take this the wrong way but it’s gonna be pretty hard for us to cast you in one of our films while your public ratings are so low. Oh, and also the acting credibility of course.”

“Right,” Matt said. Despite having mentally preparing himself for this, he felt completely taken off-guard.

“In fact, tell you the truth it’s gonna be pretty hard for us to book ANY actor from Carter-Hill agency with all this bad press hanging around. You know what this industry is like: people TALK. And right now, they’re talking badly, Matt. You can guess, right?” Dave sniffed, absolutely exhausted and pretty fucking sick and tired of this conversation already.

“Right, but you guys know my work, you’ve seen all my other stuff, like Devils Who Do?” Matt suggested.

“That was 2004 Matt, this is 2017,” Lynn said, also tiring of the conversation, “We all thought this would be your comeback, we all feel a bit misled to be honest because we were made to believe this would be a big success and that it would be perfect timing for you to be in Triple X, but it’s the opposite. We’ve already done those countless test shots for Sugarman Dynasty and filmed practically the whole first 20 minutes. It was unofficially yours that role, you know that, but how can we go forward with all this stuff attached to your name?”

“Wait a second, you’re considering pulling me out of Sugarman? I can understand if you wanna take me off the casting shortlist for The Man Who Was, but you actually wanna pull me out of Sugarman as well?”

“That’s right Matt. We’ve already got a standby for your part, we just need him to confirm his availability and make the signing. We’ll re-do the test shots, it’ll cost us thousands at this stage, but you’ll be paid for your time anyway. So... maybe see you sometime in the future once this all blows over?”

Matt was completely in shock, once the press got hold of this it might ruin him. He hadn't signed the final agreement for Sugarman Dynasty though, it had still been under discussions with Tommy - it was perfectly legal. Why hadn't Tommy told him this? He felt an overwhelming sense of abandonment, but chalked it down to having too much coffee earlier.

"Sorry Matt, maybe if you manage to ride this wave and turn it around we can talk, but at this stage there would need to be a big change in your reputation and honest to God, I don't know how you'll make that happen."

Lynn and Dave stood up, motioning for Matt to get the hell out.

"Matt, so sorry and everything, but we've got a meeting with Blake Evans at three and we really shouldn't be late for that," Lynn said impatiently.

"So, isn't there anything I can do? I mean, isn't there..."

"You can discuss the details with Naomi, I'll set up a meeting for sometime next week."

Naomi; Dave and Lynn's assistant and reserved for the low-profile types that didn't need to be taking up Dave and Lynn's time. Great.

With that, Matt left the office and headed towards the lifts, already long-forgotten by Dave and Lynn who were heading into the larger glass-walled room and ordering the room hosts to refresh everything before Blake Evans arrived.

-----

When Matt got back to the apartment he opened the fridge and cracked open a Budweiser. It wasbb't – not his favourite but it's the only beer that Lucille will drink and she gets through it slowly.

*It's so light and smooth, I just love it!*

A large sigh left Matt's lungs and he sunk into the suede sofa that looked much more comfortable than it actually was. The words of the day kept going over in his mind – 'reputation', 'press', 'comeback'. He had bad reviews before, but nothing like this.

Matt took a sip of his beer and switched on the TV. More coverage of the 'Hollywood crisis', as he liked to call it. The list of sex offenders and misogynists was expanding and growing day by day.

The door sounded lightly and Lucille walked in, arms full with Bloomingdale bags and coconut lattes. She had a tight cream miniskirt on, light brown blouse and knee-length boots - a different outfit from this morning, Matt noted.

“Drinking in the week?” Lucille remarked upon seeing the Budweiser bottle cap on the kitchen counter. Matt didn’t reply.

“You don’t wanna get a beer belly again. Remember how long it took you to get rid of it last time? And we have my cousin Jenny’s wedding coming up next month, and after that the People’s Choice awards.”

“It was just one beer,” Matt said, practically to himself.

“So hon, I’ve got my yoga class tonight yeah? See you later?” And with that she was gone again, and Matt was left alone with his own empty head and his nearly-finished bottle of weak beer.

He couldn’t find anything good to watch on the TV. He had little patience for the news and he didn’t want to start watching a Netflix series at this time in the day – he had to meet Fraser Christian for drinks in a couple of hours.

Instead, he reached over to his laptop and fired up Facebook. He had a different name, one which wouldn’t be found by any fans. That didn’t stop some of them though. He had even received a few naked photos through his direct messages and masturbated to several of them. He couldn’t deny it – girls begging for his cock turned him on. Unfortunately, that was the exact opposite of Lucille, who withdrew from him for weeks on end.

Drifting through pages and pages of his newsfeed, he saw that his cousin had shared something on the Hollywood crisis. His cousin Benji was a bit nutty and definitely could be described as a family outcast. Matt always liked him when he was little though, up until the incident when they were twelve years old and they jerked each other off at a sleepover. They never spoke about it again, but there had been a strange air of shame and awkwardness between them ever since, one which seemed to grow with time. When his cousin turned 22, he rejected the family. The legend was that he had gone travelling and become a drug addict, living off his father’s inheritance, who died when Benji was 17.

But this post had a lot of reactions and a lot of comments. Who knew Benji was so worldly? Matt didn’t bother to read them all, but he saw a couple of comments on ‘the elite’ and ‘the media’ and ‘moral panic’, the latter of which Matt wasn’t sure what it meant, but it certainly sounded intelligent.

Matt gave the link a click and briefly read through the story. He didn’t recognise the news site – Point! News Online, with a tagline ‘Alternative views, quashing illiberal liberals, serving

humanity.' 'Illiberal liberals'? Matt didn't have a clue what that could mean, but he knew liberal was a good word in his industry - something that always arose in conversations about political movies at parties.

*The case of Louis Devoir is a classic example of today's society's moral panic. Nowadays women do not want to stand up and actually take responsibility for their actions. Women are confusing flirting with 'abuse', as is most pertinently clear in the case of Peter Shenwick, who is now facing twelve lawsuits from women who cannot even produce the evidence for their accusations.*

*Let's face it, everyone is a bit perverted – but since when should this affect a person's success in the Hollywood industry? Isn't it the responsibility of women to stand up for themselves and be true feminists?*

Feminism: that was a major buzzword at the moment, Matt noted, reading on.

*Are we really going to blame an entire class of society for the actions of a few individuals anyway? This is moral panic at its worst and this liberal world needs to fight against it. The question is, do we really just side with the victim no matter what? What about the rights of men in Hollywood?*

Phew. Matt was getting tired with this article but he thought he got all the main points pretty well. And with that he shut the laptop, masturbated over Mila Kunis and had a shower before heading out to meet Fraser Christian.

-----

"Here he comes, flop of 2017 so I hear? I'm just fucking with you," Fraser says as Matt saunters up to the table five minutes late.

"Yeah haha man, it's no big deal, just a couple of reviews right?" Matt said, carefully glancing around to see if there was anyone he recognised nearby. Matt had made the reservation and after today's news he had called the restaurant to request a table in one of its more secluded parts, avoiding any embarrassing encounters about Seven Crusades.

"What the hell happened, huh? Don't beat yourself up, we all have our Britney Spears moments, right? Just don't shave your head cause your hair is like the one good thing you got going for you right now, am I right?" Fraser laughed, practically licking the table with excitement.

"So, how's Melanie Bassa?"

"Oh yeah, she's hot as ever," Fraser said, opening the menu. "But to tell you the truth I'm kinda getting tired of her constant bullshit about China plates."



“China plates?” Matt asked.

“Oh, she didn’t do this when you were dating? She’s got this thing about China plates. Yeah. Replaces them every two weeks. We have a room in the house just filled with China plates. Every place we go on one of our minibreaks she has to buy a China plate from there. Doesn’t even have to be a good one, it can be anything – when we went to Whistler she bought a China plate of a dog skiing with a helmet on.”

“No way?”

“Yes way, man. I brought it up in our counselling sessions. The therapist said it’s some sort of projection, I don’t know. It’s a fucking joke though.”

“Huh.”

“How’s Lucille?”

“Oh,” Matt thought about Lucille’s change of clothing, the scent of her neck when she came home on Sunday, supposedly from her yoga class. “Lucille’s fine. Still kickin’.”

“Awesome dude. Hey, you should marry her. Everyone loves a wedding, I bet it’ll push your ratings up. Yeah I’ll have the fig salad to start and then the duck,” Fraser said, closing his menu and throwing it in the general direction of the waitress.

“And for you, sir?” the waitress asked. Matt loved getting called sir.

“I’ll have the goats’ cheese followed by the quails’ eggs,” Matt said, smiling his pearly whites and checking out the waitress. Not much to brag about, but she did have great legs.

“Goats’ cheese? Giving up on your diet then?” Fraser asked.

Matt instantly regretted his choice.

Several minutes passed and the men exchanged more gossip and diet tips. Fraser was just telling Matt about his new intermittent fasting plan when Matt’s phone started to ring.

“Matt Forster.”

“Matt, it’s Tommy. Look, I just got a call from HBO. Hannah Umbert pulled out last minute from Wake Me Up tomorrow morning and you need to do it,” Tommy spoke fast, like he was in a rush to wrap this call up.

“What, they want me?”

“What did I just say?” Tommy said, extremely agitated. He hated having to deal with these fuckwit stars all day.

“Okay yeah of course I’ll do it. I mean, what’s it on?”

“Just general celebrity shit. Just make sure you don’t fuck it up, you need to be funny and charming Forster, or else everything will go down the shitter, got it?”

“Yeah of course, thanks so much Tommy!” but Tommy had already hung up the phone.

---

Matt crushed up an aspirin and put it in his orange juice. Six-thirty-seven, his watch said. He was making good time for this show. Tommy said he needed to be there by seven-thirty for make-up and lighting.

Lucille had come in late last night when Matt was already asleep – went out for a late bite to eat with an old friend she ran into, she said. But now she was up and awake, doing her early morning meditation in the garden. Matt had a dream last night that he was a bird stuck in between two traffic cones, with human feet but no arms or nose. He woke up in the middle of the night with his heart pounding, his thighs sweating on Lucille.

He took a Valium and went back to sleep.

Matt decided to wear his Chambaray shirt for HBO. He bought it from Max and Perille’s the week before and the sales attendant said it made him look modern and sophisticated. He watched yesterday’s Wake Me Up show last night when he got in and it was nothing special. It really is just celebrity shit as Tommy said.

“Lucille, baby? I’ve gotta go,” Matt called into the garden.

“Oh right, your HBO thing?” Lucille called back.

“Yeah, how’d you know?” Matt couldn’t recall telling her.

“Oh. I think Tommy called last night or something.”

Matt went over and kissed her head. She looked like she had lost a bit of weight and her flat, toned stomach was gently rising and falling in the heat. He put his hand on her shoulders in a display of warmth and intimacy.

“Matt! I’m trying to get into my zone, can you lay off?” Lucille pushed his head away, giving Matt a fright and almost causing him to stumble in his jet black brogues.

“Oh sure, sorry. Bye then,” and Matt went back to the house, took one final look in the mirror, called his cab driver and left.

---

Make-up. Lighting. Nails. Mike check. Matt was shoved into Hannah Umbert’s dressing room. Seems like someone didn’t get the memo in time, Matt thought to himself.

“Alright sweetie, now open wide and lemme check your teeth,” the make-up artist said. She had wild red curly hair that seemed to jut out at all imaginable angles, big oversized round glasses, emerald earrings and a thin flimsy dress covering her barely-there frame.

“Yeesh – OJ this morning?”

“Yeah, why? Can you smell it? I brushed my teeth twice before I left.”

“Yeah it happens, you just got a little pulp in your teeth sweetie. Here,” she said, attacking him with a toothpick. Her emaciated elbow bones lay within Matt’s line of vision as he tried hard not to look down her dress, but presuming there would likely be nothing there anyway.

“Done! Alright sweetie, you’re off to room eight, they’ll give you all the info from here.”

Before Matt could close his mouth, she had vanished and a brief stillness overshadowed the room. Matt made his way to room eight down the corridor, where he was told to wait until he it was his cue to come on – around fifteen minutes into the show, the stage hand told him.

---

Hot sweaty lights hit Matt square in the eye when he walked onto the stage. A live audience was there to greet him with a standard ecstatic clapping session, but no standing ovation for him.

He took his place next to two other celebrities - one a vacant actress, the other a type similar to Matt himself. They all exchange pleasantries and discuss the gossip of their kingdom. Newlyweds in Hollywood, the new kind of breast implants that look more natural and tit-like, the Ronnie Davis show, conversation flitting from subject to subject like a fly caught in between double-glazed windows. This will be a breeze, Matt thought, and they hadn’t yet brought up *Seven Crusades*, although there had been several small jokes hinting at it. Next up was the mini individual interview. First up, the actress, who discussed how her life changed completely after nude photos of her were leaked online.

*My life literally turned upside down. I mean, that's my privacy. You know?*

Matt saw those photos. She had awesome tits given how tiny her frame was. Natural too, or so he thought before the conversation about breast implants.

The other actor was questioned on his recent decision to go vegan.

*Environmentally it's just, like, the way things are going. we all know that right?* (He asks the audience, provoking a comment from the host about his weight loss) *Yeah, AND I lost five pounds, come on!* Loud cheers and an exaggerated stand up whooping motion follow from the actor.

Man, this guy is killing it, Matt thought. Suddenly, Matt got nervous. He felt tired and hungry and his heart was beginning to race. Deep breaths, remember what the therapist taught you, accept the feeling and focus your mind elsewhere. Where though? There was nowhere else to focus it. This was it.

"Matt?" Donna, the host said.

"Uh-huh?"

"You looked a little dazed out there!" Donna asked a little nervously, the audience laughing along. It's all fun and games.

"Oh right! Well, you know, Lucille kept me up late last night," he said, quick to think on his feet for once and provoking suitable noises from the audience. Then, not wanting to be too risqué in the morning, he quickly added, "Yeah, she insisted on starting a new Netflix series."

More laughter erupts from the audience. This is going well, Matt thought. Maybe I am pretty funny after all.

"A bit of Netflix and chill!" the host winks at him. "So how is it going with Lucille? Do we hear wedding bells?" As if by magic, wedding bells sounded onstage.

Matt thought about the way her pussy tasted three weeks ago – like someone had been there before him.

"Hey, I'm not a man to kiss and tell! But Lucille is an awesome woman, and we're working on an exciting project together at the moment, so keep your eyes peeled for that one." Oh crap, why did he have to make that up? Lucille would kill him for that later, but it'll probably get swept up and die in the Hollywood current within a few weeks anyway.

"Let's talk about what you've been up to and what you have going on at the moment."

Sensing where this was going, Matt needed to change the subject quickly.

“Well, as you know, it’s not a great time for men in Hollywood at the moment.”

“Oh?” Donna crossed her legs, seemingly interested in how this interview was panning out but also unnerved by where this line of conversation might be headed.

His growing confidence fading, Matt was getting really nervous now. He cleared his throat and thought rapidly. He needed to say something important.

“That’s right, Donna. This Hollywood crisis is really affecting men’s credibility in this business. We need to stand up for ourselves in this liberal world,” Matt said, veins pounding with adrenalin.

“By ‘Hollywood crisis’ you mean the epidemic of sexual abuse?”

“Well I wouldn’t call it abuse exactly, but it’s... [Matt tried to think] moral panic. It’s moral panic at its worst.” Matt looked around, but he couldn’t make out the audience’s expressions behind the bright lights. The actress looked confused by the word ‘moral panic’ but also not very interested in the conversation now that it wasn’t her turn.

The male actor’s ears had piped up and he looked like he was rapidly trying to process the words that had come out of Matt’s mouth to calculate if it was something his agent would like him to agree with. Since he couldn’t come to a definitive decision, he chose to simply look curious and thoughtful.

“I mean tThere are lots of perverts out there, right? But flirting? I mean, I wouldn’t call that abuse, Donna.” Matt was proud. He could tell this was the kind of moral stance that would make a great splash in the papers:

*Matt Forster Stands Up for Men’s Rights*, he thought to himself. As an afterthought, he added, “And for women, this is super important too because they get to take more responsibility, which is what feminism is all about.”

Nailed it. Thank you cousin Benji.

The interview came to a close fairly quickly after these comments. The host said that she needed to move on because of scheduling time, but Matt did note that he was given a lot less air time than the others. He probably pulled the short straw by being the last one on.

Eventually, the lights came down and the show was over.

No one said much to Matt and he skunked off, collecting his few belongings as he was led out the stage door. Without warning, he was met by an angry group of women and a couple of men who were being fought off by security.

“Hey dickwad! I hope you never get cast in a film again!”

“You fucking suck you sexist piece of shit!”

“You fucking asshole! You’re the fucking problem you dumb fuck!”

“Go fuck yourself, you fucking pig! Let’s see how you like someone grabbing your cock and fucking you in the ass!”

It all happened too fast and Matt didn’t have time to process it. The angry mob was pushed out and Matt hopped in the taxi and sped off.

“Everything okay, Mr Forster?” his taxi driver asked.

“Yeah, I think so. Just some more angry feminists I guess, right?”

But Matt knew in his stomach that this wasn’t good. He reached down into the side door for his Valium, dry-swallowed 4mg and shook his head out. Maybe those comments from Benji didn’t fall so well after all. His phone was ringing – it was Tommy.

“What the Jesus fuck were you thinking Forster?” Matt started to apologise profusely, but Tommy kept talking over him so Matt just stayed quiet and listened.

“I’ve got Lionsgate saying they wanna pull out two of my other actors! Your career is fucking over, your contract is over, twelve bananas and sixteen candles on the windscreen, Forster!”

“What?”

“I’ve got nineteen lights and a packet of Starbucks, you really took a motor to the front seat jail! Never talked a bunch of posies into a rainsack, this is the mescal ten in Hawaii Wisconsin!”

Tommy wasn’t making any sense. “Tommy, I don’t understand,” Matt started, but Tommy had already hung up the phone. Matt decided to stay quiet for the rest of the journey, wait for the Valium to take effect and try hard not to look at his phone. It kept buzzing with emails, but no more phone calls.

The taxi came to a slow stop in front of some traffic lights, at which point Matt realised they were going the wrong way.

“Hey, hey! This is not the right way. Is there some sort of diversion or something?”

Hesitantly, the taxi driver peeked his head around. “Shall I take you home, Mr. Forster?”

“I guess it has to be,” Matt replied, his defeated brain processing the day’s events, He shut his eyes. Everything was going purple and grey.

---

The taxi came to an abrupt stop.

“Hey idiot! Wake up, we’re here.”

Bleary-eyed, Matt looked out the window and let out a slow yawn.

“Thanks,” Matt hesitated. “You got change for a five?”

*Tight ass*, the taxi driver muttered under his breath, passing a one-dollar note back to Matt.

Matt looked out the window to the luminescent red lights that framed the doors of *Original Wings & Things*. He patted his pockets down to make sure he’d remembered his keys to lock up later. Did he have his phone charger? He looked down and saw the cord sticking out of the pocket of his slightly battered jeans.

The door had barely closed before the car sped off, knocking Matt off balance as he worked to steady himself. He straightened up and instinctively checked his pockets again. He had an unabating feeling that he was forgetting something.

He looked at his feet, which were standing in fluid of some sort. A siren blared somewhere in the distance. He wiped his feet on the pavement, opened the door and walked to the counter, his eyes met with a disapproving glare.

“You’re late. Again,” they said, throwing his notebook and apron on the counter. “Your pay will be docked 30 minutes.”

“Sorry,” Matt mumbled, running his tongue along his teeth as he tried to tease the orange pulp out of his gums and make himself presentable. His section was heaving already and an impatient click of the fingers summoned him to two tall men sitting on the table on the far left.

As Matt hurried closer, a ripple of recognition drifted across the two mens’ faces, but it was soon forgotten.

“So,” Matt said, pen in hand and ready to deliver. “What can I get for you guys?”