

Nightwalking

It was night. Alone in his room, he laid in his chair, looking up at the ceiling. Had he been any more motivated, he might have shuffled himself off his chair and into his bed, or at the very least might have put something bright in front of his face to stare at.

There was a backpack waiting on his desk to be opened. But he thought it better, or rather he couldn't be bothered today, to leave it for tomorrow instead. However, tomorrow had already begun an hour ago, and now he was only six hours away from when he was obligated to wake up.

How lazy. He suddenly stretched out his hands. They were mere shadowy blobs, but they were shapes he could bear to watch. Anything would be better than the ceiling.

Something began to ring in the room. It was a phone – his phone. He stared at the screen for a moment before picking up.

"Hello," he said.

A girl's voice responded, audibly tense, "Hey! It's me, Lindsey!" She sighed. "I know that we don't really –" She stopped herself. "Actually, um, you know how to drive right? I need a favor from somebody."

"Yeah. I can drive."

"You've got your license right, like, you can drive other people? Even if you don't it'd be great if you, um..." She hesitated, "like I obviously can't make you do something you don't want to."

"Just tell me what you need from me." He took his eyes off his free hand. "I'm not doing anything at the moment."

The sight of the empty road was almost a welcome sight. Staring down the yellow road markings that stretched past the light of the car's headlights gave him something to focus on. He passed one completely darkened house after another, the signs of a neighborhood that had long gone to sleep. But far ahead he could see a group of cars parked in front of a house, a dim light covering them. The party Lindsey mentioned, in all likelihood. Someone tipped someone else off about a house, a free night from their parents, or a favor they had won, and word spread excitedly in the hallways of the school's "acquainted" population. The kind of people who partied, who were popular, who were just popular enough. Those who weren't sitting in their room with their heads leaned back unable to sleep. People who weren't like him, he concluded.

He drove on, steady on the pedal, a thought bubbling from the haze of his mind. Perhaps, it would be worth something to her. Maybe, he would stand out to her. Maybe, she'd start to greet him if they saw each other in the hallway. She'd start to see him as more than just the stage guy who turned on the lightbulb during the school play. And if there were a moment, where they could possibly meet alone. Maybe a rooftop at one of these parties – Lindsey would have a soft smile on her face, and she would say "Trent, I—"

He couldn't actually imagine farther than that. A chill tapped onto the back of his neck, and shook through his body. No, tonight is just a fluke. Odds are, he was the last

person that she could call for a favor. Odds are, she didn't even expect him to pick up. And as he pulled into the driveway of the party, his face bore a stiff expression.

She stumbled outside, supported by her friend who was now vigorously thanking somebody. Liquor was still swishing around in her bottle, she lazily brought it to her lips and took another swig. The crude taste of alcohol lingering in her throat. Her friend was now looking at her, saying something about going back home, which she protested, she was having fun and surely she wasn't drunk by now. However, the force of two sober bodies were more than enough to put the protesting girl into the passenger seat and fasten her seat belt as she ineffectively flailed around.

"I can't thank you enough," Lindsey said, breathing a sigh of relief.

"It's fine." He said, looking at the house and all the cars around it, as if he were expecting more drunks to start streaming out to his car.

"Listen, Trent, I'll think of some way to repay you, promise."

"Hm? It's nothing you need to pay back," he began, in lame protest.

"No no no, I've got to. This, well," Lindsey looked at her friend slumped over in the passenger seat with a pained expression, "I hadn't expected her to get so wasted tonight, after what happened with—" She bit her lower lip, looked at Trent, and sighed.

"Anyways, I'm really glad I managed to reach somebody, everyone else either didn't pick up, or said they were too busy to come. You're a lifesaver."

Trent stood awkwardly with his hands in the pockets of his jacket. The car hummed beside them.

"I'm sorry in advance if she causes any trouble. You can text me when you've brought her back," she said. "I'll pay you back somehow, I really will."

She gave him the address where her friend lived and went back to the party, the noise of the house never seemed to settle. Trent pulled away, and began the drive home.

Once more the sight of the empty road greeted him, and the light of the party faded behind like the sunset. Though the presence of another body breathing in the same space, took up some of his attention. Out of the corner of his eye, he could tell she was shuffling around in her sleep. But these movements faded out of his consciousness as the yellow road markings that stretched into the dark took his attention again.

He was right. He wasn't the first person she contacted. Obviously he wouldn't be, if he just considered that he only knew her from a class. But she had still thought to contact him. Desperation called for her. Yet it also meant she still had his contact info on her phone. It was insignificant. In the next round of cleaning up her contact list, she would likely remove him. He paused for a moment. She promised to repay him. How would she do it? What could she possibly give? Perhaps something small, a candy or a gadget or something. She hadn't known him long enough to give him anything he'd truly want. It'd have to be something quaint.

What kind of treatment would her boyfriend get? A futile question, but one that crept into his deeply curious and nosy consciousness nonetheless. Perhaps she would be smiling, trying to obviously hide something behind her back, as she would present her

gift, arms fully extended forward, excitement in her eyes. He'd never get to see it. The thought of it made his hands tighten on the wheel.

He continued to ride in silence for some time, lost in his thoughts, until he heard a voice beside him say, "You've got a cool jacket." And once more he was aware of the drunken girl in his car.

She seemed to have woken up. She had her eyes focused on him with a stare that had all the dull intensity she could muster.

"Didja hear me?" She said, "I said, you got a cool jacket."

His face gave no indication he heard her. She pouted a bit and leaned back into her chair.

"Where's Lindsey?" She asked.

"Party," he replied.

"Oh, so she called you to bring me home?"

"Yes. That seems to be the case."

"And who are you? One of her ex-boyfriends or something?"

"No."

"Then are you just a friend?"

"I wouldn't say so."

She narrowed her eyes.

"You don't have a crush on her, do you?" She asked.

Trent couldn't restrain his voice from tensing. "We were in a class together," he said, "we partnered up for one project because everyone else had partners."

"I see."

Silence returned to the car.

"You wanna do something fun?" She said.

"What?" He said.

"You've got a girl in your car. Bet that doesn't happen often."

His eyes were steeled to the road.

"It's a bit stuffy don't you think?" She fidgeted with the sleeves on her dress. "I'm just gonna—"

"Hey! What are you doing?"

He pulled the car into an empty driveway. Silently, he prayed that the people who lived there wouldn't be awake to see him as he reached over and pulled the dress back onto her body. Her skin was cool to the touch.

"Why'd you do that?" She said, frowning, "it's hot in here."

He said nothing while the car moved slowly back out of the driveway and back onto the road. Meanwhile, she noticed how for a brief moment, he readjusted the collar of his jacket.

Finally, they pulled into the driveway of her house, and Trent brought the car to a stop. He wordlessly unlocked the door, and kept staring straight ahead. It was in his imagination that he would be able to go back home peacefully, but even though his movements implied she should leave, she did not budge.

"We're here," he said. "Your house."

"Mm," she murmured. It seemed that she was feigning sleep.

He broke his stance and looked at her. She was leaning on his car door, eyes closed. Moonlight was dripping in the window onto her face. He let that image stick for a moment before he spoke again, "C'mon you've got to go."

One of her eyes opened, then the other, and she yawned. "Ah, we're here," she said as she rubbed her eyes. She saw her house and its sky blue paint, then she stared at Trent. "You know, my parents aren't home right now."

"Uh huh," he looked out of his window into the dark, away from her.

"You know what I'm saying right?"

"I'd rather not acknowledge it."

"C'mon, it'd be fun."

"No."

She swung her arms around him. "We don't even have to do anything serious, you know?" She whispered. "And it'll be just the two of us."

He felt her breath on his shoulder, it sounded unfocused and slurred. "Please, just go now." Gently, he took her arms off around him. "I'm only doing this as a favor."

She pouted as he said that, but she didn't make any more advances. The car door on her side opened, and Trent breathed a sigh. He'd have to text Lindsey that her friend was home safely.

But there was a brief sensation on his cheek and a pop. He quickly turned his head to look where the girl had gone, and saw only a flash of her hair in the moonlight as she headed towards her house.

When he returned home, he had trouble falling asleep. Feeling somewhat ashamed, he quickly sought something to relieve himself of what had happened that night. After which, he lay in bed. He'd just texted Lindsey, but there was a lingering sensation on his cheek, and he couldn't focus on her response. He closed his eyes for a moment to think. A warmth crept out from his chest and spread to his body, and it lingered and lingered as he tried to forget it for the rest of the night.