

You Need Your Pants

On his back on the bed, Kevin lay staring up, allowing himself to not think about anything.

When the water stopped in the bathroom, he looked over to see her naked body reflected in the full length mirror that hung on the bathroom door. She had a wet washcloth in her hand and when she looked in the mirror and saw him looking at her she smiled. She walked back to him and stopped, standing above him, still unclothed and inviting. Kevin propped himself up with his elbows to meet her and felt the overly soft pillows give way to his movements. He pushed his body all the way up and rested his back on the nagahide headboard. His sweat bonded with the synthetic material and unless he wanted to put in some effort, he was stuck.

“When will I see you again?” She said as she bent down to kiss his neck.

He waited until she stopped kissing him to answer. He was lost in her touch and it felt good to be lost. A gentle darkness engulfed the apartment aside from the bright bathroom light and the three lit candles around the bed. Kevin closed his eyes and took in the familiar aromas of the burning vanilla scented wax and stale cigarettes that her apartment always smelled like when he was here. “Soon” he said, “but it’s tricky.”

“She has a job, right? What’s so tricky about it?” She went back to kissing his neck again.

Again, he waited until she stopped to answer, “I can’t just show up here anytime my wife is at work. It doesn’t work that way.”

She smiled, her green eyes bright and mischievous, “Why not?”

“*Yeah, why not?*” Kevin thought to himself. “I need to go,” he said aloud, “she went out with some friends tonight and she could come home at any time. If I’m not there, she’ll have questions.”

“She always seems to be going out with her friends. How come you’re not allowed to go out with your friends?”

“I can. And I do. I’m here, aren’t I? But, I guess you and I aren’t exactly... friends.” He smiled so she’d know that it wasn’t an insult, but when he opened his eyes she wasn’t looking. He peeled his back off the headboard and reached down to the floor to grab his underwear.

“Well, we were friends. Now, we are just... better friends.” She turned her head toward him and winked slowly before smirking with one corner of her mouth, something she did when she wanted to be coy. She walked back to the bathroom and grabbed her robe off a hook. Short and black and silk, the robe had a Chinese dragon flowing over the back and sleeves. It had a red sash and should have looked tacky and cliché, but it didn’t. Not on her.

Kevin got out of bed and stood looking around the room. “Do you know where my pants are?”

“By the front door. That’s where I took them off of you.”

He remembered now. It had only been an hour, but Kevin entering her apartment felt far away. Here, between the hardwood floors and the arched ceilings, the mechanisms of time ticked differently than they did in the outside world. Kevin held his breath for a moment before making his way to the front door. His pants lay in a heap on the floor next to his shoes. His keys spilled out of his pocket and laid splayed, a silver and brass peacock on the ground. His shirt clung to the corner of an end table.

A quiet shadow stretched across the room playing off the plastered walls as headlights from a bus slowed to a stop outside the apartment window. Kevin watched the moving shadow. She watched him.

Breaking the silence, she switched on a lamp and said, “You know, when we ran into each other on New Years Eve, I knew you wanted to fuck me.”

He put his pants on slowly, methodically, while looking back at her, “Oh yeah? How’d you know that?”

She looked at him matter-of-factly and said, “It was in your eyes.”

“And you knew you were going to fuck me after seeing the look in my eyes?” He grinned.

“Oh no. Absolutely not.”

He thought she was joking but when he studied her face Kevin could tell that she was being serious.

“I didn’t know I was going to fuck you until you came back to my apartment two or three weeks later.” She laughed at her own words.

“Why’d you invite me here, then?” Kevin tightened his belt and reached for his t-shirt. He liked this conversation. He liked the way it rolled and edged at his memories, poking them awake. He recalled how she looked—the fishnets, the burgundy corset, the black patent leather high heels—when they reunited just a few short months ago. The event she had been working required the outfit, but she wore it comfortably. Naturally. He hadn’t seen her for a decade. The summer after graduating from high school, they shared some mutual friends. They were all kids then, fresh and eager to drink and fool around. When he knew her before, she wore an oversized army surplus jacket that hung off her shoulders. She had to roll up the sleeves. She wasn’t that kid anymore. He let his memories go and they drifted off into the now as he looked at her in her robe. It was loose and he could see the outline of one of her breasts beneath the open fold.

“I was curious,” she said and shrugged.

She turned from him and walked across the worn Oriental rug and he watched her bare feet dance over the cigarette burns and red wine stains. “But as soon as you were back here, before I had even gotten you a drink, I knew we were going to have sex.” She laughed again. There was

nothing malicious in her laughter and for a second Kevin thought he might love her. She lit a cigarette, opened the oversized window a crack, and sat on the windowsill. As Kevin finished getting dressed, she stared out the window and took in the view of the Space Needle. From here, it stood tall and alone and towering over the orange glow of the city. She turned and looked at him, “I wish you could stay the night.”

“Maybe one day I will,” he said, meeting her gaze.

“I’d like that,” she said, “I’d like that a lot.”

“I need to go.”

“I know, you already said that.”

“I’ll call you soon.”

“I know,” she said as she took a drag from her cigarette, “and I’ll probably pick up.”

He opened the door and stepped into the hallway. The green and gold paisley carpet stretched out to emptiness in both directions. He took in that emptiness and let it wash over him. The exit sign at the end of the hallway beckoned and he walked toward it deep in thought. He wondered what he’d say to his wife if she was home.

Even though there was the chance his wife would be home waiting, he decided to take the long way through the city instead of getting on the freeway. He sat with his hands on the steering wheel and plotted his route in his head before turning the key in the ignition and starting the car. Before pulling away from the curb, he switched off the radio. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts and the thought of music was suddenly too intrusive. The car moved forward and he could hear the steady hum of the tires on the concrete. He drove east on Pike moving up the hill. Old brick apartment buildings littered both sides of the street. Each building had its own unique

gothic architecture, a well-lit brick archway, glass double doors, and a name that alluded to a different time, a more prosperous time. The Heathman. The Viceroy. El Capitan.

He crept through Capitol Hill hitting each and every red light feeling the weight of time, but also appreciating it. He took a right at 15th Avenue and headed south. The road was softer now, newly paved. Kevin watched the old brick buildings give way to more modern construction.

These buildings lacked the charm of the older buildings and pressed evenly against the sidewalks. They all seemed to be siblings, cut from the same genetic architectural design, slightly modified year after year and accented with different colors to articulate the evolution.

These newer buildings were brighter, taller, and better lit. The year they were built could be identified by the color of the exterior paneling. Oh, that seafoam green, yeah, that was 1997.

Look at that one over there, that salmon color one, that one was built in 1992, maybe 1993.

They had names like the Beryl and Pax Futura.

As he continued south and with the smooth pavement under him he had only his thoughts to contend with. The freshly paved streets didn't offer the secret whisperings of white noise. This world changed at Jackson where he would cross the last visible traces of the International District and go past Linc's Tackle down Rainier Avenue. Here, the apartments were old and rundown. Paint flaked off of the brown and graying walls and entryway bulbs were burnt out as often as not. Boards covered broken windows. The glass entryways had wrought iron doors protecting them from the unknown and there were no names on these boxy buildings. Even the bushes on these apartment properties were tired and unkempt.

At Jackson, the sound of the road returned. The subtle murmur of old concrete under his tires blended with the static of his thoughts. He liked this sound. He welcomed it. It felt more real than the smooth asphalt a couple of blocks back. It wasn't hiding anything.

Kevin remembered that his wife might be home and that he might be in for a long night of fighting. If she was drunk, it would be a really long night. If she wasn't drunk, he might get lucky and she might eventually go downstairs and watch something until she fell asleep on the couch. He decided to get some beer.

He pulled into the small three spot parking lot of the Lucky One convenience store. The building was small and crooked and stand-alone. Painted white but peeling gray, the store had black metal grates over the windows. A neon Budweiser sign buzzed red and white behind the glass. Faded beer posters and generic cigarette ads clung to the windows. In the alley next to the store, between the skeletal cinder block back of the old gas station and side of the mini-mart, Kevin noticed the taillights of a gold Buick with a white hardtop resting in the darkness. Its exhaust clouded in the cool night air. Kevin got out of his car and went inside the store.

In the parking lot, in his car with the six-pack on the seat next to him, he rehearsed the story he was going to tell Christine. Who he went out with, where he went, why he was getting home so late. He could feel the lies build on his tongue, oily and sour. Still forming, they began to fall from the corners of his mouth, coating his chin and dripping down his neck to his chest. He felt sticky with these lies.

The headlights of the gold Buick turned on and illuminated the chain link fence behind the convenience store so that the diamond shadows stretched all the way across the abandoned dirt lot. The passenger door opened. A woman stepped out and drifted toward the back of the car. She was naked from the waste down and her shoeless feet were dirty and black and covered in open sores. She began to shuffle away from the car, her fingers twisted and touching her lips. She had the high cheekbones and the sick sunken features of somebody who had lived on the streets for too long. Her black hair was pulled into a bun and frayed into a halo above her head.

Her eyes vacant. Her bare legs were barely more than the bones that her loose and leathery flesh clung to. She moved out of the alley and started talking to herself oblivious of or not caring that she wasn't wearing enough clothing to cover her partial nakedness. She shuffled a few more steps and said some more words to herself as the Buick backed up under the hollow canopy of the abandoned service station and slowly pulled forward. The car stopped, the passenger door opened, and the driver threw a piece of clothing, milky and limp, toward the ground a few feet away from the woman's boney and bleeding feet. It was her pants. The driver slammed the passenger door while pulling out onto Rainier Avenue, missing part of the driveway and skipping off the curb, his tires chirping in brief protest as he accelerated southbound.

Kevin could feel the tentacles of revulsion twist tightly around his heart as he suddenly felt a little nauseous. He watched from his car as the woman hovered toward her pants, seemingly more dead than alive. To Kevin, she became a wraith, an imperceptible creature of the night, scarcely visible, scarcely there, drifting across the paved lot. The streetlight overhead made her dark skin glow pale and yellow like a luminescent fish. She touched her twisted fingers to her lips, shouted to the sky, touched her fingers to her lips again and then reached down and put her pants on. Her ass was dry and flat and wrinkled. She said some more words, angry words, touched her lips and then shuffled off back into the nothingness of the alley that she had just come from. She did not have any shoes on.

All of the lights of the house were off, even the porchlight, which was good because he hadn't turned it on when he left. When he forgot to turn on the porchlight it annoyed his wife.

Christine thought it was an intentional violation of her well-being. She always turned on the porchlight when it was dark. Always. She felt that the little lightbulb, when left on, kept the bad guys away. Drunk, she said this to Kevin once. He laughed at her.

He unlocked the front door to total darkness and stepped into the house, turning on the porchlight and shutting the door behind him. With the shadows of the furniture defined before him, he walked to the kitchen holding the six-pack and put it in the fridge. Kevin turned on the lights and paused. He pulled out his cellphone and thought about calling Christine. He flipped open the phone and held it in his hand. He flipped it closed and waited. He opened the cellphone again and then immediately shut it and set it on the kitchen counter. He walked back to the fridge and grabbed a beer. It was late, it was almost bar close time and his wife still wasn't home. Her coming home this late was his get out of jail free card. He drank from his beer and put the phone back in his pocket.

The cat came into the kitchen and circled Kevin's leg in anticipation. Kevin pet its black and white head and then walked over to grab some cat food out of the cabinet. The cat watched as Kevin poured some kibble into the ceramic bowl on the floor. The cat circled Kevin's leg once more, then walked over to the food and started to eat. Propped against the counter, Kevin slowly finished his beer and set the empty bottle by the sink. He pulled out his phone, worried, but also feeling vindicated. He opened it and scrolled to Christine's number and paused with his thumb on the call button. It was really late and she should have checked in by now. This now became more than a get out of jail free card, it became leverage. He took his thumb off the button, slowly folded his phone shut and slid it into his pocket, then he got ready for bed.

The cellphone rang and jolted Kevin awake. It was still dark in the bedroom. He looked next to him and Christine wasn't there. The alarm clock read 4:08. He got out of bed and pulled the phone from his pocket and flipped it open.

"Hello?"

"Hi honey!" came the excited voice of Christine.

“Christine? Where the hell are you?” The sleep turned to fear and the fear turned to anger and he could hear that anger in the edges of his words.

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean you don’t know? Who are you with? Where are you?”

“I don’t know, babe. I don’t know where I am. I can’t find my pants.”

“How can you not know where you are? Where the hell are you?” He realized he was repeating himself and he began to feel a slow, sinking knot form in his chest.

“I really don’t know where I am. There is a really nice dog here, though. Dog, do you know where my pants are?” She sounded happy, playful even.

“Christine, babe, what’s going on? Why aren’t you home?” The words out of his mouth didn’t sound like his own. They sounded like a distant recording. He took a deep breath. The anger receded and fear washed over him again, this time in cold waves.

“Kevin, I’m scared. I can’t find my pants. I don’t know where I am.” Her tone, now laced with panic and uncertainty, had quickly changed to something faraway and afraid.

“Christine, I need you to listen to me, can you do that?”

“Yes. What’s going on?”

“Christine, do you know how you got there? Who were you with tonight?”

“I don’t remember. I don’t remember coming here.” Her voice trailed off.

”Babe, are you dressed?”

“I don’t have any pants on. I found my shirt on the bed, so I’m wearing that, but I can’t find my pants.”

“Christine, we need to get you out of there. Is anyone there with you?” He ran his fingers through his hair as he paced in the darkness of his bedroom.

“I don’t think so, just the dog. The dog is really nice, though. I’m happy the dog is here. I think I’m downstairs somewhere, but I don’t know where. I saw some steps earlier. There they are!

Yup, I’m in a basement. It’s a nice basement. It has a couch and carpet and everything.”

“Fuck. Christine, I need you to listen to me, can you do that?”

“I’m listening, babe.”

“Can you get out or are you trapped? Is the basement locked?”

“I don’t think so. I haven’t gone upstairs yet. I was looking for my pants when this nice dog came down.” Her voice was calm and he could hear her petting the dog. He waited for a moment, thinking. “Kevin. Kevin, I’m really scared. I don’t know where I am. I just want to be home with you.” Christine’s voice trembled and turned jagged. Her breath caught on her own words.

Seconds coalesced into minutes and those minutes pooled around Kevin, heavy and liquid.

Suddenly, sinking into the reality of the situation, he experienced a surreal sense of dread. He closed his eyes. “Can you find something to cover yourself up? A towel? A sheet? Anything? I’m going to need you to go upstairs and find a way outside.”

“Can I bring the dog?”

“Yeah, babe, I think that’s a good idea. Bring the dog with you. But cover yourself up and get upstairs. Okay? Don’t worry about your pants right now. We’ll find them later.”

“Kevin?”

“Yeah, babe?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too, Christine. I love you so much. We are going to get you home. It’s going to be alright.”

Kevin stepped out of the bedroom and turned on the hallway light. He saw the cordless phone sitting on the cradle in the living room.

“Christine, don’t hang up, okay? Don’t hang up. I’m going to call the police, okay?”

“Why do you need to call the police?”

“We are going to get you out of there, but I need you to not hang up your phone. I’m going to call the police and you stay on the line. I’m not going anywhere. Okay?”

“Okee-dokey,” she said, happy again.

Kevin picked up the landline and dialed 911 on the cordless phone. He now paced the living room.

“911 please state your emergency.”

“My wife has been kidnapped. I need help.”

“Sir, can you tell me when your wife was kidnapped? How do you know she has been kidnapped?”

“I’m on the phone with her right now. She doesn’t know where she is or how she got there. She can’t find her pants.”

There was a long pause. “Sir, did you say you are on the phone with her? I don’t think this counts as a kidnapping.”

“Okay, she’s been abducted. I don’t know what it’s called. It doesn’t matter. I need help, okay? My wife doesn’t know where she is. I need somebody to help her.”

There was another long pause and Kevin used the time to check back in with Christine. He put the flip phone to his other ear and moved the landline receiver from his mouth.

“Christine. Are you still there? Are you okay?”

“Kevin?”

“Yeah, babe?”

“I really wish I could find my pants.” She sounded sad, despondent.

“Don’t worry about your pants. We’ll find them. We’ll find your pants, but I need you to get outside, okay? Can you do that? I’m on the phone with the police, they’ll come get you. It’ll be okay.”

“Okay,” she said cheerfully, “here I go.” He could hear her walk up the stairs. He held his breath hoping nobody lingered in the rooms above. His imagination brought horrors, wave upon wave of chilling fear crashed over him with each heartbeat. Other than her footsteps on the stairs, silence.

“I see a door,” she said. “I think it goes outside.”

“Okay, good. Babe? Are you covered up? Do you have a towel on or something?”

“No. I forgot. I was petting the dog and I forgot. I really wish I knew where I was.”

“It’s okay, babe. It’s okay, Christine. We are going to get you out of there. Before we do that though, I need you to go back downstairs to put something on. Grab a sheet from the bed if you have to.” He didn’t know if this was the right thing to say. He wanted her out of the house, but it seemed like a bad idea to have her go out into a strange neighborhood without any pants on. He went back to the 911 operator.

“Hi, sorry about that. I was talking to my wife. Are you still there?”

“Yes, I’m here. Sir, can I get your name and phone number? I’m going to have a police officer call you.”

Kevin gave his name and number and after reading it back to him, the operator disconnected. In the background, Kevin heard Christine say, “Okay. Okay, I’m going back down. I’m going to

go into the bedroom.” There was a pause as she moved back down the stairs. “This is a really nice basement. It has a carpet and a couch and everything.”

“Christine, babe, I need you to focus. Can you do that? Can you try to focus and get back to the bedroom where you found your shirt?”

“Yeah, I can do that. It’s right here. I’m walking toward the bed now.”

“Okay, grab a sheet or whatever you can find. Okay? Can you do that?”

“My pants! I found my pants!” She practically shouted. “I’m so happy! They were under the sheets. I don’t know how they got there. I don’t know where I am, Kevin. This is really confusing. How’d my pants get here?”

Rage filled Kevin. His arms and legs and chest pulsed with it. He waited as she pulled on her pants. Taking a deep breath, he said “How about your shoes, babe?” It took everything he had to keep his voice calm for her, “Do you see them anywhere? Maybe they’re under the bed. I want you to look around the bed. Do you see them?”

“Yes! They’re here! I have my pants and shoes now!”

“Good! Great! Put your shoes on and let’s get you the hell out of there.”

“Kevin, I want to be home.” There was a pause and he could hear her breathing, “I’m so tired.”

“I know, babe. We’ll get you here. You’ll be home soon.”

The landline rang and Kevin picked up. Kevin heard a greeting that mentioned Seattle Police, but he didn’t catch the officer’s name.

After giving his own name, Kevin said “I need your help. My wife has been kidnapped or abducted or something. She doesn’t know where she is. She doesn’t know how she got there.”

“Sir, can you slow down? Do you have any idea where she might be?”

“No. I have no idea. She didn’t come home tonight. I don’t know where she is. She’s trapped in a house and she doesn’t know how she got there”

“We are going to need some more information. If you don’t have any idea where she is, we might have a difficult time tracking her down.”

“I’m on the phone with her now.” He moved the cell phone speaker to his lips, “Christine, are you still there? Babe?”

“Yeah, I’m here.” She paused, “Kevin, I’m so tired. I just want to be home.”

“I know, honey. I know. We’ll get you home soon. Are you outside yet?”

“Yeah, I’m outside.”

“She’s outside,” he said into the landline, “she’s out of the house.”

“You’re speaking with her? Is she injured or in danger?”

“Christine, honey, are you okay? Are you hurt in any way?” He was upset with himself for not asking this question earlier.

“I’m fine. I’m outside now. I’m just really, really tired.”

“She’s okay. She said she’s okay. She’s out of the house now. Can you pick her up? Can somebody go get her?”

“Tell her to go to the nearest street corner. Have her get away from the house and get to the nearest street corner. Once she is there, have her tell you the names on the street signs. Once we have that, we can send a patrol car to get her.” The officer said this as Kevin paced through the living room and back into the darkness of his bedroom and then back out to the living room again.

“Christine, honey, can you make it to an intersection? We need to know the cross-streets. Can you do that?”

“I can do it. I’m walking toward an intersection now.”

“Good. Good. Babe, you’re going to be home soon. You’re going to be home. The police are going to come get you.”

“I’m on the corner of Fauntleroy and Brace.”

“She’s on the corner of Fauntleroy and Brace.”

“*Jesus,*” Kevin thought to himself, “*she’s all the way in West Seattle, by the ferries. How the hell did she get all the way out there?*”

“Sir, we’ll send somebody out to get her. Can you give us your address, please? We’ll get her home safe.”

A police car pulled up in front of the house and stopped. Two officers stepped onto the street and one of them opened the back door of the cruiser to let Christine out. She was smiling and happy.

“I’m so glad to be home.”

“Oh, honey, I’m so glad you are home. I was so worried about you. But you’re here. You’re okay.” He reached out and held her. He didn’t want to let go.

The two officers watched and one of them looked at Kevin before asking, “Are we good here?”

“We’re good. Thank you officer. Thank you so much.”

The officer handed Kevin a card, “This is the incident report. You can call the number on the card if you have any questions.” He turned and moved toward his vehicle.

Kevin could hear that same officer say to the other, “Man, I really didn’t plan on being a taxi service for a drunk chick tonight. Clever though. I bet it saved them a bundle in cabfare.” The other officer laughed and they both got in the cruiser and pulled away.

“Kevin. Honey. I’m tired. I just want to go to bed. Is that okay? Can I just go to bed now?”

“Yeah, honey. Yeah, let’s get you to bed.”

Kevin sat on the side of the bed and watched his wife and the cat sleeping. Christine slept with her face pressed into the pillow, the cat curled next to her. The sun was overhead and dusty white light poured through the bedroom window. “I’m so sorry,” Kevin whispered. “I’m so, so sorry.” He put his hands over his face and wept.

The sun had begun to set when Christine woke. Kevin cooked in the kitchen. She walked out to the living room and saw the cordless phone off its cradle. She picked it up and set it on the charger.

Kevin saw her and stopped, watching. “How are you doing, babe?”

“I’m okay. I’m tired and I have a really bad headache.”

“I bet. But you’re okay? How much do you remember from last night?”

“I don’t remember anything. I was at the bar and then it’s a blur. Nothing. Do you know what happened?”

“You don’t remember anything at all?” There was relief in his voice. “Nothing?”

“I remember a dog. I remember a really nice dog. Why do I remember a dog?”