

## Schadenfreude

June hated fine dining more than anything under the sun. She found it tedious how many pieces of silverware one had to use and how miniscule the portions were. Her lover, Todd, knew this and yet there they were at one of Scottsdale's snootiest eateries chowing down on obnoxiously delicious fillet mignon and savory lobster tail. Todd knew her like a veterinarian knows euthenasia, but he was mistaken in thinking that taking her to a place like this would convince her of whatever he wanted to convince her of. Yes, Todd only took her to fancy dinners when he was up to another scheme that he wants her to be his accomplice in.

"You only have to do it once." He shrugged, shoveling a sunset colored piece of lobster tail into his mouth.

"I'm telling you," June started, exasperated already, "It wouldn't work! He's beyond the pale already—I can tell by how he calls you a 'cuck' every two seconds."

"In this case, I really would be one though, wouldn't I?" He chuckled irksomely.

He realized that maybe now was not the time for joking with June and, like the strategist he is, switched tactics.

"Listen," He started, "I know it would be affirming his mindset even if it does work, but this is more than just stopping him from being annoying, June. This is stopping something much worse from happening."

June reclined in her eggshell colored silk-draped seat and sighed dramatically, really performing her annoyance with her partner. She even lazily rolled her wide-set eyes counter-clockwise. Usually, she gives less of a peeved song-and-dance when it comes to his mischief and sometimes, she agreed to them without hesitation or theatrics. This instance,

however, sparkled with fresh fuckery and June was not having it. The subject of this discussion was one whom June couldn't stomach, even with the most expensive cuisine in her belly.

This subject was none other than—

“Charlie?” June whined.

“Yes, Charlie.”

Charlie Duncan was the singular, sniveling incarnation of everything June despised about the human race and especially men. He also happened to be Todd's best friend since the second grade.

*It's always the second grade isn't it? When people get attached to their humanoid albatrosses they call "best-friends"?*

June briefly wondered for a moment if she thought this because she did not have a best friend, but she digressed. She leaned over the table, gazing at Todd's serpent-green eyes and smiled seductively, like how a venus flytrap would. He leaned over with her conspiratorially, never breaking eye contact.

“I'm not sleeping with Charlie, no matter what is in it for me.” She whispered.

It was now Todd's turn to lean back in his chair, except he smirked like he had the winning hand. The restaurant was bustling for such an intimate venue so it was clear no one had heard her. The purple velvet walls soaked up all their conversation with their fuzzy fibers. Todd finished his last, gravy covered bite of fillet mignon then lifted his cloth napkin to his plush lips and dabbed them in a princely fashion. June mirrored him by leaning back herself, giving him an expression that says she means nothing but business.

“What if...” Todd trailed off, neatly folding up his napkin. June leaned in ever so slightly to listen.

“Yes?” She inquired, using her hand to execute a “go on” gesture.

Todd’s wolfish teeth gleamed even in the dim lighting as he let out a sly smile.

“What if,” he began again, “You’d get to kill him if it doesn’t work?”

June let in a sharp intake of breath. She clutched the brittle stem of the wine glass with the maximum strength a pastel pink pedicure could permit. The mustachioed waiter even shot her a nervous glance as she white-knuckled the likely priceless glass. She felt her rapid heartbeat in her hand—no, throughout her whole person. A tingle accompanied this pulse like the sickest of symphonies and her hazel eyes became as wide as symbols. Todd yet again had sussed out one of her deepest desires.

“Don’t you care about your best friend at all?” She finally asked, lifting the glittering glass of rosé to her lightly pursed lips.

“Don’t worry about what I care about.” Todd said a little too brusquely.

“Oh?” June replied after finishing her fizzy gulp, the pink wine tickling her gullet. “I would think that what you care about would be something that concerns me.”

He chuckled at her and placed his imposing mit of a hand on top of hers.

“You are what I care about the most, but my feelings about this are none of your concern.” He then took a deep, pensive sip of his pinot noir.

June wanted to press further but knew that wouldn’t work with Todd. Besides, every time she wanted to figure something out, she always would in due time. Now was not that time and June accepted that. Plus, she was flattered that he said she was what he cared the most about.

*That was the correct answer.*

“Fine...” She agreed.

“So you’ll do it?”

“Perhaps I will...” It was now her turn to dab her lips that became slightly pinker tinged.

Todd grinned and squeezed the dainty, tapered-fingered hand underneath his, rubbing his thumb along the side of it. June didn't enjoy many things in life, but this gesture was one of the few exceptions. She returned the grin, showing glinting rows of childlike teeth then reverted to a more serious countenance, as if the next thing she was about to say was the loftiest of imperatives.

“I will do it,” She slid her hand out from underneath and then placed it on top of his, “but we are doing this...my way.”

She squeezed his hand, coiling her fingers around his palm and wrist like mini boa constrictors. He looked up at her with a glint of intrigue or fear in his eyes. June relished this look, whatever it was, and then released him to chug down the last few sips of the finest rosé she had ever tasted, which somehow in that moment, happened to taste even sweeter.

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The cup of thai ice tea with boba sweated in June's hand as she waited outside Charlie's door. Her nerves were already frayed and she hadn't even stepped through the threshold yet. She was already done with this before it even started. Being around Charlie, to June, was like sitting in piss soaked jeans: irritating, repulsive, and possibly rash inducing. The only thing that kept her slender legs rooted to the concrete stoop was that she would never have to deal with him again after this. Neither would anyone else, for that matter.

The crimson wood door creaked open and June slapped on the fakest smile she could muster. To her surprise, on the other side of the doorway was his mother. Well, to clarify, she wasn't surprised that he still lived with his mother but that she was implausibly hot. She cursed

Todd for never mentioning this detail to her but was relieved that she didn't need to fake her smile anymore.

“Hello!” She uttered in her most saccharine tone, “Is Charlie here?”

His mom gave her a puzzled but wildly delighted look.

“Yes, of course he's downstairs! Can I help you with something?” She replied eagerly.

“Yeah! I just need Charlie to help me with my computer. It's on the fritz right now. I brought his favorite drink for him as payment!” June displayed the tangelo colored boba drink proudly and his mother appeared to be sold by every last bit of it. Even if she wasn't, she gave a look that said “Finally a girl comes to see my son!” which meant she'd probably let June in no matter what she said.

“Well, come on in! I'll call him up from the basement.” She took a graceful step to the side and allowed June to walk right through. She took some time to admire the average decor that comes with an upper-middle class house. All of the “Live. Laugh. Love” signs greeted her with their toxic optimism. Yet, she knew she was in safe hands and wouldn't be bothered.

“You have a lovely home!” June gushed. She also mentally reminded herself to kill whoever the bastard was that invented chevron print.

“Thank you so much, you are very kind! Ignore the mess, by the way,” There was no visible mess besides a pair of dirty, chunky Skechers next to the front-room couch, “*Someone* just doesn't know how to pick up after himself!” She said this in a sing-song voice loud enough for (presumably) Charlie to hear. Then she tsk-tsked when he didn't answer, placing an exasperated hand on her shapely hip.

“Don't worry, mom, I'm coming!” Charlie barked back, annoyed.

“There’s a girl here to see you!” She called back, giving June a winning smile that June returned in an obviously false manner. Well, obvious to June.

Charlie came bounding up the stairs, sounding as clunky as shoes in a washing machine. Due to his lankiness, his large head preceded the rest of his elongated body. He then stopped abruptly at the top of the white-carpeted stairs, barefoot and gangly. He gave June a perplexed and spooked look, like he was looking at a mountain lion in the wild. June rebutted this look with a closed mouth smile. Her cheeks were beginning to hurt like hell from this charade.

“Hey June,” he said tentatively, “What brings you to my place?”

Now, Charlie doesn’t look like his mother who is basically Xena the Warrior Princess herself. Apparently, he looks like his dead uncle (overdose) whom Todd has only seen in pictures. He claimed that Joey (Charlie’s uncle) was a man with a wonky sort of handsomeness that didn’t completely arrest you the first time you see him, but the ladies fell for it in droves. Charlie did not have that same appeal. Where Joey had charm, Charlie had the opposite which is something that he got from his father who hid in his office all day.

“I was wondering if you could help me with my computer, Charlie?”

She held out the boba for him to see, dangling it like a carrot in front of a horse.

He looked at her skeptically but then focused his beady-eyed attention on the enticing drink in her manicured hand.

“Is that thai iced tea with boba?”

“It’s yours if you want it!” June shook around the cup, the ice making a noise meant to hypnotize.

He paused for a bit, still appearing confused but then shook his head, apparently shaking away what looked to be suspicion.

“Go on ahead to the basement. I’ll get you something to drink and then we’ll check out what the problem is.”

He snatched the drink away from her hand and took eager sips out of that bulbous straw as he sauntered awkwardly towards the kitchen. June then looked expectantly to his mother who pointed her towards the opening from which Charlie came.

“The mess in there is going to be astronomical, by the way. I apologize in advance!” She called after June who was heading toward the basement.

“Don’t worry,” June called back, “I have three brothers!”

June did not have three brothers.

His mom gave her a hearty chuckle that only mothers seem to make and then headed toward the kitchen herself, likely to give her son a rapturous lecture about how to behave in front of women that would more than likely fall on deaf ears. June giggled to herself at the thought of it, then stopped at the precipice of the basement where the plush white tunneled down into utter darkness. It was like the passageway to incel hell, the white door at the end being its infernal gate.

*Jesus Christ, does he wear night goggles down there?*

She found the lightswitch on the left basement wall, then began her descent. She made her way past the door onto older, dingier carpet that seemed to be cleaned NEVER (his parents probably gave up on it due to Charlie’s slobbishness) and noticed modest furnishing with an old couch, an even older TV set, but a state of the art PC setup with double monitors and a rainbow light-up keyboard. Below her bare feet she could feel the needling of old Dorito crumbs. Every cell within her body wanted to eat itself alive and then shit itself out, but the poison in her pocket that Todd gave her was the only thing powering her through. It was her mitochondria, if you will.

June finished scanning her surroundings then realized that she actually didn't care that much about this filthy basement. She padded over to the couch and then took a reluctant seat on it, smelling ancient odors waft up as she sank into its dusty cushions. Her allergies suddenly flared up and she crinkled her nose trying to prevent a sneeze. To her chagrin, the sneeze escaped with an incredibly adorable *achoo!*

"Bless you." She heard from directly behind her.

She yelped then jumped up and turned around abruptly. Charlie was right behind her holding a wine glass full of a carbonated, mucus colored liquid.

*That's it. I'm gonna kill you regardless.*

"You scared me, Charlie!" She admonished him.

"Sorry about that..." He replied sheepishly.

"It's okay..."

June patted the seat beside her and Charlie looked like she just offered him a rattlesnake to chew on. Despite this, he sat down right beside her, the same odor puffing up as her plopped down on the cushions, and gave her the wine glass.

"Here. This is just Mountain Dew in a wine glass. I know you like wine, but my mom drank it all so I thought I'd get a little creative. If you squint your eyes, maybe it looks like champagne!" He let out an anxious chortle then stopped abruptly, realizing that what he said might not be all that funny.

"Thank you..." June said, breaking the awkward tension, then taking a pathetic sip of Mountain Dew from the glass. Luckily, Mountain Dew was one of the few things she actually liked. She would never tell anyone that of course.

"So," he began, cocking his head, "What's the problem with the computer?"



“Well...” She wondered if she should continue with this computer angle or cut right to the chase. She came prepared, after all. She had downloaded something from a sketchy porn site and now there are pop-ups galore on her laptop. Milfs in her area are apparently actively searching for her, isn't that grand?

*If only it was Charlie's mom...*

“You see, I sort of went on an...adult website and now my computer has some sort of virus or something.”

*Maybe the pictures will awaken something in him and make this easy on me. I'd hate to waste my seduction skills on him...*

Charlie's face turned immediately into tomato soup after she said that. If he wore glasses, they would probably be as foggy as one of those fake haunted houses.

*Maybe he won't even need to look at my computer...*

He opened the laptop as if it was a snake charmer's basket and the pop-ups in there were just ready to strike. As the bright screen flicked on, images of several intricate (possibly illegal?) sex acts and middle-aged naked women peppered the screen. He was blushing furiously.

“Well,” he coughed out, “This will actually be an easy fix. You can just leave this with me and I should have it back to you by more than likely, tomorrow.”

June knew what this meant: he was signaling to her that he wanted to work on this alone. This simply could not do. She must come up with a way to remain here. She must pull some sort of conversation topic right out of her ass...

“What do you think of these women, Charlie?” She pointed towards one of the pop-ups.

He gave her a wild look. One that indicated the gaze of a trapped Tasmanian devil.

“Come again?”

“What’s your opinion on these women in the pop-ups?”

“No, I know what you asked but, why?”

“I’m just curious about your viewpoint.”

He looked like he was on the verge of shaking.

“I don’t have an opinion on them.” He finally said after a sizable gulp.

June realized she needed to switch tactics. This line of questioning clearly wasn’t working.

“How about on sex workers in general?” She inquired, cocking up one eyebrow.

“I don’t want to answer that...” He stated, nearly yelping.

“Why, Charlie? I thought you loved a good debate.”

“Well, yes but—”

“But, what?”

“But,” He appeared flustered at this point, almost as if he was about to shatter into a trillion pieces, “I don’t want to talk about this with someone like you!”

June could barely contain the smile she was holding back because of his pathetic squirming,

*He is nearly there! Any moment now he will descend into a tirade and I will have my go ahead...*

“What do you mean someone like me?” She put the rest of what she said in air quotes.

“I mean—” He got up and ran his fingers through his greasy, shoulder-length ginger hair.

June crossed her legs and folded her hands together on the end of her knee, signaling to him that she is listening.

“I’m listening!”

“I mean a certified goddess like yourself! I mean the epitome of a Stacy, down to the honey blonde hair and everything, who is dating the exact replica of a Chad who just so happens to be my best friend!”

He inhaled deeply, his eyes twice their size. He shoved his hands into his pockets then slouched, projecting a dejected calmness.

“I mean, I can’t talk to someone like you about what I think because you wouldn’t understand it. You wouldn’t understand that women on that computer are just like women like you looking for either money or looks, or both! While men like me have to just sit here and watch.”

*There went the tirade...*

June got up from the couch and sauntered over to him, leaving just inches of space. Her statuesque frame still didn’t reach the height of his.

“Bullshit.” She said emphatically, poking her finger into his bony chest.

He stepped backwards slightly, wincing from the poke and rubbing his chest, but she immediately filled the space he left.

“It’s the horrific truth!” He yelped, nearly spitting on her.

“Nope!” She quipped, “It’s bullshit. Your whole philosophy, Charlie, is bullshit.”

He was now backed up against the desk of his computer setup. His hands white-knuckled the edge but he still didn’t break eye contact with June, who was staring directly into the cavity in his chest where a soul should be. She too had this cavity.

*Reel him in, June!*

“You don’t get women like me, Charlie, because women like me find your entitlement absolutely repulsive. Trust me on this.”

“But that’s the way it is! Women are for men!”

“Oh Charlie,” June said condescendingly, “How can I possibly change this horrendously backwards idea of yours?”

“You can’t!” He squeaked.

“Charlie,” she strengthened the hold of their eye contact, “I want you to sleep with me.”

He gasped like he was underwater for hours and just came up for air. Needless, to say June felt like she was drowning as well, her only buoy being the imminent end of his life. She looked at him expectantly, giving him an expression that was meant to convey something resembling tenderness.

“You don’t have to,” she whispered, running her fingers up his arm gently, “But I’d like you to...”

His breath hitched from the touches and then within seconds, he launched himself at her and then latched on with a very chapped-lipped kiss. Even June had the wind knocked out of her from such a sudden advance, then he abruptly pulled away, resting his hands on her shoulders.

“Of course I’ll do it.” He replied with a gracious tone. “Men like me are born to worship women like you.”

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The whole affair (mind the pun) lasted about three minutes and some change. Luckily, June was counting on and even hoping for a short session. He ended up telling her after the fact that she was now in possession of his virginity in which she pretended to act shocked. She also threw her clothes on again the moment she could. June didn’t want Charlie to have another second with her naked body.

*I should be winning a fucking Oscar for this.*

When all was said and done, she abruptly straddled his waist and held his hands above his head. He gave her a smirk as if he was saying “round two?”, but she scowled at him and then tightened her grip on his hands, digging her pink nails in slightly.

“Now,” she said with a slight growl, “Do you still believe in your bullshit philosophy?”

Charlie looked slightly afraid but something in his eyes told June he was emboldened in some way. “Somehow, you actually made me believe in it more...”

In a way, this was the answer June was expecting and possibly hoping for. Yet, she felt like jumping into a vat of acid. She had told Todd it wouldn’t work and yet there she was, just having done his bidding. She gritted her teeth and coiled her hands around his wrists even more, hoping to cut off the circulation.

“Where is the manifesto?” She hissed.

There was a pensive pause.

“I’m not telling you.” He asserted.

She dug her nails in even more, not enough to break the skin but enough to make him wince.

“You have one more chance to tell me where it is and delete it.”

“Or what?” He spat at her.

“Or I’ll wipe you off the face of the planet, that’s what!”

Then, he gave a look that said he was about to shout. June knew it was her time to strike so once he opened his mouth she hastily poured the poison into it then clamped it shut with her hand. He wriggled around like a worm on a hook and flopped like a fish underneath her weight. However, June was heavier and stronger than she looked so she was able to hold him down while the light behind his shark-like eyes slowly faded. It was the only time that night that June came

close to completion. Charlie finally slackened and June removed her hand from his mouth which luckily, wasn't covered in any foam or blood. Todd was right about this poison leaving no trace. She made a mental note to reward him for that the next time she sees him. Her triumph then dulled to a sickening silence. She could now hear only her own breath. She also realized that she was still on him and could not feel the rise and fall of life within him. Her fancy dinner from last night began to come up but she swallowed it down and reassured herself that she must continue with the objective. More important lives are at stake.

She dismounted Charlie then walked over to his computer to find the manifesto for herself. She was hoping he was lazy and just put the file into some porn folder and not behind firewalls. After some clicking around, she did find lots of porn, but still no manifesto. She even rifled through his Word documents to see if it was on there. She also tried to look through a thumb drive he left on the desk next to the keyboard. No dice.

At the rate June was looking, the basement would almost be torn apart. But she was through and put everything back where she found it but there was still no physical copy of the manifesto. Todd said he had already searched his room before and it wasn't in there so it had to be on the computer.

*Oh duh, June! It's probably in Google Docs!*

June admonished herself for not going with the obvious choice right from the bat. She returned to the surprisingly soft computer chair and then clicked on the only thing that was open on his computer: his Chrome browser. There in the first tab open was a Doc of the manifesto, splayed out in all its ungrammatical glory. She deleted every trace of it she could find. She even went into his Drive and deleted it there.

She then went to see if somehow he had downloaded it and then deleted it. Checking his recycle bin, to her dismay, was a Word doc copy of the manifesto. Her heart dropped into her stomach and drowned in the acid. Her eyes peeled away from the horrific site and then she went over to the next tab that she previously ignored because she expected it to be open already: this tab was 4chan. The manifesto had been posted to an incel message board and there were already several comments on it.

June tore through the comments at an obsessive rate. All of the commenters agreed. Many of the commenters spewed some of their own views. Some of the commenters discussed horrific violent acts that even made June sick to her stomach. She then glanced over at Charlie's stiff corpse splayed out on the dingy couch. She felt an intense amount of pity that threatened to creep out from her pores then curl around her throat. It wasn't pity for Charlie, no she couldn't feel sorry for him even if she tried. This pity was for herself and herself alone. A sickening thought then danced across her brain. Well, sickening to June. This thought was that maybe he could have been handsome and pleasant if there was someone there to poison him every day.

June then got up out of the chair and shut his eyelids with her fingers.

*Goodnight, Charlie...*

She then walked out the basement door and shut it behind her. June walked up the stairs as if it was her own funeral procession and then tried to slip out the front door. She heard his mom call from the kitchen, "I hope he fixed your computer!"

The TV was blaring something from the kitchen that June could barely make out. She decided she didn't care because she was assured now that his mom didn't hear Charlie yell.

She looked over her shoulder then grinned.

"He did that and then some!"

She didn't hear his mother's reply, but knew it was something along the lines of a friendly goodbye. Then she passed through the door, shutting it and leaving the events from the past couple of hours behind her. Now, all she could think about was how ravenous she had become despite the unspeakable sickness she felt. Walking back toward her car, she exhaled and then hummed along with the faint police sirens in the distance. Within 24 hours, she will be captured then arrested. But will she give a damn? Most certainly not.

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June loved diners more than anything under the moon and stars. She found it comforting how one could be a regular customer for years and yet still remain anonymous. The waitresses are nosy, yes, but they never ask questions that they wouldn't want the answer to. They asked her if she was meeting somebody and she simply replied, "Yes.", but it was clear that they wanted further information so she added, "My boyfriend is joining me." It was a very simple interaction all around and June appreciated nothing more than interacting simply with simple people.

Todd slid into the maraschino colored booth in front of her. He was not very punctual today, seeing that June was already munching on her french fries and had already devoured her club sandwich. She shot him a look that read as a judgement of his obvious lateness. He returned the look back. He knew June didn't care if he was late or not.

"So did it work?" He asked in an annoyingly cautious way.

"Nope." She answered, taking a puny bite out of her french fry.

"So...you did it?"

"Yep." She said, popping the "p".

Todd folded his hands together in worry and then looked down at them, almost as if he would open them again and therein would lay a better answer. Todd then glanced back up at



June, with tears welling in the corners of his eyes. June dropped her fry onto her plate. The ketchup lightly splattered off the plate and onto her other hand, blood red. This was not part of their deal. He didn't get to feel this way.

But before she could lay into him, the previously silent television set was turned up and started blaring a news bulletin:

*Tragedy strikes the university where a lone gunman murdered five sorority sisters and injured three. The gunman is in custody now. We will be hearing about the motives later today after some extensive police questioning....*

Todd gaped in horror at the TV and then looked back at June. He allowed one of his tears to fall. June, however, did not shed a single tear. Instead, she wiped the ketchup off her left hand with her right thumb and then smeared it onto his face, tracing the wet trail that the tear left. She then placed the thumb into her mouth, licking it clean of any residue.