

Monied Men

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ON top of his game, feeling a boost, the personal investor turned thirty. The wealth in his veins — a young widowed client's losing track of her husband's retirement rollover grossed him a shady eight grand — was evident. Today he would hunt for a spouse, in his better linen suit and snazziest shoes, wearing his watch-with-bling, thinning hair cut yesterday. He had a void of family, a loneliness of the type that can urge men to marry and breed out of sync with the life-pattern. His quest was primal.

Sweating gold, or so he imagined, the thickset numbers-cruncher with male pattern-baldness took a taxi to the old nightclub in “the happening warehouse district,” as the cabbie put it, mocking the local alternative rag. The marquee: POLARITY. A new name, what was the old one, he forgot. Mega-bass boomed from the propped-open doors; a column of mechanically-conditioned cool air hit him full force, devoid of pheromones or cologne. It was either a dying disco, or was he early? Ten o'clock.

Down the cavernous main hall he found a short bar and bought his ritual drink: a double Rusty Nail, with a dash of cream, over ice; when the ice melted away, like an hourglass, he would know to give a business card and leave. Staying any longer would result in either a lull (time-waster) or the timid, tipsy approach of those has-big-problems types. (This superstition originated in college, when he would ditch his frat pals to visit the local lounge bars in search of rich or pretty divorcées; it was a system he refined in grad school, for sex and for making money.)

In the discotheque, youthful singles of either sex gyrated on black platform boxes, all braided twirling hair and synthetic bodysuits, appearing digital in the flecks of light. Some were synthetic-laden and cold, a riff against their own humanism as much as symbol of the high-technology usurping science and nature. In shadow in the corners ravers sat and stared, made out, torso- or head-danced. A patron took furtive puffs on a pipe near the smoke machine. Rather than find a date, the disco crowd showed up out to expend energy.

The investor shied away from there. Straight ahead the main hall swelled into a semi-circular bar lined with brass poles, for dancing. He imagined bodacious females spinning round and sliding up and down on them, the prettiest waiting for her shot at Pygmalion. For now, the room was sanctioned off by a velvet rope.

He ascended a voluptuous staircase, slightly winded, trying to come up with the title of the instrumental version of “Mac the Knife”; it hit him as he stepped into a piano lounge. A few eligibles were waiting to be approached, by the look of them. Dimly lit, these types of lounges often attracted his type of demure, overdressed and desperate woman. He preferred to approach them in the lounges, rather than at the bars, or on the dance floors. He knew his money talked much louder if he could converse with the ladies in a relaxed scene, booths and couches, even hit the small dance floor and cut a rug to a song or two to seal the deal.

He chose a flush-looking date: tall, angular, thin, small-breasted; with ornate sculpted tresses looped in thick shiny ringlets; with exquisite dewy skin; wearing an elaborate gown snug under a modern fishbone corset, low heels. Eccentric, maybe erotic; at first glance striking, this one looked and dressed and acted like an aging model, aged thirties, wanting now to settle down yet still trying to find footing, like a spoiled teen too old to play kid anymore. His stance on that was mixed; former drug users were okay, even preferable, while currently-using dates were of no interest, usually leading to antagonism; plenty of the vixens had flaked out on him, disrupted his plans. He wanted to, needed to, settle down, create his family.

At his urging they found a secluded booth. He doled a few compliments, then got to his interview. (Another of the inquisition traps he refined in grad school, his pick-up interview consisted of a random selection from his arsenal of multi-faceted questions, meant to buoy up any lurking trouble.) The answers from this one were okay, if a bit daft, uneducated — there was a faint yet primary unsexiness to this one to bother about... this one was not only unacademic but had uncute, rather crass, replies. In the course of this survey, he grew atypically flaccid, and stalled.

“What do you do for a living?” asked the pick-up, demurely, an alto drawl.

“I’m a personal investor.”

His date smiled complete: the teeth were small, filed; the gums very pink against the dewy-sheeny tone of tanned dark skin; lips puckered like bicycle

tires. The aesthetic razzle-dazzle was corrupting, moulding, dimming. He noticed the long nose as handsome, rather than the face as beautiful. His oafishness, astride that painted doll-face? He was having second thoughts and his brain-stalling should've been the clincher. To envision more than a romp or a pricey dinner uptown proved a challenge. Yet for some reason he pressed ahead. Any offspring of theirs would anyway have a fair shot at beauty. For a moment he imagined them, athletic with good skin, if somewhat clownish in the mouth.

“All right, you caught me, Mr. Investor,” the pick-up said, hiding teeth with lips or drink. “I’ve made this mistake before—. Some men aren’t nice, about secrets! As a favor to us both, I’m telling you, straight off, that I’ve had some... work, done.”

“Erin, was it Erin?” the money-manager asked.

Erin nodded.

“Could you be more specific, on what work you had done?”

The pick-up took a shallow breath. “Teeth-filing, new lips, bigger cheekbones; pixie chin, smoothed brow; eye-tucks, ear-tucks; there’s the pretty thin throat; you bet these titties; a tummy-tuck; ass-enhance; the lower ribs removed; and, to top it off, there’s my lady-orifice,” the pick-up replied, with snappy flips of bony wrists.

Silicon and knives, flesh distortions and swabbed bleeding scalpel cuts swam over him, through him; that response sending him reeling out of a typical interview. Genital plastic surgery kink: Was it collagen-puff lips, made snug-tight again? a replication of a hymen? or a piercing? — Ugh. Too many possibilities. The gore made him queasy. He flashed his bling on his wrist, gauged the time on his melting drink.

As an inquisitive creature he had to know, his curiosity rarely getting the better of him yet doing so suddenly. “What, exactly, have you done, down there?”

The pick-up’s next phrase was so stunningly vulgar, so much the antithesis of his quest, biologically, and so opposing of his life plan, that the investor went momentarily deaf. He heard it only in retrospect. (“Penis-outside-in-to-a-twat, lubed-with-colon-tissue.”) That he’d been lured, toyed with, detained and

fooled was repulsive and disconcerting to him. An unnatural debit! At that moment, a larger loss was tough to formulate.

Wishing to buy back the night, the investor stood. He reached for his drink, wiped animal-sweat from his forehead with its cocktail napkin. He made a casual escape. He dumped his drink in the nearest bar trough, set the glass upside-down.

“Barkeep, did I somehow or another stumble, step, into a gay bar?”

The bartender, muscular in black vee-shirt, quipped, “We call ourselves ‘metrosexual’, which means your bent is just as all right as his bent is, or hers is, or as their consenting adult bents are...” in that gay high-pitched quaver. “Between you and me I fly it up and open.”

Rushing, skipping treads down the stairs, the investor sidestepped into the leather shop, nearly falling headlong into the stairwell to the dungeon, half-wits in slings and fantasies-on-crank, somewhere-out-there, subterranean and cruel. He steadied himself with the sullied velvet rope, now looped to allow entry, and turned away from the muscley male pole-dancers and their white washcloth modesty.

At the door the bouncer pointed the way to the nearest taxi line-up. First thing Monday, he’d revert the ditzy widow’s error, return the eight thousand. (Twin sons in college, a teenage daughter, a yearly property tax! widower Peggy needed the money more than he.) He would develop a more ethical stance, which meant for awhile the brunt of real work and the solace of his house. He could wait and would. He could join a church.

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