

## Naked Delights

It's been 3 hours and you're still here, sitting in the back corner of the lounge, at the party of "some guy," a friend of a friend who knows your girl. You capture yourself in the mirror, reflecting the entirety of the room, and your mood lifts. You're wearing that new, nude lipstick tonight, the one that you've been wanting to try out for some time. You've pulled your hair up into a high ponytail, opening up your features, and you give yourself a discreet compliment, a hushed, "You look beautiful," but your sour mood seems as persistent as a whining child, bouncing back like a rubber band snap of the wrist. Your girl, who disappeared some immeasurable time ago, comes back and hands you a drink- gin, or whiskey, or something. You take a few sips- not too quick, lest it come off unladylike- and you're already starting to feel a little dizzy- *placebo*? Or maybe not, since this is your fourth mix tonight. From the corner of your eye, one of your friend's friends is crushing white rock over his cup, as casual as the conversation he's carrying. You give him what you hope was a surreptitious gesture, move your mix over his direction. He slips the white powder into your cup- this time, you don't wait too long- and you *sip, sip, sip*, hardly reacting to the bitter consistency. Little shards of powder rest between your teeth, swirling around your taste buds, and it's becoming a lot harder to keep a straight face. It's worth it, though. In a matter of minutes, you're going to feel happier than you have in a while. There's a cute guy you've been eyeing wearing a Versace suit, so you point him out to your girl, but she tells you to "Smile, bitch!" Her phone comes to life, as the plastic vanity lights on the protective barrier brighten, and your reaction is immediate; you turn your head slightly towards your left shoulder, just as the picture-perfect grin you've perfected throughout the years flashes onto her screen. She turns away from you and starts to fumble with it; scrutinizing, editing, *posting*. You get the sudden urge for a conversation, but the music's too loud, the room's too full, and thick smoke is obscuring your view. You glance into the mirror again- you wonder why there's even a mirror here, in the middle of the club, with strippers bouncing in the background of your reflection. You shift back and forth on your stilettos, you're beginning to feel a little bit anxious, so you down the rest of your cup. A man walks up to you, he sees you standing alone. He asks you just that- Why are you here alone?- and you tell him you're not. He insists, "You look very alone," and in the back of your mind, you know that this is one of those "signs," one of those hidden messages from life that aren't all that hidden, the ones we tend to ignore. "I'm not," you insist, with a smile plastered on your face. The smile was put there affectedly, the tingling rising up in your body, your head, your skin. You turn to him eyes hidden beneath black liner and fake lashes, and ask him why *he's* here alone. He shakes his head, points at the group he's drinking with- friends of your friend who knows the guy, the party host- and you have no response, so you reach for your straw, but there's nothing left to drink. He takes your cup and says, "What can I get you?" like a true gentleman, and you mumble something about hating gin, but he's gone as the strobe lights flash right where he was standing. You search for your friend, but the crowd is overwhelming, heads upon heads bound up together like cattle. You move from your spot near the couch, check yourself in the mirror for validation: beautiful. Your hair, your makeup, your outfit, perfectly intact, as if you haven't been in this club for 3 hours, as if you didn't work from nine to five today, skipping lunch to celebrate Patty's birthday with the rest of the office, as if you weren't up all night watching tutorial after

tutorial on how to rock this *goddamn* near-impossible nude lipstick. Behind you, through your mirror lens, you see your gentleman emerge from the crowd. He leans over, "You look beautiful," and rather than wasting your voice, you can only smile again, losing yourself in the vibrations of the room. You are a bystander as your mind thinks and wonders thoughts about everyone and everything in here, so you conclude that at the end of the day, it doesn't even matter, because now, you're buzzing with happiness- real happiness- so much so, that you even find the courage to grab your guy pulling him out to the dance floor. He's dancing with you, leading you on your feet, and you're following him, or following the music, you're not sure. Something inside you is moving you, effortlessly, casually, a natural woman. His body grinding on yours, the silkiness of his suit is brushing up against your exposed skin. The air is thick, smoke caressing you soft as his touch, and your hands are intertwined, he leans in, smelling of a dark musk, and tells you he wants to kiss you. You're happy. So happy. All of you is bubbling up to the ceiling, you're floating, and his touch is bringing you pleasure that is radiating within you. You lean in and close the gap between you both, and your lips are on his; it's all warm, fire-sparklers and dark, vanilla-musk. The music seems to lead you both into your dark corner, where the three of you can privately finish your pirouette. You're twisting and turning, his arms like coils, keeping you safe, and you allow his touch to feed you. You catch sight of your friend across the room, hidden behind the haze, looking like she's searching for something- for a moment, you think it's you she's searching for you, but her hawk-eyes latch their pray, the man in the Versace suit, the one you were looking at earlier, the one that you told her was cute. Something is lingering within you, like you want to care, but you're having too much fun. You watch as she lightly brushes the nape of his neck- at least, you think she does, and they both get up together and leave. Suddenly, you laugh, and your new man laughs with you, and looks down at you with a smile that says he knows where this night is going, and he's probably right, as you lean into his neck and smell him for the missing hint of the ocean that he should smell like. Instead, he doesn't smell like the ocean at all, yet you keep your nose in his neck, hoping that the scent will emerge. He takes this as a sign of affection, squeezing your hand and telling you he's taking you home. You're just happy, so very happy; and even though it's not Versace, his Calvin Klein suit and his musk are good enough, secure enough, so you follow him out to the chilly night- or are those the threads of the morning peeking through the buildings now?- and you're freezing, but he wraps you with his blazer, cradles you into his arms again, and you're just so grateful you are able to share this moment with him. The cab scrapes up against the sidewalk, you think- maybe this is another sign from life- but you can't seem to find it in you to care too much as you huddle into the backseat where it's warm and cozy, wrinkling his blazer, and he tells the cab driver his address. You probably should pay attention, but you're comfortable being held, your friends fading away in the glow of the first light, and you turn to your savior and find him glowing along with the morning and your mood, higher than the buildings whisking past in the still darkness of the morning light.