

Tonight's the Night I'm Going to Shine

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For as long as I can remember this is how it's been. Doug gets all the attention, and I, well, I just get angry.

Doug this. Doug that. Blah, blah, blah.

Captain of the football team. *Tick.*

School Captain. *Tick.*

Valedictorian. *Tick.*

Ugh. The thought of perfect Doug makes me want to caterwaul like an animal caught in a trap. If I could gnaw through my ankle and limp away from him, there'd be a smear of blood all the way to the nearest airport.

It's as though *I'm* hidden in the shadow that Doug has cast over me since birth. Him the powerful bird of prey circling in the sky, me the fluffy helpless kitten scampering from one hiding place to the next. Teachers, friends, family - hell, even my own parents don't notice me! Doug the perfect child forever front and centre, and the less than perfect Jasmine hidden away in the background. I'm not even noticeable enough to be my family's dirty little secret.

When you hide yourself away long enough people stop looking for you; that's assuming they knew you were even there in the first place. But I *am* here, and I'm not going anywhere; well, not until I've done what I have to tonight, and everyone finally sees me.

Here I am, sitting at the vanity I bought from a high-end furniture store the Sunday before last. It was an impulse buy; a bargain too good to pass up. What kind of girl can walk

past a bargain? Not this one, that's for sure! Makeup is strewn from one end to the other and the Hollywood lights shine bright, their illumination transforming my pastel pink bedroom into a superstar's dressing room.

Tonight I am a superstar!

With my nose almost touching the mirror, I carefully apply eyeliner. I've done this loads of times, but it still triggers a churning in the pit of my stomach knowing that one slip might result in a pencil to the eyeball and instant blindness; unlikely of course, but it's enough to throw fuel on my crippling anxiousness. I hate my anxiety but I'm pretty sure my therapist loves it. Hell, it will ensure he can afford to take his family skiing in New Zealand again this winter; just like he has every winter since I began seeing him a half dozen years ago. Do I sound cynical? Good because I am. It was his idea that I do what I'm going to do tonight.

"I think it's time," he keeps telling me.

"You think, or it is?" my response each time he's mentioned it.

"That's something only you know, Jasmine."

It isn't going to go wrong. It isn't going to go wrong. But if it does, well, it's *his* fault!

Seriously though, this anxiety bullshit better piss right off. Tonight's the night I'm going to shine. The night I'll step out of Doug's shadow once and for all. No - I'm going to *dive* out of his shadow - a reverse three and a half somersault, with a pike, and a motherfucking twist.

Tonight I am going to be *seen*

I am going to be *noticed*.

I am going to be *admired*.

And I am as sure as hell going to be *envied*, by every person in that god-damn room.

Ugh. Who am I kidding? I'm terrified. I've never been so scared in my life.

Tonight everyone I care about is gathering at the Red Velvet Bar for Doug's 21st birthday party. And for the first time in 21 years it's going to be about me instead of Doug.

It's my birthday as well, so how about Doug takes a back seat for once?

It's time for me to be the centre of attention!

I just need to keep my shit together until it's done.

Be positive.

Be positive, Jasmine!

I glide a soft pink lipstick over my pouty full lips. "Girl, you look like an absolute babe tonight," I say to my reflection, puckering slightly to suggest a kiss. "Jazzy has arrived!"

My eyes are transfixed on the beautiful swan that stares back from the mirror. I've always been fascinated by its long elegant neck; my neck.

The ensemble I've chosen for the party is nothing short of perfection. Oh, I plan on making an impact. My little black dress accentuates every curve that the good Lord (and a lot of time, hard work and money) has blessed me with. In a sultry couture voice it whispers 'sexy' without screaming 'slutty', although who doesn't love to scream 'slutty' from time to time? My Christian Louboutin heels arch my feet, mirroring the position I hold them in as I climax. They show off my muscular calves and smooth tanned legs. I'm wearing enough jewellery to sparkle without looking cheap. My blonde hair extensions look amazing. They flow halfway down my back, and frame my gorgeous face. I don't want to sound narcissistic, but hell, I AM SMOKIN'!

My Michael Kors clutch is lying on the hall table. I grab it, throw my touch-up makeup and keys inside, and head for the front door.

Am I really doing this?

Am I really fucking doing this?

My smile turns to an anxious frown. I pause with my hand on the doorknob.

NO, NO, NO! I will not let my anxiety ruin this for me. Tonight is too fucking important.

I feel the smile return to my face. This is going to be the greatest night of my life.

I step outside of my apartment, and into the dark.

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I booked a taxi for 8:00 pm, but it's not here yet.

8:10 pm, no taxi.

8:20 pm, *still* no taxi.

This is ridiculous. The bar is only a few blocks away. Yes, these heels will kill me, but I can't be late. Not tonight.

Walking down the dimly lit street I hold my clutch close to my chest; I'm a little nervous, and my hands are clammy. What little illumination the streetlights release escapes through the tall elms, casting shadows like a hundred hands trying to grab at me.

I hate walking in these shoes. The balls of my feet are beginning to burn, and my calves are already aching. Shoes like these are designed to look hot in, not walk in - and not at this ridiculous pace. Why do we do this to ourselves? To look hot!

As I approach the corner there's a catcall from the opposite side of the street. "Hey Baby-girl, where you goin' on a beautiful night like this?" someone asks from the heavy darkness. I can make out two faceless figures standing in front of a boarded-up abandoned store. I'm fairly sure they're both guys - and even more sure they're bad news.

"Yeah Honey, what you doin' tonight?" asks the second guy. "You wanna party some, Bae?"

Without responding, I walk faster, ignoring my aching feet.

My heart is beating out of my chest. Shit, shit, shit. I should have waited for the taxi.

Not tonight. Seriously, I have enough shit to deal with without these pair of dickheads as well."

"What's the hurry, Baby? Don't you want some fun tonight?"

Rounding the corner, I cross the road, putting as much distance between me and the two creeps as possible. This street is better lit. Small groups, mainly families, wander up and down, window shopping and looking for somewhere to have dinner.

"Baby, baby, wait up! We just wanna talk," they call, noticeable annoyance building in their voices.

Fucking hell, these douchebags just don't get it! For Christ's sake, why can't they just leave me alone?

I hear fast approaching footsteps behind me. Holding my breath, I look over my shoulder to see who it is; praying it's not them. Twenty, maybe thirty feet behind, I can make out the two figures, still faceless, hoodies pulled up.

"Slow down, Sugar. We just wanna say hi."

Footsteps quicken; mine and theirs.

Shit, shit!

A hand grabs my right shoulder; fingers digging in so hard I know I'll have five evenly spaced bruises.

"What the fuck is your problem, you stuck-up bitch? Me, and my boy here, just wanna talk to you."

He pulls at my shoulder, spinning me around.

I stare at them, frozen.

They're no longer faceless; and they're no longer strangers. They're two guys Doug went to high school with, and they've recognised me.

"It's you. You motherfucking freaky bitch!" screams the one who spun me around, as his fist crashes heavily into my face. The sound of splintering bone fills my ears. Blood spurts from my nose as I stagger backwards; heel snapping, ankle twisting. My vision blurs and the metallic taste of fresh blood rolls across my tongue and down the back of my throat. The second blow is to my stomach. I double over, then drop to my knees, tearing the skin from my smooth tanned legs. Blows three and four are across the back of my long elegant swan-like neck.

Everything is silent.

A size thirteen steel-capped boot delivers the fifth and sixth blows - to my gorgeous face, and the back of my head.

The amazing blonde hair, that flows halfway down my back, turns crimson.

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Standing in the hospital morgue, my parents hold each other.

Numb.

Industrial strength bleach attempts to mask the smell of death in the small stainless steel filled room. But it can't. Death fills spaces bleach can never reach.

The doctor eases the sheet down, revealing the face of a freshly washed corpse - my face, my corpse. Void of life. An empty container crushed and waiting to be thrown onto a pile of other lives that could have been but were never allowed to be.

I'm lying here because of who I was; someone. And now I'm no one.

"Take as much time as you need," the doctor tells my parents, sympathetically.

With my mother's face buried in his chest, my father looks down at me; tears well in his eyes, his breath catching in his throat. "Oh my God... Yes... Yes... That's our child," he says.

"That's our Doug."