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A Night at the Movies
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David looked at his phone for the third time in two minutes. He hadn't soaked in the information the last two times he looked, he had only glanced at his phone looking for the time and immediately forgot what it said. The bright screen showed that it was eleven twenty eight, exactly seventeen minutes before the movie would begin. He looked back up, and turned his head both left and right looking for Anna to show up. She was usually late when they went to the movies, often making it just in time to catch the very end of the previews. David rubbed his freshly shaven chin with his fingertips. It felt smooth and puffy, as he had just gotten rid of "that thing on his face," an hour or so before he had to meet up with Anna. She was the one who had called it that.

He had been standing in front of the doors to the Crondike Movie Theater for just over 15 minutes now. It was a sprawling building, and it seemed to stretch endlessly in both directions. It had been built two years. It had run the old movie theater, the Circus Triplet Theater, out of business. This new theater had stadium seating, bathrooms that smelled like lavender, and even do it yourself popcorn machines. David looked into the window, his breath fogging up little circles in front of him.. He could see someone inside using the do it yourself popcorn machine. He turned his head to the right, and blew the air out of his mouth as if it were cigarette smoke and watched as the cold, outside air made his own appear as if it actually was smoke. He had been trying unsuccessfully to blow cold air rings for the last 10 minutes. He wasn't even entirely sure that was

possible, but he kept going anyway. It was about 22 degrees, at least that's what his iPhone told him. It was sure to get colder as the night went on.

He was about to check his phone again, when he heard some shoes scuffing behind him.

“Hey!”

David turned around to face the man who had addressed him. He looked into his brown eyes, they looked like they were honing in on David's freshly shaven chin. Then, David glanced down to his shirt, an old dress shirt. The blue of the shirt was barely noticeable, as it had faded significantly, but it stood out under the streetlight in front of the theater. It was creased like a crinkled ball of wrapping paper. David spotted and smelled the body odor from the dirty, yellow patches of sweat on the shirt, which looked like the continents on a globe of the Earth. The man's corduroy pants were lime green and the lines of the corduroy were smooth around the knees.

“Y-yes?” David asked, his voice trembling a bit, his eyes bulging, and his head cocking to the left like a confused pigeon.

“You know what?”

“...What?”

“Yeah, you know what!”

“Ha...” David chuckled nervously, and searched for something to say. His whole brain felt totally empty. He could always just leave. No, he didn't want to be rude. He thought of what his mother would say. *David, that man was probably just very lonely. It's not like it would've killed you to talk to him for a five minutes. A lot of people like that just want someone to talk to.* It was eerie how clearly he could hear her voice in his ear. He knew she was right. Wait, his imaginary mother was right? David thought, of how ridiculous it was to take orders from someone who wasn't there, who doesn't even know he's talking to a homeless man. He still knew she was right about this, though. He could feel it. Besides, this old man might say something insightful or wise, just like the homeless people in those uplifting movies.

“Haw! I'm just kidding, son! You just looked like the “funny” type!” the man had held up his fingers for use of air quotes around the word “funny.”

“Oh, well that's me, I guess.” David looked toward the right and left again hoping to see Anna's face, so that he might have an excuse to leave.

“Listen pal, you don't happen to have anything you could give to an old goose like me? I mean I'm not asking for a handout, I'll give you whatever the hell I can. Shit, I'd give you a handy if you want!”

David squirmed as the man kept talking. He fiddled with his phone in his pocket, and took it out, and looked at the time again. David tried to not look into the man's eyes. Hoping the reference to a “handy,” might be burned from his brain if he thought hard enough. The man in the crinkled shirt laughed loudly, showing all his teeth in a wide open circle around his mouth. Some were clearly missing, while others were on their way out.

David chuckled again, still nervous as the blood rushed to his face.

“Sorry, but, I-- I don't have any cash or I really would.” Which wasn't true in the slightest. David had probably got at least \$155 dollars in cash in his back left pocket. He had just stopped at an ATM not twenty minutes ago.

“Shit, I don't care what it is you got anything to give, son? Anything? Come on, I'm down here.”

“Well, I suppose I do have some gum actually if you wa--...if you like.” David looked around for Anna again, the sweat starting to dampen the part of his sleeves that touched his armpit. He pulled out a pack of EZ Breath Gum, and slid out a piece of foil wrapped gum from the first wrapper and handed it to the man. The old goose snatched it out of his hand, and looked at it closely, examining it's every detail. He quickly tore off the wrapper like a child does to a birthday gift and shoved the blue mint stick in his mouth. David took one, too, and gently unwrapped it and put the stick into his own mouth. David bunched up his piece of foil and tossed it on the ground.

“Hey, now whatcha gone and done that for?!”

David stared the old man, now kicking himself mentally that he hadn't waited inside the theater. The old man bent down and snatched the wrapper of the ground with his long, soft, fleshy claws. David couldn't help but notice how yellow and long and cracked the old guy's nails were.

“Didn't your ma ever tell you not to litter?!”

“Sorry, sir--”

“Don't call me that! Do I look like some 'sir,' to you? I haven't been a sir...since...well since...look I don't know. Point is, this what your mommy told a 'sir,' looked like!?”

“Well, I,...she never, well no I gue--”

“Just call me Bull.” Bull waited for David to respond. “You know, like who MJ used to play for? Hello?!”

“Right sorry, Bull.”

“There we go.” Bull spat out the gum. “Thanks for that...say what'd you say your name was? You know me, now I know you! What is it? Wait don't tell me...I was always good, no great at guessing names! Well before the car accident anyway, but I sure ain't tried since then! Let me see...you're a...you're Todd aren't ya! Don't tell me that you ain't a Todd!”

David wanted nothing more in the entire world for Anna to come save him from this situation. He wanted to forget that Bull existed, he never wanted to think about the black knit cap on Bull's head, nor his gray, stringy beard that looked as if some college kids had pranked their friend by gluing their pubic hair to his face.

“You--, you're right! How did you know?” David had no idea what on earth, heaven, or hell had possessed him to say that.

“I knew it, you looked so much like a Todd I could slap ya!”

“Ha, yeah,” David said quietly as he looked around again. His brain started to boil with ideas for excuses, or anything that could possibly get him out of this situation. He could just run. No, that wouldn't do, what if Bull chased him, or what if he ran into Bull again once he was trying to get into the theater or once he was leaving with Anna? He was pretty sure that once Anna showed up he could politely leave Bull alone, and escape to the sanctuary of inside the theater lobby.

Suddenly David had an idea.

“Well, I've gotta go to the bathroom, but hopefully I'll get a chance to talk to you later, Bull.”

“Oh, sure. Sure. Sure, sure sure.” Bull looked out into the street, his eyes following each car that drove by, until the next one would catch his dark brown eyes. He didn't even seem to remember who David was, and why he was talking to him right this second.

“Well, I'll see you...” David waited for a response, then realizing he now had his window of opportunity to escape, he turned his head and tried to open the door to the theater. The door rattled. David pulled harder, thinking the door just a heavy one, and tugged at it again. The door didn't move at all. Then again he tried. The door was locked. *Shit.* His eyes scoured the inside of the lobby through the window of the door he had just been tugging on. He only saw an older woman, slowly making her way to the restroom. He knocked on the

door, his knuckles stinging with each strike. The lady paid him no notice. He knocked harder.

“Come in!” Bull giggled.

David looked over his shoulder to find Bull still looking out into the street. He looked back and tried calling into the lobby.

“Hello! I have a ticket to the movie! Could someone let me in?!”

No luck. Nobody came out to help him. He was stuck outside with Bull, once again. He rested his head against the door, softly pressing it against the glass, he began to bang his head softly on the door, reprimanding himself for not going inside earlier. He looked up one last time to try to grab someone's attention in the lobby. He noticed a dark maroon sign to his left. The sign read “LOBBY DOORS ARE LOCKED AT 11:30 PM. PLEASE ENTER BEFORE 11:30 PM FOR 11:45 PM and MIDNIGHT SHOWINGS. THANK YOU. - MANAGEMENT.”

“You've got to be kidding.”

He turned around and walked out to stand next to Bull.

“It's locked.”

“Oh, yeah, I could have told ya that! They lock that now so I can't get in there. I guess the man doesn't like me using their fancy, flowery bathrooms! Huh, what a world, huh!” Bull spat onto the street. “Guess you'll have to hold it!”

“Hold what?”

“Didn't you hafta go to the bathroom?”

“Oh! Yes, I...well I suppose I will have to hold it.”

David was now starting to worry where Anna might be. She would be upset that he hadn't waited inside for her, so that he could have let her into the lobby and they could have gone to see the movie like they had planned. Her lips would curl as she learned what had happened, she would say “well, that's very disappointing. Next time let's read the signs, Davey.” That was what she would call him when he did something clearly stupid in her eyes. Davey. He always felt like a child whenever she called him that.

“Uhhhhh.” Bull grunted for no reason that David could see. So he simply ignored it. David pulled out his phone and brought the phone in front of his face, and he began to search for Anna's name in his contacts list. He scrolled to her name, it was close to the top of the list and he clicked the little call icon next to her name. He

pressed the phone up to his ear.

“Bzzzzz.”

The phone rang loudly. The sound scared him, the volume was up so loud. He quickly jerked the phone away from his ear and his fingers felt along the side of the phone, looking for the volume buttons. His index finger fumbled and turned the phone up even louder.

“Christ...” David muttered under his breath.

He eventually fixed the sound so it was bearable. He pressed his phone up against the top of the black phone just in time to hear Anna's voicemail message.

“Hey, you've reached Anna Franksten, my phone must be off, or I must be busy. Please leave me a voicemail and I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Thanks! Bu-bye.” Anna's voice was suddenly cut off. Her voicemail always seemed to sound like that, anyway.

Bull started to talk about how the same car had driven in front of the theater sixteen times and how it must be there to get him. David tried to call Anna again, but he had no luck. He tried one last time and she still failed to pick up.

“Come on, Anna, come on...” David whispered to himself.

“You waitin' for something, Todd? Or for someone? Huh? Why you still out here?”

“I--well my girlfriend is going to be here any minute and I was trying to tell her the door was locked.”

“Yeah, that guy, that manager, in there is a real piece of work, I'll tell ya!”

“David?”

David turned around to see Anna walking briskly toward him. He heard her black leather boots clicking against the sidewalk as she walked up to him.

“Were you waiting for me to go in?” She smiled at him

“Actually, *Todd* was talking to me!” Bull chimed in and stood out from behind David, having been silent for a moment.

“Todd?” Anna looked at David confused, with a mildly amused look on her face.

“Yes, I was just talking with--”

“Ain't you gonna introduce us?” Bull couldn't seem to wait for anyone to finish their sentences.

“Right, I was just about to. Anna, this is...Bull.”

Bull shoved his hand toward Anna with a quick, jerky motion. Almost robotic. His hands were silver like a robot, too. His long yellow fingernails were the only bit of color one could find anywhere on Bull's silvery hands. He also had on a wristwatch with a cracked screen, and a silver band. Most of the band was falling apart, being made of merely thread. It barely held itself together, looking as if a dog had chewed on it.

"Nice to meet you." Anna feigned a smile for Bull and looked over to David, her eyes bulging just a little. "Well we had better be getting inside now." She pulled her hand away from Bull's silvery one, he probably would've kept shaking her hand for hours. She then started to move towards the door to the theater, her heels clicking against the sidewalk.

"Actually...it's locked." David said quietly. "I didn't see that sign there until...well until it was too late."

"Oh." Anna read the sign on the door of the movie theater. She then began her chastising little speech to "Davey," as they began to walk towards her car.

"Hey! Lady! Anna! You got anything to give to a little old man like me? Your boyfriend didn't have nothing, but maybe you do! What do you say?"

Anna turned around and looked at Bull. He stood at the same spot in front of the theater looking after her, with his big, dark brown eyes. He looked like he was trying to puppy dog eyes, but they looked more like Rodney Dangerfield's eyes. She started to walk toward him, and David followed her. Bull didn't budge from his spot and waited for the two of them to walk to him. He smiled all the front teeth that he could at them as Anna dug through her purse. She pulled out her wallet, a blue little purse that fit snugly into her regular one. She opened it, and pulled out two dollar bills and handed them to Bull who snatched them in the same way he had David's gum. He looked at them, his eyes almost burning through them, trying to discern if they were real or fakes.

"Oh. Well thanks, I guess."

"Excuse me?" David could here the irritation in Anna's voice. He knew Bull would soon be getting a mouthful of unpleasantries.

"Look, Bill, or Bull, or whatever your name is, I didn't *have* to give you that money, and if it's not enough for you, well then you can just hand it right back, okay! The least you could do is be thankful someone gave you something!"

David tried to get Anna to leave, saying Bull hadn't meant to be rude, but Anna stayed, looking Bull in

the eyes. Bull just stood there with a smug little grin stuck on his face. He started to walk slowly towards Anna, the grin staying smack in the middle of his face. David tried one last time to get Anna to turn around and leave, but she stood her ground. Almost as if she was trying to call Bull's bluff, whatever it is he might be bluffing about.

“Look Anna, let's just get out of here, ok!” David walked in between her and Bull. He looked in her in the eye. “Anna, really come--” He felt a sharp, stinging pain on the side of his head. He fell toward the street, his head banging onto the curb. David saw lights whirling around him, as if he had been sucked up into a tornado in Las Vegas. He felt cold and seemed to be spinning and spinning. Then he passed out. There on the street.

* * *

“David! David!” Anna yelled six inches in front of David's face as he regained his consciousness.

“Bull just hit you over the head with some sort of stick he found on the ground!”

“What? Is he...” David trailed off his head still surrounded by spinning lights.

“He left, he ran down that way after I threw some more money at him and started to call for help, a lady inside the theater heard me and called the cops. What were you thinking talking to that creepy guy?!”

David sighed and collapsed into Anna's arms, his head throbbing.