

YOU **ARE** **A** **LOSER** **AND**
NO **ONE** **WANTS** **TO** **BUY**

YOU FRUIT SNACKS

You used to go to high school and fail algebra class, feet kicked up on a rickety desk while your best friend laughed. One time, you had to do damage control when said best friend revealed, quite dramatically, to everyone within earshot in the cafeteria, that your ex-boyfriend did your acrylics. And that is why your nails have looked like shit since last February! Humiliation was never your thing, saving face was easy to do when your hair reached the small of your back, and Mike barely did anything but police your nail color choices. You had mediocre jokes but excellent delivery, your mother liked your left eyebrow shape over the right one.

You made sure to know enough about the house parties in your neighborhood in order to only successfully attend one per year. Someone always handed you a beer when you walked in, and you loved the performance of drinking swill without grimacing. Gritted teeth, hands shaking, stomach clenched, *oh boy* did you give off the appearance necessary to continue participating in the conversation about the inefficacy of strawberry vape flavors. When you walked home at a reasonable hour, you spilled the remainder (80.5% of the can) of the beer behind you, trickling on the sidewalk hitting cement like acidic rain.

And what do you think about these scenes now? Is this where the nostalgia trip stutters to a halt? There's something lovely about ending it here, where you sound innocent enough to be undeserving of the transformation in the woods behind the weird sports center where a pile of tennis balls has been rotting in the staff bathroom for the last six months. So much to consider – where it went wrong – in the dark where you usually never are! Something followed suit, trailed the sickening little wet road you paved, unknowingly. Was it because of the cigarette you stole on your way out? No, maybe the lighter you borrowed, promising to return? Actually, might it have been the pattern clashing outfit-wise? Did you wear red lipstick like a disgusting little lady from Paris (quoting your mother) again? Is it because you held a friend's hand and told her that she *will* get rid of her cystic acne in time for her part-time modeling gig for her dad's Audi dealership? Was the sin punishable so clearly because you knew the problem wasn't the acne but the crippling lack of charisma?

Think about it again then: little scratches on the side of trees and lampposts, a collection of wide unblinking eyes, like headlights, illuminating you from the back while you light the disheveled cigarette stuffed in your back pocket. Slithering into view, dancing void-black tentacles made of something vaguely evil and proud wrap around your ankles. Elongating on the brick wall pocked with ash, a shadow eclipses yours. You barely have the time to say how rude it is before a jaw filled with moon-bright fangs unhinges with a creak.

Now, you sometimes visit the high school grounds at night, stepping lightly on wet grass squelching under your paws. How long has it been? No matter, you know it isn't the kind of place you should be seeing and be seen at anymore. It isn't entirely just about how you look nowadays; it also just seems tacky to wander aimlessly like a ghost looking for free haunting real estate. You're kinda busy these days.

The office job seemed like a good get after *What Happened* – it became increasingly confusing to show up to class with tentacles writhing, teeth clashing, and gooey limbs slapping on cracked wooden floors. The HR lady seemed nice enough. She smiled sympathetically when you entered the empty conference room by gripping a desk chair with a distinguished long red claw, dragging the rest of your material body to it like a slingshot. The questions were politely posed, such as:

q. Past Work Experience?

a. Chasing large rodents behind the Wal-Mart on 2nd street.

i. *Go-Getter!*

q. What would you do if you had an irresolvable conflict with a co-worker in your department?

a. Eat said captured large rodent behind the Wal-Mart on 2nd street for lunch and calm down.

i. *Problem-solver!*

“There is something so special about you!” – Yes, of course, you knew this even before your hair touched the back of your ankles and started seeping some kind of burgundy sap all over your freshly painted toes for a few days that one time. And it takes someone special to be a junior payroll assistant.

Very bizarre, this office setup, though. Everyone seems unnecessarily nice, even when you keep fucking up a year into the gig. You ask yourself, often, if it is an earnest reaction or cruelly condescending that when your forearm claw flakes end up in the XEROX machine’s paper tray for the second time this month, Kelly the receptionist delicately picks each decaying shedding nail out and asks if you’d like to keep them.

(Yes, you keep them all – you’ve been trying to make earrings out of at least one set)

It continues like that for so many things: your boss in accounting realized that your social anxiety is preventing you from delivering the kind of dashing presentations the department is known for at the end of the financial year. You unceremoniously collapsed into a pile of radioactive goo when you moved on to slide four of the PowerPoint and it didn’t load correctly. Ever since then, you have been put in charge of font selection, and there is clearly an aesthetic sensibility you bring to the table when you sit on the center left of the conference table, hundreds of eyes blinking unsettlingly at the CEO.

The 8th floor janitor accidentally started Hoovering your back paws because he didn’t see you in the dark when you were working late one night, finishing a pie chart graph. He apologized profusely, asked if you’ve heard of light-up sneakers. Your hair grew a little too long again after you looked at the moon at exactly 3:00 A.M one time two months ago. Sticky toffee blood-red jam curling and unfurling out of your corner office, embarrassingly, furiously wiped with old payroll reports until the janitor gently pushed you up and mopped up while telling you about his niece’s new Heelys.

Sometimes the blood inside you curdles like bad milk and you feel too sick to enjoy the water cooler chitchat about the weekend. You lay on the floor next to the gurgling water tank, face down, claws clutching the awfully patterned carpet. Kelly crouches next to you on days like these and tells you about her boyfriend’s obsession with her sharp knuckles. You groan and moan, paws and tentacles and eyes gunking up with salty tears. A paper cup with its edges unfurled gets deposited next to your head and you lift it just enough to blink a dozen slitted eyes at it. You thank Kelly. She compliments your nails.

And when you go home now, you have a little routine that helps with the material you were made to be made of since *What Happened*. You open the fridge door and grab the nearest beer can, opening it with a hiss. The trickle of brown liquid is wobbly at first, you never know what the shape is going to be. Recently though, it’s been circular – a delicate fizzy spiral coats the kitchen floor. Sometimes the trail doubles over, sometimes not. You put the can down on the counter. Lowering yourself on your many beautifully nightmare-limbs, your tripart tongue follows the beer-trail until every last drop is gone.

Oh, now that’s **nice!**