

The Drip

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“Barry! My man, are you alright? You look a bit thirsty.”

I jumped in my chair. Ed had scared the shit out of me. He had snuck into my cubicle while my headphones were on and grabbed me by the shoulders. He never bothered announcing himself first.

“Gee, Sorry Barry.” He said. “Didn’t mean to scare ya.”

I turned around. Ed had a mug in hand and an open smile. He looked the exact same as he had every day for the last two years. He had short, greasy hair, a moustache and a pale face, but his most distinctive features were his giant hands. Giant hands that would knock over every cup and stationery item in their way, wherever Ed stumbled around.

“Look Ed.” I said. “I have to fix this graphic for Steven before two. You know, like you told me an hour ago.”

“Oh Barry.” Said Ed, looking off into the distance and waving his hands around in gesticulation. I instinctively ducked. “Barry, you’ll finish it in time, don’t worry. I’m just helping out, I thought you might like some water.”

“I’m fine, thank you.” I turned back to my screen and reopened the editing software. I dragged a watermark across the screen. Leaning in close to my screen, I moved the mouse millimetres at a time. I had to snap it in at the exact pixel. It was stupid, but I didn’t have time to research a better way.

I could feel that Ed hadn’t walked off yet, but I ignored him, hoping he would get the message. I kept moving my hand as slowly as I could. I had tried seven times before and was ready to break the keyboard with my forehead if it didn’t work again.

I could feel something on the back of my neck. Like Ed was tapping me with his hands.

I was close to getting the watermark perfect. I slowed down.

Tap.

10 more pixels.

Tap.

5 more pixels.

Tap.

“Oh for god’s sake! Ed w-”

He wasn’t there.

“Er, are you alright Barry?”

I turned around, flustered and red. Gemma’s head had popped up from the cubicle in front of me. Her eyebrow was raised high, half hidden under her curly ginger hair. Unlike Ed, she wore something different every day. Today she had purple lipstick and pearl earrings.

“Yeah, no. I’m fine. Just thought he was tapping me on the shoulder.”

“Oh, ok.” Said Gemma. It’s probably that then. She pointed above my head at the ceiling. I looked up, a tile on the ceiling was wet and mouldy at the corner, a single drop formed underneath. I hopped from my chair and moved to the side just before it splashed on my seat.

Gemma giggled, “It’s just some water, it’s not going to kill you.”

“It’s disgusting,” I said. “The ceiling’s all mouldy, it nearly landed on my face.” I stepped further away from my chair, glancing at the tile.

“Well go t- Go tell Steven then.” She appeared to be holding in more laughter.

I furrowed my eyebrows at her and walked from the cubicle to Steven’s office.

Steven, my boss, was sitting back on his chair with his legs up on his desk. He was only 33. He had short, brown curly hair and wore skivvies and denim jeans to the office, he thought he was Steve Jobs.

The door was already open and he didn’t notice me when I entered, he was leaning back and rapidly drinking what seemed to be a full steaming cup of coffee.

I knocked on the door frame. He looked up and finally saw me.

“Barry!” He said. He hopped out of his seat and extended his free hand out as if to hug me. “Come sit down. How are you doing?”

He kept coming towards me. He *was* trying to hug me. I slowly backed away into the door frame.

“Barry, Barry why are you always so tense?” Steven gestured to his own chair. “Sit down, sit down.” He placed his mug down on the desk and vaulted over it, swinging his legs over to face the chair.

“Er, sure.” I said. I sat down in the chair. Steven started swinging his legs back and forth

and poured the rest of his coffee down his throat. He kept his neck twisted in an awkward position the whole time he drank, just to maintain eye contact with me. He didn't blink. I thought back to when the stock manager Charlie had told me rumours of upper management racking cocaine.

"Feeling good, Steven?" I said.

He slammed his mug onto the desk. "Oh yes!" He shouted. I jolted and the chair rolled half a metre backwards.

"Yes!" He said again. "It's this coffee. It's absolutely tremendous. You should try some."

He held out the mug in front of my face. It was empty.

"I um. I don't really drink coffee." I said.

"Well then you should try it for the sake of trying coffee."

He kept it thrust forward in my face.

"It's empty, you know." I said.

"Ah!" Steven spoke with the exaggeration of a Play School host. Slapping his forehead with his palm. "I'm an idiot. I'll get you a full mug."

He swung his legs back over the desk and hopped down.

"Uh, I actually had a question. That I came in here for."

He was already halfway out the door, but he turned back. His face was half cocked to the side.

"Yes?"

"There's a leak above my desk. It's landing right on my chair. So I'll need to work somewhere else until it gets fixed."

"Oh of course." Said Steven. He paused, looking up at the sky.

"Use mine." He said, and wandered out the door without looking back.

I sat in the chair for a few minutes, waiting for him to step back in and say that he was just joking.

Charlie appeared at the door instead, looking down at a clipboard.

"I think we need to order a few more desks, we might be running - Oh, hello Barry. No one

told me you got promoted,” He mock-saluted me. “What happened to Steven?”

I circled my finger around the side of my head, making the ‘crazy’ signal.

Charlie glanced behind into the office and then closed the door.

“You think he...?” He said, tapping the side of his nose.

“I don’t know,” I said. “He says it’s the coffee, but he’s absolutely loony. It’s kind of creepy”

“Where is he?”

“He’s going to get me coffee?”

“Oh, don’t drink it.” Charlie laughed. “He’s probably put extra sugar in if you know what I mean.”

“I don’t drink coffee anyway.”

Charlie leant against the desk, looking around the room. “So what are you doing in his office?”

“My cubicle has a leak, so he gave me his office.”

“A leak, can’t you deal with a little bit of water.”

I folded my arms. Everyone in the office was perfectly content with living in filth it seemed. “It’s right above my chair, it nearly landed in my mouth.”

Charlie rolled his eyes. “ Well if it’s just a bad tile, We have some replacements downstairs. I could do it right now.”

“Oh?” I said. “Yes please.”

The door swung open. Ed was standing behind, his shirt was drenched with spilt coffee, even more so than usual.

“Oh, what are you two blokes doing in here?”

“Barry’s been promoted.” Said Charlie. He exited and sidled around Barry, looking down and seeing his shirt. “Oh Ed, you might need to go home and change.” He looked back at me. “I’ll get onto that leak Barry. See ya.”

Charlie left and Ed slowly turned to face me. “Oh, is that true?” He said. “Guess I should watch my step around you now, eh?”

“Steven’s just lent me his desk while mine get’s a leak fixed. Did you want to talk with him?”

“No, no.” Said Ed. “I’ve just got you something to drink.”

He held up a clear cup. But it wasn’t filled with coffee. A milky-white substance clung to the inside of the cup.

I stared at the semi-gelatinous liquid for several moments. “I’m good.” I said.

I stood up from the chair. Ed didn’t move, he took up most of the doorway with his large frame. He kept holding the cup at arms length in front of him.

“Try it, you’ll love it.” He said. He took a step inside , but still blocked the door. I wouldn’t be able to push past him. Not only did he have 30 kilos on me, but he was also a foot taller.

My body began to tingle, I was getting hot under my jacket.

“I’m really fine.” I said.

He took another step forward and placed himself between the desk and the wall, boxing me in. “You have to drink at some point. You might as well get it over with now.”

“I can drink at home.” I said. I eyed the desk, wondering how quickly I could leap over. Ed saw me looking and stepped back under the door frame.

“What are you trying to avoid?” He said. “It’s better in than out.”

I thought for a few seconds. “I’m just feeling like some coffee really.”

Ed paused. Staring at me. I realised he hadn’t blinked the whole time, but he wasn’t wide eyed or bloodshot. If anything his eyes looked tired.

He finally lowered the cup. He smiled.

“Oh, really?”

“Yep,” I said. “I was just going to grab some from the kitchen.”

Ed stood to the side. I walked past and as I did he raised the cup to his lips and threw his head back. The liquid missed, smacking his moustache and sticking like gel. Slowly the gel oozed down over his lips. It moved at a steady pace, like it was crawling under its own will. Finally it slipped down and dropped into his open mouth. I gagged.

“Mmm.” He said. “Just what I needed.”

I headed straight for the stairs. I heard, smelt and felt Ed trundling along behind me.

“Where are you going?” He asked.

“I meant the kitchen downstairs. Charlie keeps the best coffee down there.”

I took the steps two at a time, trying my best to look like I wasn’t rushing. Charlie kept walking behind, I heard the cup drop and bounce down the steps.

There was a door at the base of the stairwell. I grabbed the handle but it didn’t open. I didn’t have my keycard with me. I shook the door back and forth, hoping it was just stuck.

I felt a hot breath tingle along my neck. Ed was right behind me.

“Oh, haha.” I said. “Th-that’s not the way to the kitchen.”

I turned around and walked around the Ed and stairs, avoiding his eyes. He just kept silent and started walking behind me again.

I opened the door to the warehouse. The lights were on but I couldn’t see anyone. I stepped inside, the floor was wet. There was enough water for my feet to send small ripples along the ground. I looked behind, Ed was still down the end of a corridor. I jogged out into the warehouse and started looking around the shelves. Charlie was nowhere to be seen.

A light blared on and an engine roared to life. Suddenly a forklift shot out of an aisle and slammed into the far wall, piercing the plaster with its fork. A maniacal laughter came from inside.

I looked back, Ed was at the entrance, looking left and right. He couldn’t see me yet. I snuck through the gaps in the shelves and made my way over to the forklift. Charlie was in the pilot’s seat, prodding and pulling at the controls like he had never used them before.

“Charlie.” I hissed. “Charlie.”

Charlie’s head whipped around and he stared down at me.

“Oh hey.” He shouted. “Well how’s it going?”

“There’s something wrong with Ed.” I said. “And I think Steven too.”

Charlie stared at me. His head seemed to bobble around.

“You know what I think is wrong with him.” He said.

I slowly backed away. “What?” I said. Charlie turned in his seat and placed his chin on his fist. His eyes began to slowly cross.

“I think he looks absolutely p-parched.”

“You know what.” I said. “You’re right. I’ll go tell him that.” I took another step back.

I felt a familiar feeling on the back of my neck. I turned around just in time to see Ed unleash a gob of spit directly at my face-

But I had already ducked.

I sprinted out across the warehouse. The water splashed at my feet, it was deeper than before. My shoes were soaking wet. I slipped halfway across the warehouse, sliding on all fours. I hopped up as fast as I could and kept on running.

The door was still closed so I raced up the stairs. No one was in sight. I ran to my desk and grabbed the phone, dialling triple zero. The phone began to ring.

A drop of water splashed on my shoulder. I leapt back, crashing into the cubicle partitions and nearly yanking the phone from its base and snapping the cord. I had landed on my back, but the phone was still in my hand.

Gemma’s head popped up over the other side. She has been sitting there without making a sound.

“You really need to get over your germaphobia.” She said, “I think you could benefit from some exposure therapy.”

Her hair was drenched, it hung down her shoulders wavy instead of curly. Her lipstick was smushed down her chin, which was so wet it had some water beading into a droplet. She lent over the partition and revealed a pair of scissors.

“Let me just get that for you,” She said.

“No. No. No-” I said, lunging for her arm. But I was too late. *Snip*. The phone went dead.

I froze. Defeated.

Gemma giggled. “Cmon, cheer up Barry.” A drip fell from the roof again, she flicked the bead with perfect timing as it dropped past her, splashing it in my direction.

I dove out of the cubicle and pushed myself to my knees. I felt a pair of large hands grab me on the shoulders. I darted forward and raced to the other kitchen. Gemma’s foot shot out and tripped my legs. I stumbled forward and fell to the ground, my arms flailing. Someone caught me.

“I’ve got your coffee.” It was Steven. He hoisted me to my feet.

I stared at the ground. I was shaking. I was surrounded.

“I made sure to make it just how you like it.” Said Steven.

The large hands grabbed my shoulders again. Steven and Edd pushed and pulled me over to my desk and forced me into the chair.

“It’s time you finally calmed down.” Said Steven “Now, drink up.”

Ed sat behind the chair and wrapped his arms around my stomach, clasping his wrists on either hand to create a loop. Steven grabbed my chin with both of his hands and yanked it up. I couldn’t see anyone anymore, just the roof and the mouldy tile. A bead of water dripped down and splashed on my forehead, running down and pooling over my eyes.

“Gemma, darling. Take the coffee and help little old Barry get it down, will you please.”

“Sure thing babe.”

Steven let go of my chin with one of his hands and he grabbed my jaw. He tried to pry it open as I clenched it shut. A mug of coffee rose over my face.

I yanked my head free of Steven’s grip and thrashed myself around.

“Let me go!” I shouted. “Let me go.”

“Now, now.” Said Steven. “Doctor’s orders.” He fumbled at my face, trying to grab a hold of me again as I twisted and turned.

“Help! Help!”

Steven’s arms pulled away. The mug did too. I looked around. Steven was still standing next to me, hands by his sides.

“This isn’t working,” He said. “Gemma, come help me.”

He walked to the other side and ducked down. Grabbing at the chair. Gemma appeared by my side and grabbed the chair as well. Together the three began to lift me off the floor, Ed was still holding me tight.

I looked up. The mould had begun to grow, it was covering half of the tile now.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

The tile, ever so slowly, began to pull back into the ceiling. It was pitch black above, but a gurgling sound emanated from within.

“Stop.” I said. “Stop!”

They kept raising me higher and higher. Ed let go of my stomach and the chair began to rise

faster. The tile completely disappeared, leaving a dark, open square. The gurgling stopped. A single squelch echoed. It sounded like it was right there.

I looked at Gemma's desk. I pulled up my feet and tucked them underneath me. I kicked off, but instead of me propelling myself, the chair simply flew out from underneath and I crashed down on Steven, Ed and Gemma. Steven, Gemma and I fell to the floor. I leapt up first, Ed's hands lunged out to grab me but I shot off like the start to a hundred metre sprint and Ed caught nothing but air.

I raced to the stairway railing. I didn't want to take the time running down, I was going to jump. Then I was going to head to the warehouse and open the roller doors to the outside. Then I was going straight to my car-

Something large and slimy had stuck to my neck. Just as I had climbed the railing. It tugged me back from the edge. I reached back and grabbed it, but there was nothing solid to hold, my hand just sunk straight into a warm slime. It began to pull me back from the railing.

I screamed.

It dragged me across the floor. I kicked my legs and swiped behind me with my hands but to no avail. My three coworkers watched on, they were smiling.

"Wooo. Go Barry." Said Gemma

"See, I knew you were right for this job." Said Steven.

The slime on the back of my neck lifted me from the ground and I floated up to the ceiling. I began to cry.

I closed my eyes. But the light still darkened underneath my eyelids as I passed into the roof. My shoulders scraped against the edge of a tile, then my hip, then my legs. I kept going, the gel dragged me over the tiles until it had pulled my feet inside. The sound of tile scraped and clunked, it was the original tile being set back into place. The slime let go from my head. There was darkness, and total silence.

The gel touched me at the feet. I couldn't move, I wasn't even shaking. I was paralyzed. The gel crept up my leg, underneath my pants. It kept crawling under my shirt and over my neck and chin. I managed to shut my mouth, it was all I could do anymore. But the gel just kept squelching forward. It reached my nose and rested on my nostril, waiting for a few seconds. Then it pushed forward, over my face and smothered me. I couldn't breathe, I started choking. I felt a warm sensation in my eyes, then my ears, then my nose and finally, my mouth.

It felt.

It felt good.

It kept pushing. It filled my mouth and pushed down my throat. I relaxed and let it through.

I don't know what I had been worrying about.

It was so warm, so smooth.

Everyone should be a part of this.

Everyone.

They'll need some help though.

I'll have to make something for them to drink.

Is there anything I can get you?

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