

A MALL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS
by Aardvark
linktr.ee/aardvarkia

Friday nights for Mason and Joey were reserved for fun. Careless, reckless, dangerous fun. Joyrides, or smoking at the reservoir, or getting Mason's stepsister to buy them booze so they could party with the college kids across town. There was nothing more fun than those nights.

This Friday night was not one of those nights.

This Friday night was starting off in the drab back room of the town's shopping mall, and the skinny man in a cheap suit who'd brought them there was not one of the frat-boys-in-training they wanted to be out carousing with. Nor were the clothes sitting on the table the type of clothes they'd wear out. Or be seen dead in.

"I'm not putting that on," Mason said, crossing his arms. "I don't know where it's been."

"It's been in the factory, then in the package, then on you," Mr. Sanderson said dryly. "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. Did you think when you were told you could come here instead of going to jail you were going to get to do whatever you wanted?"

"It feels like jail anyway," Joey mumbled, which wasn't entirely inaccurate. Between the overhead lighting, bare walls, and series of locked metal doors they had to navigate, the back rooms of the Valiance Mall had the same aesthetic appeal as Leavenworth.

"If you don't follow instructions I'll let the courts know and we can arrange other penalties instead," Sanderson needed. Mason and Joey both responded with withering looks and heavy sighs, then stepped forward and grabbed the sealed plastic bags. They tore them slowly - *extremely* slowly - keeping their eyes locked on their overseer as they wasted a full minute of Mr. Sanderson's time. For his part, Sanderson just stared back, unimpressed by the rebellious display. Finally, there was no more plastic to delay ripping, and the bags exploded apart.

Joey unfolded the first item and laid it across the table: a brilliant white button-up shirt, short-sleeved, with chest pockets and a pointed collar. It crinkled when he touched it - the cheap polyester fabric was so starched it felt more like cardboard. And it smelled funny, too, sort of like a new car. Industrial.

At the same time, Mason unrolled the other item they'd been given, black polyester pants with extra tall belt loops and pleats down the front. A uniform.

Joey started to put his arms through the sleeves of his shirt, but Sanderson stopped him. "No no. You can't put it over your t-shirt. That isn't the dress code."

"I'm not taking my clothes off in front of you, sicko," Joey shot back.

"I'll turn around, then," Sanderson smiled, and he did so, facing the wall as he continued, "Let me know when I can look."

Mason and Joey stared at each other, communicating silently. Mason balled up a fist and swung it at the air as if he was going to suckerpunch Sanderson, while Joey raised double middle fingers to the man's back. The clothes were stupid, their eyes said, but going to jail was way worse, and that option was still very much on the table. So, resigned to their embarrassment, they yanked off their trendy t-shirts, briefly exposing their lean torsos to the chill of the back room. Joey had a little definition from intermittent weightlifting, Mason was bony and hadn't ever filled out from his growth spurt, but neither could be described as anything other than skinny. They both shuddered as they pulled on their uniform shirts and buttoned them up the front, noticing that the creases they thought were from folding were actually sewn into the shirt to give it a permanently crisp look. Stays were sewn into the collars to prop up the points. The shirts were much too big, hanging on them like formless curtains, and when they buttoned their collars closed, their scrawny necks didn't touch.

Even though they'd shared locker rooms many times over their years of friendship, Mason and Joey still turned away from each other as they took off their jeans and pulled their black uniform pants on, hastened by the goosebumps on their bare legs. "It's cold in here," Mason grumbled.

"We're dressed."

Sanderson turned back around and chortled when he saw the boys. "Guess I should've gotten your sizes ahead of time. Oh well. Here, these will help." He rummaged through another plastic bag on the table and produced two black braided belts, both two inches wide with hefty silver buckles. Mason and Joey both put them on, then paused when Sanderson said, "And you have to tuck in your shirts."

Both boys groaned. "Why's it matter?" Joey whined.

"Because it's dress code, and you need to look crisp and professional at all times. If that's not a good enough reason for you, then let's say because it'll stop you from going to jail."

"You can't play that card *every* time," Mason said.

"Sure I can," Sanderson smiled. Joey wanted to knock his teeth out.

Mason and Joey reluctantly stuffed all the extra shirt fabric into their pants, then tightened their belts to the last notch to hold it all together. It was nice to know that the trousers weren't going to fall down now, even if the belts pulled them dorkily high on their waists.

"And these." Sanderson pulled two pairs of shoes out of the bag: chunky black Oxfords with a hi-gloss finish. They were a size too big, but the boys laced them up on their feet, over the ribbed black crew socks Sanderson also made them put on. The shoes made loud clomping noises as Mason and Joey moved around.

Sanderson started gathering up the clothes the boys brought with them, filling his arms with their jeans, t-shirts, and expensive sneakers. He held up Mason's pair of Nikes. "You steal these too?"

"No. I paid for them, so I want them back."

"Sure. But they're getting locked up." As the boys protested, Sanderson held up his hand. "I want to be sure you don't leave the mall overnight. So I'm putting you in full security uniforms, locking up your real clothes in the safe, and setting the door alarms. You can walk around the mall but all the stores are locked. You're guards on patrol for the night. In fact..." Sanderson balanced the collection of clothes in his hand and dumped the rest of the accessory bag on the table. A tangle of wires and fabric fell out. "Those are your radios and hats. Put them on."

It took Mason and Joey a moment to figure out how it worked. Chunky walkie talkies clipped on their belts over their right hips, wired to speaker microphones that clipped onto the front of their uniform shirts. Then, reluctantly, they put their hats on: bell crown caps, like what policemen wore. The tall hats stood three inches above their foreheads, like a screen broadcasting the insignia of the security company.

Sanderson chuckled as he looked at them. "Look at the little mall cops. Bet you didn't think this is what you'd be doing tonight, huh? Or what would happen when you stole all those video games? Now you gotta guard the game store."

Joey spoke through a jaw locked by fury. "Yeah right. Real guards have to go through training and stuff. You're just making us wear uniforms to embarrass us. You can't make us work."

"Sure I can! Once I lock up your clothes, I'm going home and going to bed. You'll be here overnight keeping the mall safe, just the two of you. Remember, you can't leave. Court's signed off on this. And if you did decide to walk outside into the pouring rain and set off the alarm, you wouldn't be able to get back in, so when I get back in the morning I'll know you left and I'll turn your ass in." Sanderson chuckled as he saw the two thieves' shoulders slump. "Yep, you're stuck. You're mall cops now. Good news is the Segways are charged, so you can ride around on those all you want and save yourself the walking while you're on duty. Do me a favor and read from that paper there, so you know what's expected of you."

Joey and Mason picked it up and started to read before Sanderson clarified, "Read it out loud."

Joey glared. "Security officers are expected to be observant and provide a visible deterrence to crime and disruptions in the Valiance Mall. Officers assist guests, enforce rules and regulations, and ensure access control. The security officer's mission is to maintain a safe, secure and professional environment by interacting with the public, vendors, client's staff & other event support staff." He turned to Mason. "You read, dick."

Mason snatched the paper away, speaking haltingly as he read. "The security officer must be able to stand and walk for several hours at a time. Officers must possess superior interpersonal skills and be willing and able to speak confidently and professionally with people or groups of people while representing the company and the client. Officers must be able to operate common communications equipment such as 2-way radios and cell phones. Officers must have exceptional written and oral communications, organizational and time management skills and be able to work alone or with groups of people for long periods of time both inside and outside."

"Sounds fun, huh?" Sanderson teased. "But don't worry, you shouldn't have to talk to customers, or anyone except each other...unless you decide to do this full-time."

Mason and Joey rolled their eyes in unison.

"We'll check all the tapes in the morning to be sure you went on your hourly patrols. If you damage anything, or you sleep through the night, I'll know and I'll tell the judge. Oh, and one more thing," Sanderson stretched out his free hand, tucking the bundle of clothing under his arm. "Give me your cell phones."

"You can't do that. That's not safe, we need a phone if we need help," Joey pointed out.

"I completely agree, which is why there's one there..." Sanderson said, jerking his head to the phone mounted on the wall by the door, "and one in each room back here, along with in each of the hallways, plus your radios."

Thoroughly defeated, Mason and Joey angrily slapped their beloved iPhones into Sanderson's hand. They followed him to the office where he dumped everything in the safe. A lump formed in Joey's throat as he heard the safe click shut. "You kids and your phones," Sanderson said, sensing their despair. "You'll be fine without them for one night. Maybe you'll learn to live without them, even."

"What happens if we get tired?"

"Make some coffee. There's vending machines with other caffeinated stuff too. I told you to bring cash for tonight, remember?"

"Yeah. I did," Mason said. "I just don't want to spend it."

"Be grateful you can. You can't just walk over to a vending machine and buy a Red Bull in-

"-in jail, I know, I know, Jesus Christ," Mason said, cutting Sanderson off. "I get it."

"I'm not sure you do," Mr. Sanderson said, "but you will. Alright, my little mall cops, I'm outta here. I'm sure you'll have a lot of fun tonight."

Joey opened his mouth to snark back to the creep, but his world went dark as his security guard cap fell down over his eyes. He wrenched it off angrily to see Mr. Sanderson and, more annoyingly, Mason laughing at him.

“Put it back on, kid, it’s part of your uniform,” Mr. Sanderson ordered with an amused smirk. Joey grit his teeth as he put the cap on his head, this time shifting it further back to sit on his crown. It wobbled as he walked down the hall behind Mason and Sanderson, toward an emergency exit that Sanderson opened with a ring of keys. Rain was pelting down outside, but a canopy prevented the man from getting wet.

Mr. Sanderson extended his hand to Mason, who looked at it like it was a dead fish. But when Sanderson kept staring at him with those cold, arrogant eyes, Mason reluctantly shook the man’s hand.

“No, no, come on, you’re a security guard now, you’re supposed to be tough. Give me a proper man’s handshake.” Sanderson pulled his hand away and made Mason shake it again. “Much better. Now say, ‘I am proud to be a mall security guard.’”

“You gotta be kidding.”

Sanderson and Mason’s hands were both red from how hard they were squeezing each other, but the handshake didn’t break. “Say it,” Sanderson said.

“I am proud to be a mall security guard,” Mason grumbled.

“Well done, officer,” Sanderson said, patting the epaulet on Mason’s shoulder before turning to Joey. “Now you.”

“I don’t have to shake your fucking hand,” Joey sneered. “The judge told us to be here and to work, not be your slaves. You already made me dress up like I’m an action figure or something. You gonna tell the court that we didn’t do what we were supposed to do because I wouldn’t shake your stupid hand?”

Mr. Sanderson didn’t react. He didn’t even flinch. “That’s exactly what I’ll tell them,” he responded simply, the flatness of his voice making the hair on Joey’s neck stand up.

“FINE!” Joey slapped his hand into Sanderson’s with comical aggression, trying to squeeze the life out of it. “I’m *super* proud to be a mall security guard!” he said cloyingly.

Sanderson laughed. “See? That was easy. Until tomorrow, fellas.” He shut the door and a few seconds later, Mason and Joey heard the lock click - and noticed the “ALARMED” light flicker on. They both flipped off the door and hoped Sanderson felt their disdain on the other side.

But the middle fingers were an empty show, and they knew it. The truth was that they were alone. And they were stuck.

“This is the dumbest fucking thing,” Mason swore, stomping back to the break room. He and Joey immediately wrenched off their hats and untucked their shirts. “While he was talking I was thinking we could just fall asleep in here and leave in the morning, and then he was like, ‘oh I’ll check the security footage hurrduurr.’ Fuckin’ retard.”

“Maybe jail would’ve been better,” Joey joked and Mason laughed. For all their posturing, they knew this was the far superior option. Better than paying a fine, even, because they didn’t have any money. Guys with money probably weren’t stealing a thousand dollars worth of games from GameStop.

They tried to waste time by talking. They covered school, teachers, girls, parents, games. After a long silence, Mason bent backwards and looked at the wall clock.

“We’ve been here forty minutes,” he groaned. “God, this is going to be the slowest night ever.”

“Literally, can we call someone and ask them to smash out a window so we can call the cops and leave?”

This seemed like a viable idea, until they realized they only knew a couple people who would be willing to commit an actual crime for them, and they didn’t have those people’s phone numbers committed to memory. Plus, Mason pointed out, the mall phones probably had call records, and if someone put two and two together they’d be hauled back to court.

The boys forced conversation for another fifteen minutes as it dawned on both of them that they’d never had to talk for this long. There was always another task to distract them: a movie, a game, a meal. Now, in this boring-ass room, there wasn’t even anything to prompt new topics. It was like being on a bad date.

They were arguing the merits of their favorite colors when Mason finally stood up. “I gotta get a change of scenery, man. I’ll take a walk around. Might as well since we have to anyway.”

“Saves me from having to do it.”

“You’re gonna make me walk around this dark-ass mall alone?”

“You’re gonna leave me in this dark-ass *room* alone?” Joey rocked his chair backward and looked at Mason standing by the door. “That uniform looks so dumb on you.”

“Right back at you, dick.” Mason opened the door and stepped into the hall. “These dumb shoes. So fucking noisy. I wonder how much walking counts as a patrol. Like, can I just walk

around this floor a little bit? Or do we have to walk around all three floors...or can I do one and you do another..."

"Just GO, man."

"Yeah, you're right. Shit doesn't matter as long as we're seen on camera, right? I'll just do a loop I guess. See ya."

Joey listened to Mason's footsteps clomp away. He heard the door that separated the back security area from the main mall swing open with a creak, then softly click shut. It was then that he realized how bored he was going to be. There was literally nothing to do, and now no one to talk to either. But he wasn't going to go chasing after Mason, so he stood up and ambled around the small room, looking for anything to occupy his thoughts like a drug addict searching for a fix.

Next to the microwave - which, Joey noticed, really needed cleaning - was a brochure detailing the Christmas offerings of the mall. It was something that had words printed on it, and that was good enough for Joey. He didn't care that Christmas was months prior. He was going to read about how to meet Santa and where to park if you just wanted curbside pickup for your pre-ordered gifts, and he was going to pretend to find it fascinating.

The tri-fold pamphlet took about two minutes to read. Joey read it front-to-back three times, then looked around the room again. The next thing he found was a three-ring binder which, to his crushing disappointment, was a yellowed instruction manual for the mall's security guards. He would not be reading that, no matter how bored he got.

Joey left the room and went to the next one down the hall, where he was greeted by a wall of black-and-white TVs displaying security footage from around the mall. Everything was so still that Joey wondered if the televisions were frozen, but then a movement in the lower left corner got his attention, and he turned to see Mason walk by the camera. "Look at that loser," Joey chuckled to himself, trying to spot Mason on the other monitors. Every now and then he'd see a stuttering feed display his friend for a few moments, glitching his way across the screen. Mason was probably bored out of his mind too. It sucked they couldn't actually go into the stores.

And finally, Joey found a game he could play: in the upper right corner of the bank of screens was a feed of the mall's entrance, and cars would regularly drive by. Joey would lean in closely and try to guess the make and color of the car. Sometimes he could make out a hood ornament, other times he had to go off of the shape. It kept him engaged until he finally heard the hallway door swing open and click shut, heralding the return of his buddy.

"I'm in here," Joey said, sticking his arm out in the hall and waving. "Watching security camera stuff."

"Comin'." *Clomp clomp clomp clomp clomp.* "These stupid shoes..."

Joey almost jumped when his friend walked in the room. It took him a moment to recognize Jason. Something was different about him, but Joey couldn't put his finger on what. It was just...something in general. The way he carried himself, maybe. Joey had never seen Jason put his hands on his hips before, which is how he was standing as he looked at the screens. That was how Joey noticed Jason's shirt was tucked in.

"Look at you, Mr. Crisp and Professional," Joey teased, echoing Sanderson's words from earlier.

"Huh?" Jason looked down at his precisely tucked shirt. "Oh. Yeah, it snagged on a door handle, so I tucked it in." His voice was a little lower, too - not quieter, just deeper.

"Need some water, bro? You sound hoarse."

"Maybe. Actually, I'm gonna make some coffee. Gotta wake my ass up." Jason walked out of the monitor room and back into the break room.

Joey followed. "I thought you hated coffee."

"Have we ever met? It's just about all I drink," Jason said, but Joey remembered all the times Jason chugged a Bang in class at 7 in the morning because he didn't like coffee. Or all the times they'd gone to Starbucks and Jason got a hot chocolate because he didn't like coffee. Or all the times Jason turned down Joey's uncle's homemade coffee ice cream because he didn't like coffee. Jason *really* didn't like coffee. And yet, there he was, brewing up a pot of bitter brew, which he poured into a styrofoam cup and drank black. "Want some?"

"No. What's with you?"

Jason lowered his cup and stared at Joey. "Uh...nothing?"

"You seem weird. There's something...I don't know. There's something different about you."

Jason shrugged. "I dunno what to tell you, dude. Is this some kind of game to make you less bored? You trying to start something?" He took another long sip of coffee and shut his eyes. "Damn, that's some good shit."

"You're like an inch taller or something. I can't figure it out."

"You sound like a crackhead. Chill." Jason crushed the rest of his coffee and poured a second cup. "In case you were wondering, it's boring out there too. I was hoping at least for some spooky noises or something, but nope. Nothin'. Well, actually, I did hear a car peel out one time. I was hoping it was gonna smash through the side of the mall like the Kool-Aid man in Family Guy."

Joey chuckled at the joke, but was drowned out by Jason's low, rumbling laugh, which was a far more robust sound than Joey was used to him making. That was all Joey could think about as Jason recounted the rest of his route: Jason's weird, deep laugh. It sounded like one of their teachers. He was completely lost in thought when he heard Jason say, "Did you see anything like that?"

Joey blinked. He had no idea what Jason was asking about. "See anything like...what? Sorry..."

"Dude, are you even listening to me?"

"Sorry, I'm just distracted."

"By what? There's nothing to do here, that's what we've been talking about!" Jason unleashed his manly laugh again. It made Joey's stomach flip. "The scanner, that's what I was asking about. There's checkpoints all over the mall with barcodes that you scan to show that you were there, but I didn't have a scanner. I was just wondering if you saw one for when I go out there again."

Joey felt his irritation rising. "Why do you care about doing this shit correctly? That fucking weirdo didn't tell us about using barcodes or scanners or anything so why should we worry about it?"

Jason's eyebrows knit together. His expression turned defensive. "Because I'm trying to not die of boredom, so let me pretend I'm playing laser tag, okay? I can go around and try to find all the checkpoints. It's like a fucking treasure hunt and it's more interesting than sitting back here scratching my nuts for an hour. Calm down, what's your fucking problem?"

"Sorry, sorry." Joey raised his hands and leaned back. "I just thought you were taking this seriously for a second and it pissed me off."

"Nah, this shit is dumb, dude," Jason agreed. "I mean, it is serious, in a way, because it's keeping us from going to jail. But the actual work is pointless. And clearly, it doesn't matter much, if they're putting this whole mall in the hands of two high school guys who can't even leave of their own volition."

"Of their own what?"

"Volition."

Joey chortled. "The fuck does that mean?"

"We can't leave willingly. Voluntarily."

“Oh.” Now Joey just felt dumb. Not only because he didn’t know that word’s meaning, but because he could tell something was up and he simply couldn’t figure out what it was. This night had him fucked up. Unsettled. Wearing the uncomfortable uniform, sitting in a strange room, talking to his best friend who he didn’t know as well as he thought. “I wanna go home,” he grumbled.

“Me too. What I wouldn’t give to be in my recliner with my feet up...” Jason sighed. Joey had been to his buddy’s house a million times and never noticed a recliner. But they were both on edge already, and that wasn’t a fight worth picking. “Watching some football, drinking whiskey,” Jason continued. “That’d be nice.”

“I’d be in bed playing games,” Joey said.

“What kind of games?”

Joey humored him. “Video games, dude. C’mon now. Xbox, Playstation, Nintendo...”

“Oh, right, those.” Jason took a long swig of coffee and looked at the ceiling. “I’ve never been into those.”

“You’re...” Joey had a million things he wanted to say. They were literally stuck in this situation because of video games, specifically because Jason was a shitty thief who got them caught, and now here he was saying he didn’t even like video games to begin with. It kind of made sense, in one way, because Joey couldn’t recall Jason ever actually playing. He always sat next to Joey and watched - sometimes even with a controller in his hand - but never joined in. But Joey couldn’t piece together why Jason would try to steal a thousand dollars worth of games if he didn’t even like them. There’d never been plans to resell them. They were stealing them to play them. “...really?” Joey finally squeaked out.

“Yeah, you know me. I like football, muscle cars, things like that. Guy stuff.”

Joey felt like he didn’t know Jason at all, actually. Everything he was hearing felt new to him, but he could recall pockets of memories that backed up what Jason was saying. He’d just never connected the dots.

There was a clunking noise and Jason leaned forward, looking for the source of it. “Oh, it’s the scanner,” he said, holding up a small black cylinder. “For those checkpoints.”

“Where’d that come from?”

“It was clipped on my belt, actually. Sanderson must’ve put it there. Do you have one?” Jason asked. Joey looked down and shook his head. “Pew pew,” Jason chuckled, flicking the laser onto Joey’s chest. “Gotcha.”

“Please actually kill me,” Joey said. “It’d get me out of here.”

Jason stood up, shining the scanner’s laser on the wall. “I think I’ll take this baby for a spin,” he said, twirling the item like he was a gunslinging cowboy. “Go find me some checkpoints.” He grabbed his security cap and jammed it on his head, pushing his nest of hair down around his ears.

“Want me to come?” Joey offered, even though he didn’t want to.

“You don’t have a scanner! You don’t need to, it’s fine. You’d just be bored. Anyway, I’ll be back in a few. I won’t do a full facility tour this time.”

Joey felt a chill when he heard Jason call it a ‘facility tour.’ That sounded like an official phrase. And as he watched Jason tuck his shirt tighter and adjust his security cap, he thought Jason looked a little too official as well. But when Jason stopped at the door, spun around and flashed the laser beam on Joey’s chest again, with another high-pitched “pew pew,” Joey relaxed a bit. Jason wasn’t actually taking it seriously.

As Joey listened to Jason’s steps thud loudly down the hall, he thought back to their conversation. Jason was behaving oddly, there was no denying it. The coffee was one thing, but also his posture - so straight - and an occasional bluntness breaking through. Jason and Joey were supposed to be a united front during this stupid punishment, but now it felt like Jason wasn’t fully seeing it for the bullshit it was. Even though he’d been joking about it, Jason seemed to genuinely want to go on a - what had he called it? - a ‘facility tour.’ Where had he picked that term up, anyway?

Joey only wanted to see eye-to-eye with his buddy. Literally, in fact. He hadn’t noticed until a few minutes prior that Jason was taller than he was, which also gnawed at him. It was only by an inch or two, but still, it mattered. Joey didn’t like to lose. It was already bad enough that Jason was getting into working out. Joey never thought his friend would be the type to have tubs of protein powder and pre-cooked chicken breast in his kitchen, but Jason was pretty dedicated to it nowadays. He was too lazy to have ever played sports in school - despite having some natural athletic talent - but with the weightlifting, he was getting pretty strong.

It’d be hilarious to see Jason all jacked, Joey thought, but he knew that would never happen. Jason never saw his obsessions through long-term.

Clomp clomp clomp clomp. Joey perked up at the sound of Jason’s thunderous footsteps coming back down the hall. Sounded like he had a pair of cinderblocks strapped to his feet. “Those fuckin’ shoes, huh?” Joey said, as Jay walked into the room.

“Shoes?” Jay looked at his shiny Oxfords.

“They’re noisy.”

“Oh. I guess. I walk heavy too,” Jay said, his voice deep and resonant. Joey had never heard him sound like that. Like a man. “God, I need more coffee.” He looked tired, Joey noticed. Kind of...worn. Yet there was a strength to the features. Was his jaw wider? No, that’d be crazy...

“Where’d you get those patches?” Joey asked, noticing Jay’s sleeves.

Jay swallowed down a gulp of hot coffee. “Hm?”

“Your sleeves. They have the mall security patches on them.”

“Oh.” Jay looked casually at his short sleeves, which bore bright blue iron-on patches that depicted the mall’s logo, along with the same insignia that was on his bell cap. “I didn’t notice.”

“I don’t have those,” Joey pointed out, raising his arms to show his plain sleeves.

“Different factories, probably,” Jay shrugged. The motion drew Joey’s eyes to Jay’s collar, where there were gold stars pinned to each point. Had those been there even a second ago?

“Maybe that’s why your shirt fits better than mine,” Joey griped.

Jay’s uniform shirt was still too big on him, but only by a size. His workout regimen was paying off nicely - he had square shoulders, veiny forearms, and chest definition that showed through his shirt. Even his neck looked to have gained a couple inches, which was why he reached up and unbuttoned his collar, the points springing apart to reveal a bulging Adam’s apple. “Ahh, that’s better. I don’t know why I buttoned that. I always leave my collars open.” He took his cap off and ran his fingers through his short, choppy hair.

“How’s your working out going?” Joey asked.

Jay’s eyes lit up. He was suddenly more spirited than he’d been all day - maybe than he’d ever been. “Good, dude! Thanks for asking! I actually just upgraded my gym membership so I could go to all of the locations in town. There’s one right by here, it’s really nice. I’m getting a lot stronger. It’s really more about the nutrition than anything else - that’s the hard part for me - but I’m getting better with that. I’ve outgrown some of my clothes, isn’t that crazy?”

Joey tried to interject a non-committal “yeah, crazy,” but Jay kept talking, about his favorite lifts and his new gym buddies and all the things he was learning. Before this moment, Joey had never heard about any of these supposed gym friends, or seen evidence of Jay meal prepping, but according to Jay he no longer ate fast food and he brought all his meals from home, cooked and weighed ahead of time.

Finally, the monologue stopped for Jay to take a breath and a sip of his precious coffee, and Joey was able to speak. "I'm not gonna make fun of you for being like a jock, because you look like you could beat the shit out of me," he said, "Just don't get so big you look gross."

Jay's deep, masculine chuckle reverberated through the room. "I don't think I'll ever be able to get that big. I'm naturally skinny. I just want to be able to carry my groceries up to my apartment in one load without getting tired."

Joey wondered what apartment Jay was talking about, but figured maybe he was planning ahead for college. He eyed Jay analytically as his friend sipped his coffee, biceps making small peaks each time he raised the cup to his lips. Finally, Jay noticed the stare. "What?"

"You just seem different today. I can't figure it out."

Jay rolled his eyes. "Not this again. I dunno what to tell you. I don't think there's anything different about me." He looked down at himself and straightened the mic hooked to his shirt. "Maybe it's the uniform. Seeing you in one is throwing me off too, because you actually look good for once."

"Shut up, dickhead," Joey laughed. "I don't feel like I look good, I feel stupid."

"No, I mean, it's stupid we have to wear them, but they don't look bad," Jay said, checking the points of his collar to make sure they were standing up around his neck. "If I had my phone I'd send a picture to my aunt. She always says the best jobs are the ones that make you wear a uniform. I thought she meant, you know, like a doctor or a soldier, but maybe she meant-"

"-yeah, she definitely meant being a fucking mall cop," Joey interrupted with a grin.

"Maybe she did!" Jay said with an agreeable smile. "Keeping people safe is important!"

"Is that what we're doing? Or are we rolling up on our Segway to yell at a kid for sticking his gum on a bench?"

Jay snapped his fingers. "The Segways! I wanted to try riding one."

"Stop fucking with me, man, this is so weird."

"What? I'm serious. When else am I gonna get to ride a Segway? And it isn't one of those dumb two-wheeler ones, it's the Patroller model with three wheels. It looks like the Batmobile." Jay trailed off when he saw Joey's judgmental glare. "Don't want to ride it? Suit yourself, I'll go alone." He flipped the uniform cap onto his head and tossed out his coffee cup. "Should make this next facility tour a lot easier. I'm gonna try to scan every single checkpoint this time, I think I missed a few last time..."

He ambled out of the room, leaving a dumbfounded Joey behind. "You're not *actually* a mall cop, Jay," Joey muttered to himself. He felt slightly betrayed by his friend no longer mocking the whole process. Tucking in his shirt, wearing his hat, doing the hourly patrols, *riding the fucking Segway-*

The Segway! Joey realized he could use the security cameras to watch his dork-ass friend ride it around. Apparently Jay knew enough about Segways that he knew the names of the models. "It's the Patroller model, it's a Batmobile," Joey mocked aloud. "Dumbass."

He walked into the room full of monitors and distracted himself with the car-identifying game for several minutes. "Ooh, a Tesla," he spotted. After several minutes, Joey began to wonder where Jay was. Maybe he couldn't get the Patroller to turn on, or he didn't know how to start it. It was pretty crazy that Sanderson was letting a couple of proven delinquents run wild inside the mall with machinery that cost thousands of dollars. Then again, they couldn't pick up much speed-

Joey's head snapped to the left when he saw a flicker of movement on one of the monitors. "There you are," he whispered, leaning forward. Jay on a fucking Segway, looking ridiculous. It rolled out of frame before Joey had much time to analyze it, and then his viewing became like a game of whack-a-mole, as he watched all the monitors waiting to see where Jay would pop up next. Jay was right, the Segway had three wheels - it reminded Joey of a jetski fused with a police bike, with the rider standing upright on the back and controlling it using the big handles. The white exterior shell had the word "SECURITY" emblazoned across both sides, big enough for Joey to be able to read on the security monitors, and it looked like it had the mall logo and security insignia on the front.

What was most surprising was how Jay was driving the thing. Joey'd assumed Jay would be acting like he was in *Fast & Furious*, zooming all over the place, making donuts. But Jay just went in a slow, straight line, from one area to the next, his head swiveling back and forth as he surveyed his surroundings. Every now and then he would stop the vehicle and hop off, presumably to scan one of those checkpoints he wouldn't shut up about. As Joey watched his friend check all the main doors of the mall, pushing against them to ensure they were locked, he said out loud to the screens: "You aren't a real mall cop, dumbass!" Jay was playing it cool when they were together, but he was busted now: he was taking it seriously, and Joey couldn't believe it. Punkass Jay, wearing a uniform with little stars pinned to the collar, riding around on a Segway, acting like he was a goddamn mall cop. If only the other guys from school could see him now.

He watched Jay step back onto the Patroller and check the tuck of his shirt and angle of his hat. "Loser," Joey spat angrily, having seen enough. He got up and stormed back to the break room, kicking his feet up on the table and waiting for Jay to walk back in so he could lay into him.

But after ten minutes, Jay still wasn't back. Granted, he didn't move nearly as quickly as he used to, because he'd broken his promise and gotten much bigger. Another betrayal. Joey and

Jay barely hung out anymore because that motherfucker was always in the gym with his stupid lifting bros, eating dry chicken and drinking gross protein shakes.

The wait was long enough that Joey's bladder began asking for relief. The teen got up with a sigh and walked to the door. Where was the bathroom in this place? He hadn't seen one in this hallway. He pawed blindly on the hallway walls for a lightswitch, but felt none, and since he couldn't use his phone to see, he made it all the way to the end of the corridor and opened up the metal door that led into the mall. Most of the light was courtesy of the moon through the skylight, which gave the silent atrium an eerie purple glow.

Joey shuffled past stores, his oversized shoes making it hard to walk practically. He'd just spotted the sign pointing toward the restrooms when-

"STOP RIGHT THERE!"

Joey nearly jumped out of his skin. The bellowing voice made his ears ring. He clutched his heart and whirled around to see the outline of Jay zooming up on his Patroller. "You're in trouble now, kid," a deep voice snarled from the darkness.

Joey felt his throat knot up, making his words barely audible, but he squeaked out, "D-d-dude, it's me! Joey! I-it's Joey!"

The Patroller came to a stop a yard away. "Joey? Who's...oh! Joey!" Ray hopped off his vehicle and walked into view, and Joey's eyes widened. He hadn't noticed how big Ray was until now. Ray was a full head taller than Joey, for one. And he was built. Thick, bulging muscles rippled across his tensed frame. His square jaw was locked, ready for a fight. And his voice was unnaturally deep, almost preposterous to listen to. Like a growl. "My mistake, kid. I forgot you were here. Why are you out walking around? You should've radioed and let me know." He put his hands on his hips and looked down at Joey sternly.

"Sorry, I didn't think I needed permission from my friend to take a fucking leak," Joey said furiously. "I was looking for the bathroom, but don't worry, I don't need it anymore cause I think I pissed myself just now."

"You...oh, that's a joke!" Ray's deep, dull laugh echoed through the mall. He pushed his hips forward and leaned back, laughing heartily. The shirt button over his chest pulled open and exposed two solid blocks of muscle where there had once been nothing but a flat board. "I can show you where the john is if you still need to go, bud."

"How do YOU know where it is?"

"Cause I check all of them, make sure no one's hiding in there or anything. C'mon."

“You know you don’t actually work here, right?” Joey muttered, slouching behind Ray’s confident, long strides, which provided a view of his muscular butt straining the back of his uniform pants. Joey felt like he remembered Ray’s clothes being too big, like how his own were, but Ray usually had the opposite problem - most things were too small on him, especially in the chest and shoulders.

“I could, though. I’m good at it.” They walked into the bathroom and the automatic lights came on, bathing them in more light than they’d had all evening.

Ray stood at a urinal and took a hearty piss, not seeing Joey staring at him in shock from the side. Joey’s mind was racing. This was wrong...something was very, very wrong...Ray wasn’t supposed to look like this, he knew. He didn’t remember what Ray actually needed to look like, but it wasn’t this. His friend wasn’t supposed to be built like an amateur bodybuilder with thick veiny arms that threatened to tear his shirt sleeves if he moved them wrong. Not only did the open buttons on his shirt show off his shockingly thick chest, but the muscles were sporting little sprouts of hair, just like Ray’s square, bulging jaw was.

Ray strutted to the sinks, still zipping himself back up, re-tucking his shirt and tightening his belt around his cobbled waist. He swept off his hat to reveal his treasured hair was now shorn into a barely-there flat top, the half-inch bristles standing straight up to form a surface as level as a table. Joey caught sight of it and froze.

“What happened to your hair?”

“Hm?”

“Your hair. It used to be long.”

Ray made a face. “I hate long hair on men,” he said, before his eyes fell on Joey’s shaggy curls. “No offense.”

“But a flat top, dude?”

“Of course a flat top. It’s perfect for me.” Ray clenched his jaw at the mirror, the tendons around his neck hardening and releasing. Joey remembered Ray having a pointy, elfin chin, but now Ray had a broad box with a dimple in it, the kind of chin that went with a flat top. It made his whole face look different. In fact, his whole head just seemed *bigger*. Stronger. Joey felt stupid for thinking it, but he couldn’t convince himself otherwise.

“It makes you look like you’re on steroids,” Joey said, delivering it like a joke even though it wasn’t.

"I think it's the muscles that make me look like I'm on steroids," Ray said cockily. On the left side of his chest was a gold shield, pinned above the breast pocket. Ray checked it in the mirror and made sure it was straight. "But I'm not doing anything crazy. Just cruising test right now."

Joey didn't know what that meant, but he didn't like the sound of it. He wondered if it had anything to do with Ray's chest hair. Hadn't it just been bristles a second ago? Now it was long and curly, shading Ray's collarbone and the center of his square pecs. Ray smoothed it down as he admired his reflection, then gave his chest a not-so-subtle grope. "You good, kid?"

"Don't call me a kid, asshole. We're the same age."

"You're right. Just a habit." Ray's low chuckle once again gave Joey the creeps. His entire voice, really. It was too deep, like a bad guy in a cartoon.

Joey followed Ray out of the bathroom, noticing his friend's back muscles squirming under his shirt. "Why did you get so buff, man, it's freaky," Joey said.

"Because I'm a man, and all men should be bodybuilders," Ray said firmly. "I want to be strong and big and manly, and you should too."

"But you didn't use to be like that," Joey stammered, annoyed with himself at how meek he became around Ray. He didn't feel like Ray's equal anymore. And why was that? Because Ray had bigger muscles and some chest hair? That was stupid. And yet, Joey couldn't overcome it.

"Yeah, I used to be a little punk asshole, but I've got my head on straight now," Ray said, hopping back on his Patroller. "You coming?"

"No," Joey said, bewildered. The sight of Ray, muscular and uniformed, standing atop the vehicle, shook him to his core. "I'm not gonna do work for that Sanderson dick."

"Lazy," Ray said. "But whatever." The Patroller powered to life, and he rolled past Joey into the darkness without another word.

Joey didn't know whether to be sad or mad. He felt abandoned by Ray, but it was also so ridiculous to see Ray pretending to be a fucking security guard that it almost made him laugh. He wanted to shout "Loser!" into the darkness, but if Ray came back to beat his ass, it would not be a fair fight. So he trudged angrily back to the break room, catching the low hum of the Patroller echoing through the empty mall before he slammed the door to block it out. He finally said it aloud as he stormed back to the break room: "Loser! Dick!"

Curiosity got the best of him, and he stuck his head into the monitor room to look at Ray scooting around the mall. But after a few glimpses, he didn't want to watch anymore. Ray just looked huge. Even the small, blurry monitors couldn't hide his size. The Patroller looked kind of silly with such a big man piloting it - like an adult riding a child's tricycle.

Joey didn't know what happened to Ray. They had so much in common when they first met. He never imagined Ray to be the type to get obsessed with bodybuilding, but Ray had allowed it to completely consume him. He made himself so huge that he tapped out his body's potential, then he started on steroids - another thing that shocked Joey - and grew so enormous Joey barely recognized him anymore. And when he was tanned for those weird competitions he did, Joey *really* couldn't recognize him. Ray, painted an unnatural copper, body shaved, dick stuffed into a little pouch, flexing and posing and dwarfing all the other men onstage. It wasn't the guy Joey knew. Ray was a new man. A stranger.

Joey bought a Red Bull and chugged half of it before he remembered he didn't like Red Bull, but it provided a blast of adrenaline that fueled his anger toward Ray. That stupid fucking meathead, taking himself so seriously in his gay uniform. Who the fuck did he think he was. The real Ray was fun, adventurous, wild, and he'd given all that up to...do what, exactly? Live in the gym and act like a goddamn Boy Scout?

"Blech," Joey said, unable to endure any more Red Bull. He folded his arms on the table and rested his head on them, unsure of what else to do except sleep. Before the surge of caffeine he'd consumed could hit him, he dozed off.

A loud metallic bang woke him, and Joey's head jolted up. With his eyes still navigating through the blurry purgatory of semi-consciousness, the enormous shape he saw from behind didn't register as human to him. The thing was rummaging through a locker, like a bear attacking a campsite.

It was only when Joey's vision brightened that he could see the beast was wearing a uniform, and that there was a human hand pressed against the lockers for support. It was the biggest human hand Joey had ever seen, as broad and thick as an oven mitt, but it was a human hand nonetheless.

Dread knotted in his stomach. It couldn't be him, could it...maybe there was another guard here...just please don't be...

"...Roy?"

The locker slammed shut and Roy turned around. "So you *are* awake," he rumbled.

Joey stared in utter horror. He knew Roy, he'd known Roy for years, but it was like he was seeing him for the first time. It was a monster that stood before him, not a man. It couldn't be Roy - there was too much muscle. Bestial, terrifying muscle that seemed to fill the entire room. Joey's brain didn't know how to process the man's size. What his eyes first saw as a grown man's thick, muscular leg was Roy's *arm*, which meant Roy's actual legs were off-the-charts massive, making the heavy polyester pants he wore look like a ballet dancer's tights. His shirt fared even worse, offering the same coverage as a Kleenex would wrapped around a brick. The

bottom three buttons were holding on for dear life over his abs, leaving the rest of the shirt to fall open and expose his gargantuan chest. Parked above his broad rib cage were a pair of square pecs so dense it was as if two or three extra sets were grafted onto them. They were each the size of Roy's head, bursting proudly out of his uniform shirt.

But even ignoring the muscle - which Joey couldn't, but he was trying - Roy was positively freaky. His skin was like a rhino's hide, leathery and worn, covered head to toe in angry veins. Veins bulging from his temples, veins slashing across his mighty pecs, and the biggest veins of all across his biceps - those ones looked like goddamn garden hoses. His extreme vascularity brought a permanent flush to his skin, but the ruddiness was offset by body hair as coarse and colorless as steel wool. Thick mats of hair prickled out of Roy's immense forearms, but they were nothing compared to his beautiful pelt of chest hair, so silver it made his pecs look metallic. Like he was the Terminator. His silver flat top drove home the killer machine look.

"What're you starin' at, kid?"

Joey's eyes flicked to Roy's face when Roy asked the question. His jaw was too square, like an action figure's unrealistic dimensions, with a chin so powerful it was almost a parody of masculinity. Sharp cheekbones set his eyes deep in his skull, beneath a bushy dark brow. The skin of his face was weathered, lightly wrinkled as a 50-year-old man's was supposed to be. Joey struggled to recall why he knew a middle-aged man so well, because there was no denying that Roy was several decades older even if Joey didn't remember him that way.

"Y-you...your..." Joey choked and wheezed, his mouth hanging open at the colossus. "Your uniform doesn't fit."

"It fits how I want it to. I'd say yours fits worse." Roy yanked a chair out from the table and crashed his bulk into it. There was a plastic container on the table, and he popped the lid off to expose a pile of grilled chicken and jasmine rice, which he began shoveling into his mouth with the plastic cutlery he'd retrieved from his locker.

"Where'd you get food?"

Roy didn't look at Joey. He was too busy eating. He shrugged, which made his rainbow-shaped traps bulge up to his ears and out of his open collar. "Brought it from home, of course. You gotta for overnights." Joey noticed a tear in Roy's short sleeve right over his bicep, which was the size of a cantaloupe.

"But where did you store it, they took all our stuff away-" Joey's mind was swimming. Hadn't he walked in with Roy? And Roy didn't have food then...

"They took *your* stuff away. I have a locker 'cause I work here, kid."

Joey's confusion tripled. He sat quietly, absorbing what Roy had just said. As Roy ate an entire fucking chicken like it was a light snack, Joey was trying to reconcile the man before him with the boy he thought he knew. Bits and pieces went together, but nothing made sense. "You don't work here," he said as boldly as he could, though he hesitated when he saw Roy's body tense up. "You just think you do. You've been, like, brainwashed somehow...that Sanderson guy, I think he did something to you. He changed you. It doesn't make sense but-

"Derek wouldn't do shit to me," Roy growled. "And I fucking work here. I've worked here for years."

"Dude, seriously, that's impossible, you're just a kid-

"Shut the fuck up!" Roy barked, and Joey did so. In the silence, Roy stood up and threw out his disposable dishes. He turned back around and put his hands on his hips, flaring his lats and puffing his chest. "Does this look like a kid to you?"

"N-no-

"That's fucking right, because I'm not a kid. I don't wanna be a kid. I'm a grown fucking man."

"But you're not!" Joey tried to reason. "That guy is just making you think you are! We're supposed to be in here because we stole games and now you-

"I've never stolen anything in my life," Roy shouted, thrusting a finger as thick as a hot dog at Joey. "I'm a good man. I work hard. I've spent my whole life protecting people from shitheads like you. You think you know me, kid, you don't know a single fucking thing about me. My name is Roy McCollum. I am 54 years old. I'm a combat veteran who served my country. I'm a masters division bodybuilder. I work as a bouncer and a security guard and I love it. I'm proud to be a mall security guard. There's nothing else I'd rather do." Every muscle in Roy's body seemed to flex in agreement.

"That can't be right, that can't be right," Joey mumbled, half to himself. "No, something's happening, you're...you...mustache?"

In the five seconds since Roy stopped talking, he'd grown an epic horseshoe mustache that put Hulk Hogan to shame.

"Jealous?" Roy smirked. "Maybe you'll grow one someday."

"Wh-what *happened* to you, man?"

"Nothing happened to me. I worked out, took a nap, got my dinner together, and came to work. The only surprise is I have to babysit some little asshole young enough to be my grandkid." Roy

arched one of his bushy eyebrows. "I'm sure you're just not used to being around a man like me."

Joey shook his head. "No, I'm just trying to remember...you were young, we came in together, and you just...*transformed*, and now I'm having trouble thinking back to how you used to be--"

"Good," Roy snarled, pushing his hips against the table. His skin was flushed, his breathing ragged. "Good. Forget all of that. I don't want to be a kid. I want to be a man. Forget anyone weak you're confusing me with. I was never weak." His hips pumped faster, fucking the air. "I've never been anyone else but Roy McCollum. I'm a veteran and a bouncer and a security guard...and a bodybuilder...FUCK, I love being a bodybuilder...makes me feel like such a fucking man, and I love being a fucking man...if I've changed, then I'm glad I changed! Listen to my voice! Look at my fucking *body*, oh *FUUCCK*!"

He slumped forward, a wet spot spreading across his crotch before vanishing moments later. He groped his cock and moaned happily, pearly teeth peeking out from beneath his mustache. Then the room went silent. Roy caught his breath. He stood up, smoothed down his shirt and re-tucked it, then looked at Joey. "Sorry kid, what was I saying?"

"I don't remember," Joey said truthfully. He was so confused. He felt like he'd had his head slammed into the ground. Who was this roided silverback ape in front of him...

"Well then stand up," Roy ordered, and Joey did so. "Tuck your shirt in. Tight, like this." Joey obeyed, but Roy shook his head. "Not tight enough. Look how a vet does it, we know how to tuck in a fucking shirt. There you go. Now put your hat on and stand up fucking straight."

Joey followed his orders like an obedient soldier and hated every moment of it, but he was stuck with this big juicehead and powerless to do anything about it. His spine ached from being so upright. God, he wanted this night to end...

"Follow me," Roy said, walking out into the hall. When Joey hesitated, he said again, "Follow me, and don't make me fucking repeat myself."

"Okay, okay." Joey trailed behind the hulk reluctantly, wishing he had some companionship for the night. First things had been boring, now they were weird. He had a hazy memory of shoplifting stuff with a friend, but when they'd gotten caught, suddenly he was alone. And now he was stuck one-on-one with this freak.

They walked into the mall and up to the parked Segways. Roy cracked his neck from side-to-side and looked at Joey. He reached out and pushed Joey's hat a smidge further back on his head. "You're a mall cop now," he said. "Take pride in your appearance."

Joey wanted to correct Roy, but before he did, he asked, "Why is it okay for you to have your shirt open like that?"

“We don’t have to wear ties, so this is allowed. You can open yours up too, I know you get hot and itchy.” Roy didn’t wait for Joey to respond - he took the liberty of undoing the top three buttons of Joey’s shirt himself, pulling it apart to expose the center of Joey’s flat chest. “Shit, that’s a lot of hair, kid.”

“A lot of...” Joey looked down and saw black where he expected to see skin. With a shaking hand, he touched the center of his chest, his fingers bouncing against a forest of black curls. He had chest hair. He had a *lot* of chest hair. More than Roy. More than anyone he’d ever seen. It looked like the type of hair that belonged on top of someone’s head, and it was so glossy it shone in the lights of the mall.

“Ladies like that?”

Joey shook his head no. Girls thought his chest hair was gross. He got a lot of shit for how it puffed out of the collars of his t-shirts and polos. And it was warm, especially against his sheets when he slept. It was strange how he was essentially hairless everywhere else, but could knit a sweater out of his chest fur. But it had never dawned on him to shave it, either.

“Didn’t think so,” Roy said. “But be proud of it. It’s manly.”

“I am,” Joey lied, as he hesitantly climbed onto his Segway. He didn’t have the confidence atop it that Roy did. It felt like he was going to fall off, but he knew he didn’t have a choice. When they started rolling forward, he noticed Roy went slowly, staying right beside him instead of leaving him behind. It was the first nice thing the old gorilla had done that night.

“First checkpoint is over here,” Roy said, pointing to a small piece of metal mounted on the wall. Joey wondered how many hundreds of people walked by it every day without noticing it. “Scan it.”

“I don’t have a scanner.”

“Yes you do, on your belt.”

Joey patted his hip and sure enough, there was a scanner holstered right there. He hadn’t noticed it all evening. As he removed it, he noticed a patch of black hair across the back of his hand, which led his eyes up his forearm. He remembered light, fuzzy blond hairs there. But now there was the same kind of hair as his chest: black, coarse, curly. And when he hopped off his Patroller to scan the checkpoint, he took the opportunity to scratch his nuts without Roy seeing. Damn, were they itchy...

The second time he got on the Segway, Joe felt a lot more confident about it. This time around, he knew it wasn’t going to somehow buck him into the air. Roy was a full head taller than he was, so if Roy could maintain his balance, Joe knew he could. He just had to remember to not

scratch himself as he was driving, because it could throw off his equilibrium. But that was an exercise in mental fortitude, because goddamn, was he itchy. His bush was so thick it acted like a second pair of underwear, and the pattern barely narrowed as it crawled over his stomach and up to his gloriously hairy chest. From there, it did thin out some - but there was no missing the coverage on his back and shoulders, especially with his collar spread open to display it. The prickles he felt in his polyester uniform trousers were a reminder that his legs hadn't been left behind, either.

He stole a look over at Roy and looked again at the man's extraordinary mustache, like a big silver horseshoe mounted right to his face. "Facial hair is allowed?"

"Yeah, this ain't the armed forces," Roy said. "Otherwise I woulda made you shave."

Joe never had visible beard growth - his whiskers were blond and light, and he only shaved once a week if that - but if Roy could see them, maybe they were darker than they'd once been. He'd check them out next time when he got the chance. For the time being, he was occupied with following Roy's lead and going from checkpoint to checkpoint. He'd been so bored in the breakroom that it was nice to have a task, even if it was one he didn't want to do. But if he pretended he wasn't being forced to police the closed mall, and was instead just tooling around on his little Patroller, then it became palatable. At least he wasn't having to work when there were customers around and he was at risk of seeing someone he knew.

Roy seemed to expect a horde of burglars to pop out of the shadows at any moment, judging by the way the older man swiveled his head back and forth as he drove, looking in every corner with a steel glare. Joe was amused by how seriously the guy took his work. The mall was completely empty, so any sort of movement or sound would be noticeable, Joe assumed. But Roy acted like he was guarding Fort Knox.

They rolled by a vacant storefront, its papered windows providing a mirrored surface, and Joe saw something that made his blood run cold. He stopped his Patroller and jumped off without realizing he was even doing so, stumbling over to the glass. From behind him, he heard Roy screech to a halt and yell "Hey, kid!"

But Joe ignored him. He was too distracted by his beard. His full, thick, jet black beard. It covered his face entirely from the cheeks down, the dense whiskers blocking out his skin. He stroked the inch-long hairs and inspected his neckline, where the beard came to a perfectly trimmed stop and gave way to a shaven throat.

"You can't just stop, we have a job to do," Roy said, storming up behind him. But when Joe whirled around and Roy saw his bulging eyes, he stopped. "What is it?"

"When did I grow a beard?"

Roy's brow furrowed. "Huh?"

“I didn’t have a beard when I walked in here!” Joe looked down at his hairy arms and the cavalcade of curls pouring out of his shirt. “Or chest hair, I don’t think! I didn’t think I could even *grow* a beard...”

“The fuck are you going on about? Of course you had a beard. This some kind of joke or somethin’? Some kind of TikTok shit?”

Joe shook his head and turned back around, staring bug-eyed at his furry cheeks. That was when he noticed his eyebrows, dense and full, only a millimeter away from connecting into a unibrow. “I’m so hairy... I don’t wanna be a short, hairy guy!”

“How tall are you, five-six? That’s a perfect height for a bodybuilder.”

“I’m not a bodybuilder!” Joe practically shrieked, still scratching at his beard.

“Jesus Christ,” Roy sighed, pinching his nose. “Let’s get you some water. Maybe throw it on you...” Before Joe could respond, Roy had already walked over to a vending machine, scanned a credit card and purchased a bottle of Aquafina. He wrenched the cap off as he stormed back over. “Here.”

“Thanks,” Joe said, chugging it. Droplets of water streamed down his whiskers and collected on his big fluffy mustache. “That was nice of you.”

“I take care of my men,” Roy said. Joe recalled what he’d said earlier, about being a protector his entire life. “You got a great beard anyway,” Roy continued. “Dunno why you’re so freaked out about it. I know fifty guys who’d kill for a beard like that.”

Joe nodded glumly. He knew that was true. Tonight was just so strange.

“Enough pouting. We got work to do. You’re a mall cop now.” Roy motioned Joe back onto the patroller, so Joe clambered on and rolled his vehicle up to meet Roy’s. He didn’t like how Roy kept saying he was a mall cop, but there were too many other things on his mind to pick a fight about that. So he zoned out as they patrolled, thinking about all the odd happenings of the evening, and wondering how he’d ever forgotten he was so goddamn hairy. Even the hair on top of his head was thick and lush - he could feel his cap sitting higher on his head, buoyed by the sheer volume of his follicles. Blocking out his thoughts lessened his heartbeat and let him focus on small things: like his nipples rubbing the inside of his shirt, or the breeze in his chest hair, which got an erection pumping up in his pants.

It became a vicious cycle of manliness. His hair and beard made him feel masculine, which boned him up, which made him feel even more like a man. He got hornier and hornier as he drove, beads of sweat popping out across his brow.

They navigated the mall in silence, Joe scanning each checkpoint as he was told. After fifteen minutes, when he got off his patroller again, he noticed his pants felt tighter, as did his shirt across his back. A quick check in a store window showed an athletically built Sasquatch looking back at him. "When did I gain-" he started to say, then he swallowed his words. His voice was a rumble now, rich and deep like Roy's. He'd never thought of his voice as feminine sounding, but the sheer virility emanating from him now would make anyone else sound like Marilyn Monroe. "My voice!" he boomed, stroking his beard. His fingers tapped against the stars pinned to his collar, like Roy had. "I think something's happening to me," Joe said, trying to put the pieces together. He turned to Roy. "Are you doing something to me?"

"Only thing I'm doing to you is trying to get you to do your damn job."

"I don't recognize myself." Joe fluffed his chest hair with his fingers. "Maybe it's the uniform. I just feel strange..."

"We'll get you your medicine back in the break room."

That encouraged Joe. If Roy had meds, that meant whatever was happening - even if it was mental fog - was curable. So Joe bounded back up to his Segway and tried to not worry as he drove. Even when his clothes started feeling even tighter, he didn't worry.

They finished the circuit without talking much more. Joe continued to have a strange feeling about Roy and the niggling thought that he wasn't there at the beginning of the evening, and he wasn't in the mood to make conversation. Which was likely fine with Roy, since he didn't seem like a chatty guy. And the silence had the side benefit of decreasing Joe's heart rate and calming his erection.

"Picked up the driving fast, kid. You're a natural mall cop," Roy said as they walked back into the break room. He went to his locker and began rummaging through a backpack inside.

"One night only," Joe said. "Or whenever they say I've done my time, I guess."

"How much did you steal?" Roy asked.

"Thousand dollars worth of shit."

"Goddamn. How'd you do that alone? Sounds like at least a two-person job." Roy turned around and approached Joe. "You wanna lean against the wall for it?"

"For what?"

Roy raised a syringe full of...well, Joe wasn't sure what. "Your medicine."

"Oh. It's not a pill?"

“Intramuscular.” Roy pressed his palm against Joe’s back and guided him to the wall. “Glute?”

“Um...yeah, glute...” Joe mumbled, feeling a strange sense of familiarity with the situation. He fumbled with his belt buckle and dropped his pants, exposing his hairy ass to Roy.

“Just relax, kid. Don’t clench.”

Joe did his best to be calm. He wasn’t great with needles, but this would make him feel better. He trusted Roy, for some reason. He knew he didn’t know the guy, but Roy was clearly a leader. So when he felt the pinch of the tip breaking through his skin, the needle sliding into his muscle and injecting its contents into him, he didn’t flinch. But he did get hard. And he moaned.

“Yeah, you like this, don’t you?” Roy chuckled behind him.

“Uh-huh...” Joe panted, wondering why he was being so compliant. He slid his hand inside his shirt and played with his nipple, relishing the burning sensation in his glute.

“There we go. No blood. That was a good pin.” Roy gave Joe’s glute a little smack. “Pants up. Tuck your shirt in.”

Joe did so. He made sure his shirt was tight as a drum when he tucked it and buckled his belt. His ass felt so warm. His dick was so fucking hard...

“Gonna take a piss,” Roy said, and he clomped out of the room and down the hall, leaving Joe to grope his crotch in peace. He groaned, a guttural noise coming from his dry throat. The warm tingle of his injection site was spreading through his body, he could feel it...down his legs...up his torso...

“Oh *fuck*,” he gasped, suddenly covered in sweat. That big ape had given him steroids, he knew...a whole potent cocktail of them. They did make him feel better, though. More like himself, somehow - and so horny...his body hair stood on end, goosebumps raising on his skin. He moaned louder. He stroked his beard. “Oh *FUCK*...”

His butt felt huge. He could tell it was so tight in his pants that the seams were about to give way. He turned and looked down at it, and he could swear it was swelling...it looked like a big, muscular man ass.

Then his chest popped outward.

Joe jolted and looked down, his pecs suddenly bulging proudly from his torso. He prodded them gingerly, finding them hot to the touch. Even though he had three buttons open, his shirt felt tight - across the back and shoulders, and in the sleeves. He raised an arm and looked at his bicep, which sported a vein snaking over the peak...he remembered being disgusted by how veiny

Roy was, but the veins looked cool on his own body. He flexed his bicep and grinned as it tensed into a big ball. His fingers looked thicker, too, and his forearms were meaty...

"Unh!" Joe's lats flared out like plane wings, reshaping his back into a V, throwing his arms further out to the side. His chest widened with a crack, striations rippling out under his pelt. He rolled his shoulders...so tight...so broad now, too...vast mountains sweeping outward from his neck, rolling down into a huge hypertrophied back and thick, powerful arms.

"I'm not a bodybuilder," he grunted to himself, fondling his new muscle tits, but his body was defying that assessment. He could feel himself swelling, taking up more space, uniform getting tighter and tighter. His abs bulged out over his belt buckle, pushing his shirt buttons to the brink, but the size added to his waist was balanced by his expanding thighs and back, which kept him impressively X-shaped. He swung his left leg further out as his hamstrings shoved together, forcing him into a permanently wider stance. The shapes of deeply cut quads emerged like a pattern on his pants. "I'm n-not...I'm...not...I'm-"

It felt like his entire body took a deep breath. The expansion was spectacular, capped by his chest swelling into absolute enormity, pecs inflating like party balloons that his shirt could barely contain. His chin knocked into them as he looked down, noticing that his body hair looked less dense now that there was so much more body for it to cover. His trap muscles pushed up under his ears, splaying his collar even further open, and his massively wide shoulders thickened into a jaw-dropping yoke. Delts the size of pumpkins developed above his arms, which drew Joe's attention to his sleeves that now sported the same little rips as Roy's - and the same security patches, too.

His eyes rolled back into his head. He was so confused, and so horny, and so fucking big...he had to sit down, or else he was gonna faint...he staggered to a folding chair and plopped onto it, and it only supported him for a moment before the cheap metal pancaked under his mass and sent him tumbling onto the concrete floor.

That was when Roy walked back in.

"Moe!" he said, shoving the table aside to get to the heap of muscle on the floor. He crouched down and put his arm around the younger man, hauling him upright. "Our big asses can't sit on the folding chairs, that's why they got us the stools!"

"I...I...whuh?" Moe stammered, looking down at himself. "Oh my god..." He held his hands up to his face. Broad, hairy paws. They looked like Mickey Mouse's gloves. "Am I bigger than you?" he croaked to Roy.

"Different builds, short stack. Can you stand up?"

“Yeah. Give me a minute.” Sitting up was hard. Pecs were too big and blocked the range of motion. He rolled to his side, which also yielded no results, so then he flopped onto his stomach and pushed off of the floor, standing up out of a squat.

Roy stood too. “See? You ain’t bigger than me,” he said, making a show of looking down at Moe, who was six inches shorter.

“But I’m thicker,” Moe pointed out, a slight grin on his face. He loved sticking it to the old guy. He knew he was completely stacked. There was so much mass on his small frame, the muscle groups all pushed into each other. He looked and felt like a total fucking freak. And for some reason, that word made him proud instead of ashamed. “I’m a muscle freak,” he said aloud.

“We both are, kid. Get some water or something, take a leak, we have another facility tour to do.”

Moe nodded. He noticed he breathed loudly now. Or maybe he always had? His head was still jumbled, maybe from the fall. He tried to clear his thoughts as he got some water, listening to his big dopey breaths and trying to make his clothes look somewhat presentable. He had a shiny shield on his chest, like Roy had. “I’m not a real mall cop, am I?” he asked.

Roy paused and snorted. “You look like one to me.”

But Moe knew that was wrong. This was just for tonight...because he’d been stealing something, with...one of his friends? Or alone...fuck, nothing made sense anymore. Why would his dumb ass think he could get away with stealing anything? People were always staring at him because he was so big. A squat, roided ball of muscle. He couldn’t even sneak up on anyone because he waddled when he walked and breathed like a car without a muffler.

He slammed three cups of water and felt better. A guy who sweated as much as he did had no business not carrying a water bottle at all times. Even though he didn’t feel the need to piss, he waddled off to the bathroom anyway, just to kill time.

He didn’t make it to the urinals before the sight of his arm stopped him. It was like a man’s leg stuffed in his sleeve. He didn’t know how the fabric was even holding around it. Moe stopped and turned, looking at himself full-on in the mirror. He gasped. His cock sprang to full mast.

He was a masterpiece.

He was a fucking *god*.

So much muscle his body didn’t know where to put all of it, cloaked in a gorgeous layer of black hair. He was as wide as he was tall, bursting out of his comically small uniform. His clothes didn’t fit at all, but that was fine, because it showed how small his waist was and how enormous his lats and pecs were in comparison. Up top was his beard, the manliest thing he’d ever laid

eyes on. His eyes were locked on it as he unzipped his fly and dug out his meaty cock, stroking it at the sight of himself. He could remember not wanting muscle...why on earth had he felt that way? Muscle was a gift from heaven. So was body hair. He loved every inch of himself, even his height, because being short just meant he looked bigger.

Moe pumped on his cock and smiled at himself, his white teeth shining through his beard. He looked down at his penis and wondered why it looked so ruddy - the same could be said of the hand stroking it, in fact. He'd always thought of himself as pale. But the man in the mirror had tanned skin with reddish undertones. It made sense with his dark hair, it was just different.

Different...

His features looked different too, somehow. Especially his eyes. Most of his face was covered by his beard, which made his eyes stand out all the more: they were so large. Round and dark. Soulful. Combined with his almost-unibrow and prominent nose, he looked kind of...

Kind of...holy shit...HOLY-

Suddenly panicked, Moe ran out of the bathroom and back to Roy. It wasn't until he was looking at the older man that he realized-

"What the fuck, put that thing away," Roy barked, staring at Moe's cock protruding from his open fly. "Jesus! Be professional."

Moe stammered an apology and tucked his manhood back into his trousers. "Sorry, I...I'm...am I an Arab?"

The room went silent. Roy drew his shoulders back and stared straight at Moe. "What is wrong with you tonight?"

"I was looking in the mirror and I - my face, it looks almost-

"You just gave me this big long lecture about how you *weren't* an Arab." Moe did not remember this, but the revelation calmed him down, until Roy added: "Because being Persian isn't the same as being Arab."

Persian...

"It is not the same, no," Mo agreed, and that was when he heard his own accent. How long had he had that...and why did he speak accented English, when he'd been born in America...hadn't he? "I...I'm sorry, for being a problem tonight," he stammered out, listening to how the words sounded.

"You're not a problem, kid. But you are making me worried. Seriously, are you okay?"

"I'm okay." Mo wasn't sure that was true, but he didn't want to look weak.

"Are you good for another go?"

Mo nodded. He was eager to get back on the patroller and clear his thoughts. And with *that* thought came the realization that he wasn't thinking in English, he was thinking in Farsi. He spoke two languages. Why did that surprise him, and why was he thinking he was white when he was clearly not. Few white men had his hairiness, his virility. He was proud to be Persian.

But as Mo clambered back onto his Segway and fired it back up, he couldn't get all the contrasts in his memory out of his head. He recalled his uniform being like a baggy tent on him, and now he was exploding out of it. He thought of himself as skinny, but he was built like a professional bodybuilder, just like Roy was. Roy, who he thought of as both a boy his own age and a grizzled older man. And "boy his own age" was a loaded identifier, considering Mo himself didn't look like a boy. With his sensational beard and giant muscles, he appeared every inch a grown man. That little white punk...who was he? How could he be the same as the hairy Persian muscleman? The night was full of flashes of memory like that. He recalled another young man in an ill-fitting uniform who, every time he came back to the room, was a little bigger, a little older...a little more like Roy. Mo wondered if he was changing like that. He didn't want to change. He liked being a huge Persian stud. He hoped he didn't turn American, but that thought seemed silly - impossible. You couldn't just turn American. It took a lot of work to move there, and he was happy he'd done so, but he was forever Iranian.

"What are you thinking about?" Roy asked from his Segway.

"Home," Mo answered. Shiraz, where he was born...

"Do you miss it?"

Mo thought through his words carefully. "Some. But I had to leave, so that makes me miss it not as much." He couldn't remember why, but he hadn't had a choice. He was proud of his heritage, but it was stuck in the past, and he had to either leave, be someone he wasn't, or risk death.

"Your English has gotten really good," Roy complimented.

"Thank you. I practice." Mo was proud of the speed with which he was picking up the native language. It was what he'd been most worried about before immigrating. That and disrupting his bodybuilding routine, but after some initial hiccups he'd figured that out. He hadn't lost much size or shape. His body was used to being big. It wanted to be big. His muscles were as mature as they were massive.

Damn, was that right...could teenagers get that permanently grainy look? It took years and years and years of lifting, Mo was pretty sure. Not that he was old. Not like Roy, he chortled to

himself. Mid-30s wasn't old. He was in his fucking prime. He was in a new country where he could live the life he wanted, using his immensity the way he'd always dreamed of: sexually. He was a virile Persian stud, after all; a man built to fuck. And he loved to fuck. In America, you could fuck as much as you wanted. And the gym provided an all-you-can-eat buffet. Big, strapping men who were down for whatever. Mo loved to pick up a bodybuilder, run his hands over the man's muscles as the guy did the same to him...bury his face in a hairy chest, bite a bearded lip, plow a tight hole...

"N-no," he squeaked as he drove, realizing what was happening. He *wasn't* gay. Or he *was* gay. He couldn't remember. He didn't want to be gay, did he...but was that why he'd left Iran? So he could have sex with men and be openly gay. Wear a harness in a Pride parade. Maybe even marry another man eventually...not now, but someday...

He rolled past a reflective window and surveyed himself. A gay fantasy in a skintight uniform. A masculine, hairy beast in touch with his gentler side, the side that mewled as he got his nipples sucked and cuddled after a rough fuck. He'd spent so many years living in fear of his sexuality that now when he held another man, he felt euphoria.

Roy interrupted his thoughts. "I know dawn's pretty close, so let me know when you need to stop for your break."

"Thanks," Mo said. A break sounded nice, even though he hadn't worked most of the night. Which seemed unlike him, because he was a hard worker. He liked working. You didn't get as huge as he was without enjoying work. But did he like *this* job? *Was* this his job? He felt so jumbled.

They didn't talk much while they patrolled. Roy was a quiet man, and Mo was wrapped up in his own confusing thoughts. He needed to focus on something and quiet his mind. Usually he was good at that, but tonight, he felt anxious.

But then he saw rays of sunlight breaking through the skylights of the mall, and his heart soared. Daybreak! His strange night was almost over.

"I need my break now," he told Roy.

"That's fine." Roy paused, and seemed to be considering something as Mo stopped his patroller and climbed off. Finally, he spoke again. "Do you mind if I watch? I've never seen-"

"I don't mind," Mo said. He moved on muscle memory, as if he'd been in the exact place, at the exact time, before. Maybe he had. He didn't know. But he pushed through all his disordered thoughts and clicked his brain into a single priority for the moment: "I shall offer the Fajr prayer for Allah," he said under his breath, positioning himself to face slightly northeast. That felt right. It felt right to say these words, in his native tongue. It flowed naturally in a way nothing else had

that night. He blocked out his confusion and his surroundings and just prayed to Allah, and it made him feel like himself again.

“Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah,” Mohammad finally said, completing his prayer before standing up from his knees. He turned and looked at his colleague Roy, who was leaning against his patroller watching. “That is how a Muslim prays the Fajr Salaah,” he said.

“I never knew there was so much movement,” Roy said. “It’s like a dance.”

“It is. I don’t have to think about it. I have done it so much, it’s like moving a muscle for me,” Mohammad said.

Roy nodded. “Thanks for letting me watch. Back when I was in the service, we didn’t really...we made fun of that stuff. Makes me feel like shit now.”

“Good. You should feel like shit,” Mohammad joked, eliciting a rare laugh from Roy.

They got back on their vehicles and spent the next half hour finishing their tour. It flew by for Mohammad. He liked his work, and it had the extra benefit of familiarizing him with American culture. He learned about brands, holidays, and customs from the ever-changing signs and sights within the mall. Everything was sponsored. *Everything*. The West worshiped money. Mohammad knew money was important, but it wasn’t everything to him. All he needed was enough to support his bodybuilding and have a little fun.

“You feeling better?” Roy asked, his voice cutting through the silence of the mall and Mohammad’s thoughts.

“I am,” Mohammad nodded. He still felt slightly off, but had a remedy in mind that he didn’t dare tell Roy. It was a phrase he’d learned from a hook-up, as they lay in bed after fucking: “post-nut clarity.” The guy had needed to explain it to Mohammad, but they’d laughed about it. It was definitely a real thing, too. Mohammad would get so horny he could barely see straight until he found release. He knew once he blew a load, he’d be fully fine. Roy was kind of uptight about that sort of stuff - a holdover from his military days, Mohammad assumed - so Mohammad kept it to himself, but allowed his erection to protrude as they drove back to their break room.

“Thanks for saying I need to work tonight,” Mohammad said as they parked their patrollers. “I don’t know what my problem was.”

“Yeah,” Roy said, his brow furrowing. “I forgot about that already, but that was unlike you. No problem though. I won’t snitch on ya.”

“Snitch?” Mohammad didn’t know this word.

“It means to tell on you. Turn you in. Report to Derek that you were being lazy.”

“Oh!” Mohammad just nodded, but the mention of Derek Sanderson made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. He remembered the guy making him put on his uniform earlier in the night. That was a strange thing - why hadn't he been wearing it already, when he showed up for work...

The whole night was full of bizarre flashbacks like that. Looking down at a hairless, underfed torso...that confused white guy staring back at him in the mirror...and his hands, so small and slender, nothing like the big callused mitts he had now...

Mohammad drank in the sight of Roy's big ass pushing against his uniform trousers, and his giant lats that were one wrong move from ripping through his shirt. The image was enough to get him staggering to the bathroom, sputtering out an excuse to Roy, who nodded and headed back to the breakroom.

The thick Persian bodybuilder barely made it inside the men's room before his cock was out of his fly at full mast. “It's time,” he said in Farsi to the empty bathroom, and he didn't know why he'd said it or what he meant - all he knew was he was ready for the horny fog to dissipate for a while. But he also loved celebrating his own male power and beauty. The soft skin of his shaft felt so good against his rough palm. He stared lovingly at his black chest hair. “I'm a man,” he grunted.

It plopped into his head, that white boy - Joey - swimming in his uniform and resenting his work. Mohammad remembered Joey. And he realized Joey spent half the night changing. Just like how Mason had. Those pipsqueaks were so pathetic until they received their gifts - deep voices, gargantuan muscles, facial hair - morphing into grown men right before each other's eyes. Now they belonged in their uniforms. That meant Sanderson had won, but Mohammad didn't care. He wasn't about to give up his beard and his accent and his roided mass. Nothing was a loss if he had those.

He crunched his abs and his shirt caught in between their deep grooves, making him moan louder as he stroked his cock. Who cared if Sanderson got what he wanted? Mohammad was bigger than him now anyway. Bigger and hotter and completely shameless, a Persian muscle bear let loose in America. With a body like this, Sanderson wouldn't give him shit. No one else would either. It didn't matter that he was gay, or had an accent, or was short. All anyone had to do was get one look at his monster pecs - Mohammad popped them up and down and felt them strain his shirt - and they'd leave him alone. It hadn't been like that when he was a kid.

But he wasn't a kid anymore. He didn't want to be, either. He remembered Roy saying that, too. “I don't want to be a kid. I want to be a man.” He understood now. He fucking loved being a man. He didn't want to be younger. He just wanted to be Mohammad, the sexiest, hairiest Persian roid bull America had eve-

“UuuuUUUNNNNHHHHHH!” The cum erupted out of him in long, roping spurts that splattered across the counter and sinks. It came hard, and it came heavy, oozing into a thick creamy puddle. Mohammad’s manly essence. He stared at it lovingly, tugging on his nipples and flexing his muscles until he’d squeezed out of every drop of spunk from himself. Then he towed up and tucked his dick away. He’d nut again real soon. Once he got off work, he’d go home, masturbate, fall asleep for a few hours, then go to the gym, work out, find the second biggest guy there, and they’d beat each other off in the steam room. It was an awesome fucking life.

The Persian stud strutted back to the break room, the fog of his brain clearing to free up his big ego that manifested in extreme cockiness. When he walked in, he was surprised to find Roy chatting with their supervisor, Derek Sanderson. The small guy turned and smiled broadly at Mohammad.

“Well, well, look at *you*. It’s been a busy night.”

“It has?” Mohammad asked, looking at Roy. “Nothing happened.”

Sanderson chuckled. “Sure. Nothing happened.” He walked in a circle around Mohammad, who gave him an odd look. Sanderson whistled. “Those are some *big* arms, man,” he complimented. “And your chest is incredible. You’ve worked very hard, I can tell.”

Mohammad nodded. “I like to work.”

“It shows,” Sanderson said. “I’m glad you work here and not in construction or something like that.” He hooked a finger into the small tear on Mohammad’s sleeve. “You and Roy both need bigger shirts.”

“But then all our hard work would be hidden,” Roy said. “Right buddy?” He slapped Mohammad on the back.

It was a rare show of friendship from stoic Roy, and Mohammad relished it. He puffed up tall, chest hair bristling. “We show off!” he said, hoping he got the words right.

“I’m sure all the storefronts appreciate it,” Sanderson said coolly, staring directly at Mohammad’s tits.

“Why are you here so early?” Mohammad asked. It had to be barely daylight outside - hours ahead of when Derek normally clocked in.

“Oh, I couldn’t sleep. I was too excited to come in,” Sanderson smiled. “Wanted to see how the night turned out for you fellas.”

“It went well,” Roy said.

“I’ll say it did,” Sanderson agreed. “I’m glad you both have taken so well to your work. You like your job, Mohammad?”

Mohammad wasn’t paying attention. He’d been flexing his glutes and thinking about sex. “Hm?”

“I said, do you like your job?”

“Yes,” Mohammad nodded, giving his beard a stroke. “I’m proud to be a mall security guard!”