

NEW NEW YORK

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12 September, many years later, somehow still talking about this.

Of course they should have been protecting the mountain. But A only equals A when you control the trademark. TAB2 had nothing to say for himself, which worked out fine since Maude Mold was doing most of the talking.

"How could you not have known *anything* about this? Weren't these *your* guys? When I saw those towers come down, right after I stopped crying, I said to myself, Maude, we're going to be majorly inconvenienced here. No sooner had I mounted that flag in the bed of my pickup truck than word came down from Plinth the whole winter line had been placed on hold. *Hel*, now the *whole line* is on hold. *Capitalism* is canceled. Not even your brother is allowed to fly. How are we going to move these shipping containers out of the city?"

Piro and his mother had just landed on the roof.

"Speak up, and don't talk back to me!" Maude shouted, way too close to TAB2's face to be shouting.

He rocked back on his heels, not about to offer an excuse. His smile was uneasy, and his face glitched uncommercially from an excess of management as his mind raced behind his visor. No, not now. He needed this job. A lot was riding on his burgeoning partnership with Piro. He was finally beginning to see residuals from their ill-considered gains. The big cocaine cash in.

Maude fixed him with a hard stare, twitching out a false start every few seconds, as if to telegraph she were about to leap across the desk and strangle him with his own plastic necktie. He guessed what she must be thinking. Ever since Spiro had died, some fifteen years in their past, TAB2 couldn't do a damn thing right as far as Maude was concerned. Soon as Spiro had gone, Maude suddenly remembered she was a parent, and it was as if TAB2 was being made to pay for all her prior twelve years of sleepover mistakes. It was not as if he'd killed the boy or anything. He never even understood why they couldn't get along.

Suddenly she was upon him, unsnapping his plastic pants. Her hand plunged in, trawling his UNIQLO underwear for guilty treasure. Too soon?

Abruptly, she stopped.

"I don't care anymore," she said, surveilling TAB2's poorly secured thoughts. "Get out. You're fired."

The worst was coming true but still TAB2 had friends. He made a beeline for the elevator to the roof. To Piro. Auspiciously, he passed Plinth arriving at the office, coming the other way down the corridor just as he egressed the scene of his final dissolution.

"Where are you going?" asked Plinth. "It's 2:30 in the afternoon. I need those drawings by the end of business today."

"You fired me," TAB2 said.

"I didn't fire you," Plinth said, and took a sip of his coffee. "There's a war on."

Looked at his watch, debate concluded. If a human lifespan was 20,000 years, Plinth was a very old man, indeed.

TAB2 smiled.

Employment!