

COMMUTERS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. DALE'S BEDROOM - DAY

SILENCE. A darkened room in the Midwest in the midst of winter. A sense of gloom hangs over everything, and outside it is SNOWING.

Out of the silence, an ALARM. DALE, 46, a bond salesman as gray as the weather, comes to life in his BED. His hand rubs his ever-tired eyes and moves up to hold his forehead as he fumbles around to turn off his CLOCK. He is hungover.

Wait a minute--is that an arm under his neck? He hears a RUSTLING in the sheets next to him. He looks over to see JIMMY, 38, also a bond salesman but with a little more child in him, starting to wake up, turned towards him in bed.

Jimmy opens his eyes and stares at Dale's leg in shock. Neither say a word. Then, finally:

DALE

Well. You're not my wife.

INT. DALE'S KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Now dressed in YESTERDAY'S WORK ATTIRE, the two of them drink COFFEE in Dale's open-plan kitchen. Not much more has been said. There are REMNANTS OF LAST NIGHT'S PARTY strewn everywhere.

Dale stands behind the counter staring into the SINK. He drinks his coffee and holds his forehead. Somewhere, a CLOCK TICKS.

He looks up at Jimmy, who sits on the COUCH next to a PLATTER OF HALF-EATEN CHIPS, MUG in hand, watching Dale. Every once in a while, he lets loose a loud COUGH. It is cold season.

INT. COMMUTER TRAIN - DAY

On the Metra, headed for Chicago. They sit across from each other. The train is full of identical MIDDLE AGED MEN dressed in the SAME CLOTHES THEY ARE. They must be in the quiet car because no one is talking. Jimmy watches the snowy suburban cities go by through the yellow window while Dale reads the New Yorker on his IPAD.

Or at least pretends to read. He looks up at Jimmy, who looks over a moment later. Avoiding eye contact, Dale looks back down. They continue to eye fence for moment more before--

JIMMY
Should we talk about it?

A moment as Dale tries to figure out what to say.

DALE
I don't know. Do you remember anything?

JIMMY
Just throwing up.

Jimmy grins to contain laughter at his own joke. Dale gives him a polite smile and returns to the New Yorker. Jimmy sobers up.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Well, we know you had the party for the top branch thing, right?

DALE
Yeah.

JIMMY
Everyone was there, we were drinking--

DALE
I think I'd rather not talk about it, actually.

JIMMY
Oh. Yeah.

Jimmy looks out the window.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
(falsely flippant)
They probably already know at the office.

He coughs. Dale smiles to himself and secretly looks up at him.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

WHITE-GRAY CONCRETE BRICK. PADDED CUBICLES. TEN OR TWENTY OTHER SALESPeOPLE typing away on COMPUTERS. CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS. A SIGN on the wall reads "Teller & Lerner."

Dale stands in the break room, drinking more COFFEE. Through the GLASS WALLS, he is watching Jimmy do work at his desk: he types on his COMPUTER and blows his nose.

Every once in a while, he stops, thinks for a moment, and furiously scribbles something on a PAD OF STICKYNOTES.

This last action makes Dale smile, and he doesn't hear a COWORKER walk in behind him.

COWORKER

Hey, do you mind if I...

Dale has been standing absentmindedly in front of the cabinet of coffee cups.

DALE

(jumping)

Oh, yeah, sorry, yeah.

Dale turns to walk out of the break room, embarrassed. As the coworker grabs a MUG out, Dale pauses for a moment and looks back before he heads out the door.

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

Dale, sitting compactly within his cubicle, fiddles in the BLOOMBERG TERMINAL on his COMPUTER. On the desk, a PICTURE of his college graduation, posing with his mother, father, and sister. Pinned to the soft wall of the cubicle is a PHOTOGRAPH of a woman looking sensuously at the camera.

Dale looks at the photo of the woman and sighs. He unpins it and holds it in front of him, obviously lost in thought.

MARK, 23, full of testosterone and belittling self-confidence, appears above Dale, leaning on the walls of his office. Dale jumps and tosses the picture onto his desk.

MARK

Hey, big guy.

DALE

Hi, Mark.

MARK

What you up to?

DALE

About to do a trade with Indiana, I think, so um--

MARK

Hey, man, that's great. Listen, I'm heading over to Boefhaus in about an hour, and your ass is coming with me.

DALE

Oh, that's great; I don't think I can make it, unfortunately, uh--

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Warm and dimly lit, the feeling of old wood. DINERS sit huddled in their CHAIRS, COATS on laps, reveling in the electric heat.

Mark, Dale, and Jimmy sit at a table, menus out. Dale stares at Jimmy over his in disbelief that he's there. Jimmy pretends to be engrossed in his selection, and Mark doesn't even bother reading.

MARK

I've got it--trust me. Just order whatever. I've never seen two old men drink like you did. You guys earned it.

DALE

Oh, well thanks, Mark.

MARK

You know it, man. I got to ask, though--what's the partying for? You know what I mean? Was it the bitch?

DALE

The bitch?

JIMMY

(suddenly interested)
The bitch?

MARK

Yeah, man, I heard about that whole fucking thing. If Kathy ever did something like that to me, I'd track that guy down and string him up. You're lucky you never got married, Jim. I'd fuck him up. A little suspicious though, Jim. Just saying. If the waitress comes over, order me a rye Manhattan and the fish; I've gotta piss.

Mark walks away from the table. Jimmy and Dale look at each other uneasily. Dale blows his nose into his NAPKIN.

JIMMY

What are you getting?

DALE

Sick. I think you gave it to me.

JIMMY

Oh. I'm getting the chicken.

Jimmy looks back down at the menu and slowly smiles at his own joke. Dale matches it quietly. Jimmy bursts into another fit of coughing.

DALE

See?

JIMMY

Do you think he knows?

DALE

No.

JIMMY

He brought us here.

Dale shrugs.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Do we ask him?

DALE

No.

JIMMY

But just in case, right? I mean, he might--

Mark returns from the bathroom and sits down--not pleased.

MARK

Fuckin--there wasn't even the divider things in there, and this dude kept looking over while I was pissing. Like, merry Christmas! Can't these fucking faggots ever just keep their eyes to themselves?

Dale and Jimmy don't even shoot each other looks.

MARK (CONT'D)

Did the fucking waitress come? I'm starving. Jesus fuck.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

Dale and Jimmy are standing in a hidden hallway somewhere back at work.

JIMMY

Well, then who are we going to ask?

DALE

No one.

JIMMY

What is your thing with not knowing?

DALE

It's not the knowing; it's the asking.

JIMMY

What?

DALE

Jimmy. I'm trying to think of the nicest way to put this. I...I'm not going to be the fucking faggot looking in the men's room. Yeah?

They look at each other for a moment in silence.

JIMMY

Yeah. Sure.

Jimmy walks away through a DOOR TO A STAIRCASE. Before the door closes, he descends into a huge coughing fit. Dale stands still against the wall. He closes his eyes.

INT. OFFICE BATHROOM STALL - DAY

Rarely cleaned, yellow lights. Dale sits on a TOILET with his pants on. The STALL DOOR is closed, and he is on the PHONE.

DALE

But, no, Genie, I woke up this morning, and I thought she was back. That's what it felt like. Exciting. I haven't felt excited waking up in three months, you know? Yeah, sure, I guess it was weird--

From outside the stall, he can hear the SINK TURN ON. Shit. He thought he was alone. He looks under the stall and sees a pair of shoes.

DALE (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Hey, Genie, let me call you back.

Sitting back up, he stares at the stall door in front of him. He winces as he hears the man GETTING PAPER TOWELS. The man coughs. Jimmy's cough. Dale relaxes his shoulders. He stands up and unlocks the stall. He walks out.

JIMMY (O.S.)
Did you wipe?

INT. COMMUTER TRAIN - EVENING

Back on the Metra, and Jimmy and Dale are sitting next to each other. Jimmy's eyes are closed, and Dale's are getting there.

JIMMY
Do you still have a headache?

DALE
Not really. You feel okay?

JIMMY
Good. Just tired.

DALE
Yeah.

They sit for a moment, and then Jimmy rests his head on Dale's shoulder. Dale gives the small beginnings of a smile, and puts his hand on top of Jimmy's. Jimmy holds it with his thumb. Dale looks out the window. It's just starting to snow.

FADE OUT.