

the object

by

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INT. OFFICE BATHROOM - DAY

RETCHING NOISES in the sterile room. A mousy woman, JANICE (31) hunches over the sink.

Janice wipes her mouth on the sleeve of her rumpled blouse, locking eyes with her sickly reflection.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Janice emerges. PEOPLE fill the hall, smiles all around. Everyone is crowded around MARISSA, a young woman sporting a fat engagement ring on her finger.

MARISSA  
Janice! I finally said yes!

JANICE  
(shrinking back)  
Congrats.

She hurries away.

INT. JANICE'S CAR - AFTERNOON (PARKED)

Janice hammers her fists on the steering wheel.

JANICE  
That fucking bitch, rubbing it  
in... When is it my turn, huh?

Each punch causes the horn to beep.

EXT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Marissa passes, shoots Janice a dirty look. Janice sinks down in her seat.

INT. JANICE'S CAR - LATER (MOVING)

Janice crawls through the seemingly endless line of cars in her shitty sedan.

To her left in the carpool lane, a luxury sports car whizzes past. Janice seethes.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Janice pulls up by the curb. She gets out wearily -- a BURLY SHAPE looms, blocking her path.

She cowers. The man is still. Oh -- it's not a man.

The DUMMY is a sort of mannequin fashioned out of a soft, sock-like material. The figure protrudes from a trash can. A madman's discarded art piece.

JANICE

Golly. Sure scared me, mister.

She smiles shyly at the blank face.

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Janice rolls over, awake. Upstairs, LOUD SEX NOISES.

Her hand creeps down her belly. She caresses herself as the sounds continue overhead.

She bites her lip. Peers out the window -- the dummy still shoved in the dumpster, looking sad and lonely like her.

As she closes her eyes --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FREEWAY - MORNING (DREAM)

Janice merges into the carpool lane, speeding past the other cars stuck in the congestion.

INT. JANICE'S CAR - MORNING (DREAM)

Janice sings with the radio, a HANDSOME MAN places a hand on her thigh, smiling at her.

MATCH DISSOLVE:

THE BLANK LOOK OF THE DUMMY

seeming to watch Janice as she masturbates.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Janice pulls the dummy out of the trash, making a big racket as she struggles with the unwieldy thing.

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

Janice plays solitaire on her computer.

Marissa peaks her head over the divider wall.

MARISSA

Oh, Janice, you're early. Could we get together soon to work out the presentation for Thursday?

JANICE

Thursday?

MARISSA

I know you're not a big public speaker. Can never be too prepared. And with the engagement and everything, I am just swamped...

Janice watches her talk, working out the machinations of the conversation in her head.

JANICE

Okay. Well, I don't know.  
(searches for the right response)  
Sure.

MARISSA

Great. Thanks, girlie. Oh, love your nails, by the way.

Once she leaves Janice rises.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She bolts toward the bathroom, running right into MS. HENDRICKS (55).

MS. HENDRICKS

Oh! Janice, good to run into you, ha-ha. I needed to speak with you.

She leads Janice down the hall. Janice stares at the bathroom door with a look of hopelessness.

INT. BOSS'S OFFICE - DAY

Janice stands in the center of the sterile room, across Ms. Hendricks's big oak desk.

MS. HENDRICKS  
Listen, Janice, it's not that  
you're a bad employee. It's just...

JANICE  
It's just what, Ms. Hendricks?

Ms. Hendricks looks uncomfortable. Everyone always does. It's Janice's hard, unwavering stare.

MS. HENDRICKS  
A few of your coworkers have asked  
if... ah, you know what I'm talking  
about. Please don't make this --

Janice falls to her knees.

JANICE  
I'll do anything.

MS. HENDRICKS  
What are you doing?

JANICE  
I can't lose this job, I -- Please.

She buckles over like she's going to get sick.

MS. HENDRICKS  
Janice... it's okay...  
(sighs)  
Jesus.

Ms. Hendricks sighs and comes around her desk. She extends a hand -- Janice closes her eyes, resting her cheek against the older woman's hand. Then gags.

MS. HENDRICKS (CONT'D)  
(recoiling)  
Stop.

Janice looks up at her. Ms. Hendricks smooths her skirt, looks embarrassed.

Janice bolts out of the room, holding her mouth shut as she dry heaves.

INT. JANICE'S CAR - AFTERNOON (PARKED)

The dummy sits in the passenger seat. Janice gets in, stifling a sob. She looks over at it, wiping her tears.

JANICE  
What do you want?

INT. JANICE'S CAR - LATER (MOVING)

Janice exits the freeway. A pickup truck stops abruptly at the red light ahead -- and Janice miscalculates, tapping the truck's bumper as she skids to a stop.

JANICE  
Shit.

The DRIVER throws the truck in park, gets out.

JANICE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

DRIVER  
What the hell was that? Your brakes not work or something, lady?

DRIVER'S POV: Janice in the driver's seat, another figure shotgun -- it's the dummy.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
Huh.  
(getting back in)  
You just drive safe, all right?

Janice waits a beat. She looks over at the dummy. A honk behind her. Light's green. She's holding up traffic.

Janice exhales.

HOOONK.

She flips the car off behind her and guns it.

JANICE  
Think you can mess with me? With us? Huh? FUCK! YOU!

She pounds the steering wheel. The dummy watches silently.

JANICE (CONT'D)  
You're the only one who doesn't mess with me. You're helpful! Nobody hurts a girl with a man.

She lights a cigarette, giggles.

JANICE (CONT'D)  
You probably don't even hear me...  
you wouldn't judge.

LATER

Janice drives deliriously. The dark road blurs ahead of her.  
She turns her head to gaze at the dummy, riding silently.

JANICE (CONT'D)  
Are you sure? Well, I guess I am.  
Okay, okay... if you say so.

She pulls off onto the shoulder of a dark road.

Janice curls up, resting her eyes. The dummy sitting there,  
watching over her with a sort of stoicism.

JANICE (CONT'D)  
Brad... I love that name... my only  
friend in the world.

Her eyes flutter as she dozes.

A shadow falls on her. A tap against the glass. She jerks her  
head up.

A MAN (64) waves through the window with a big flashlight.

MAN  
You okay? You need help?

Janice stares blankly.

MAN (CONT'D)  
(slowly)  
HELP. Car trouble?

JANICE  
Please don't hurt me.

MAN  
What? Why would I --

Janice swings the door open, metal colliding with him.

The flashlight clinks on the pavement as he goes down.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Fuck! What the hell's your -- ow.

He looks up and sees the dummy in the passenger seat behind Janice as she gets out.

JANICE  
You're a carjacker! From the news!

MAN  
What? No, I swear, just let me go.  
I'm sorry. Please.

JANICE  
Get him, Brad!

MAN  
What?

Janice lunges for him, grabbing the flashlight and bludgeoning him on the face.

The man sputters and moans, throwing his arms up defensively but is unable to stop her attack.

Janice stops, panting. She stares at the motionless man.

She hunches over, vomits all over the ground. The only sound in the eerie night.

Finally she collects herself and rises.

THE DUMMY NOW SITS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT. Sniffling, Janice gets in the passenger side.

JANICE  
You... you...

The car peels out, leaving the contorted shape of the man, lying limp beside the road.

INT. JANICE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS (MOVING)

Janice watches in the rearview mirror.

Her hand brushes the dummy's soft cotton limb.

JANICE  
Thank you.

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Noises of carnality... this time, it's Janice, writhing in bed atop the dummy, lying limp under her.



JANICE  
Oh God, Brad... oh, baby.

EXT. FREEWAY - MORNING

Janice's sedan speeds, merging into the carpool lane... under the watchful eye of a TRAFFIC CAMERA... on until --

EXT. OFFICE - DAY

Janice's car is parked outside the office.

BLOOD smears the concrete behind Janice as she walks across the parking lot.

People spill out of the office behind her. Shouts.

INT. JANICE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS (PARKED)

Janice gets in. The dummy sits shotgun.

JANICE  
Brad, you've outdone yourself.

She extends her hand, touching the dummy's mitten. A gaudy engagement ring on her finger... the fat diamond glistening with red.

Janice beams as they drive on, away from everything.

end.