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MY APARTMENT NEAR THE CASTLE



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To my second-ever apartment's balcony. Also, to the small
carpet my dad bought for it.

OYSTERS VS. MARIANA

“*Oh, yummy!* I’ve been waiting for oyster season to start.” The manager said, or at least, I thought he was the manager. He spoke with a thick Finnish accent, like the rest of his crew. “Did you know it’s best to avoid oysters during summer?” He laughed, telling the opposing chief executives who agreed with him. The men at this table wore expensive suits, watches, and insisted on having meetings during dinner. My boss and some vice president discussed ski resorts in Central and Northern Europe.

“Write this down, Mariana.” My boss snapped his fingers near my face.

“Already on it, sir.” I replied, writing down *ski resorts* I couldn’t afford with this income. He laughed with the vice president, saying it was a good way *to get away from the wife and kids*.

“Everyone is getting oysters, correct?” The Finnish manager asked as the waiter approached the giant table. All I heard was the arrogant laughter of businessmen; *of course we will, we can afford it! Hahahahahahahahahahahahaha*. I feared I was exploding; my heartbeat hammered in my brain and not in my chest, where it should be. It caused my head to ache, and the

sound of their voices pierced my forehead with needles, sending waves of pain down my neck and arms.

My boss tapped my bicep, the irritating tapping a man does when he's in a higher position, halting my current assignment of collecting information on goddamn ski resorts. He didn't look at me as he yelled after the waiter, telling him to get me oysters, too. "No, no oysters for me," I argued. "I'm working."

"Everyone's getting oysters." My boss said, offended that I declined the slimy fuckers.

"Sir, I'm working." I replied.

"Just eat the damn oysters," he whispered as the others' chatter blared. "You're not embarrassing me like this."

"I'm allergic." *I'm not.*

"Everyone's eating oysters." He smiled, grinding his teeth. The Finns, especially the manager, kept explaining why it's advised against eating them during summer. The beautiful shells hold such horrifying insides. The image in my mind of their meat, grayish and yellowish, caused cold sweat to form. The hair on my nape stuck to my skin, the feeling drove me up the wall.

The oyster dishes started appearing before the men; the men clapped their hands like happy seals. I was terrified as the *raw* meat appeared in front of me. I clutched

the paper pad and pen, knuckles turning white and holding my breath as if not inhaling the scent of the so-called food would keep me safe.

“Lemon juice, *ohh*, I’m in heaven.” One of our crew’s people moaned. He pushed the meat in his mouth and made noises that you’d expect to hear in bad porn. The oyster juice mixed with lemon trickled down his chin, falling on the table and floor. The rest of the men devoured, no, made love to the oysters similarly. *It couldn’t be that good. Seriously.*

Inside the full restaurant, nobody except me paid attention to these *men* licking the shells and moaning, acting as if they hadn’t eaten in years. I looked at the plate in front of me and the oysters had doubled in size. They taunted me; *oh, eat us Mariana, we won’t make you or anyone sick! We want to be iiiiiiinsiiiiideeeee youuuuu!* I sprinted out of my seat, ignoring whatever assignment I had received from my asshole boss. The voices were high-pitched, yet distant as I scurried toward the bathroom and locked myself inside a stall.

My breathing was heavy as I leaned against the thin door. The voices were singing, pleading for me to eat them, but the moaning and groaning of the men had ceased. Conversations with *actual* languages had been replaced by awkward squishing, wet sounds, and no feet touching the floor like everyone had had their legs stolen. Quietly, I exited the stall and made my way toward the entrance of the bathroom, only for it to be obstructed by a white, grayish and brownish wall. The bright lights made the surface of the so-called door

that wasn't there before glisten. Liquid pooled on the floor. The *wall* acted as a sound-proof barrier between the rest of the world and me; only the horrid squishy, wet sounds bounced around the sealed bathroom I was stuck in. The smell of oysters, lemon juice, and hot sauce. The spicy air made my eyes water as I spiraled, yelling profanities and cursing the damn seafood to hell and back.

My head was about to explode, and my last straw was oysters. No, gigantic oysters. I searched the bathroom for *anything* and *everything* until I decided to kick the soap dispenser off the wall and threw it at the oyster. It squealed. I picked it up and started beating the oyster-wall with it. The raw meat whined like a scared puppy: *dooon't huuurt meeeeeee!!* My physical assault of the oyster lasted for minutes before it fell, giving me an opening for freedom, yet I hesitated to escape. The air of the bathroom was different, but secure, the air in the rest of the restaurant was unfamiliar, yet filled with scents of lemon, peppers, and expensive red wine. *Pinot Noir*, I thought, of course, it was *Pinot* fucking *Noir*.

Faaaaceeeeeeee yoooouuurrrrrr feeaaaaaarsssss, the fallen oyster sang. My feet sat on the edge of the bathroom and restaurant, and the gigantic piece of raw meat laid on the floor, too close to my liking. *Faaaceeee yoorrrr fearsss*, it sang in a lower register.

"Eat shit," I whispered, spitting at the oyster. "I'm not scared of an oyster."

A cat can get too curious, but usually not that curious...

One should be careful when letting desires grow. You never know what might appear at your door.

This guy should've hired a better lawyer...

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