

A Thief in the Night

by

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INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

A single, dusty table lamp sits fluorescently illuminated on a bookcase as a MOTH frantically pursues the unknown promises of the light held within -- the vestiges of its brethren's efforts lying lifeless at its base. The scratched, antique bookcase retains randomized books, coverless flash drives and adult magazines and DVD covers. Busy traffic noises seep through a half-opened window as bursts of keystrokes and mouse clicks resonate inside. Outside, a too-close CLOCK chimes the three o'clock hour.

WE PAN ACROSS the dingy, cluttered room to its other light source -- a U-shaped configuration of large and small monitors, standing adjacent to two even smaller tablets, poised at differing heights, supported by thrift store tables. Various black boxes feed them all through the tangled wiring climbing from the floor - the Command Control Center.

CUT TO

AN UNKEMPT MAN: CLOSE UP ON HIS EYES

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

CORD NAUPLIUS, 50ish, gray, unshaven, greasy hair flailing, leans into the center monitor, as his unrestrained, frayed bathrobe falls open.

He sits encircled within, slightly bobbing his head while his mouth splays like a lamprey sucking it all in. He smacks at the keyboard below.

WE PAN IN to guess at the unspoken words forming on his rounded, near puffy, lips as he circles, then strikes, its keys.

CORD
(muttering)
OK. Enough bullshit. Let's see
'em.

He leans back in his chair and pulls a beer to his mouth as he keenly surveys the center display.

CORD (CONT'D)
Pisser! Done!

He smirks, turns and makes a solitary stroke on a second, side keyboard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORD (CONT'D)
 (exhaling)
 ...and done.

He looks at a side monitor, digests the message displayed and returns to his original screen. His eyes drop towards the screen's bottom. He pauses, exhales sharply, then resumes his slap-typing.

CORD (CONT'D)
 (muttering quickly)
 Fuck. Ok. Fine. Fine. Yeah. Yeah.
 After they go to bed...
 (beat)
 ...and your fucking, dumbass
 homework.

Cord types several more strokes, punches the keyboard one final time, then turns and makes another single keystroke to the second keyboard. He pushes back and rises from his chair as he stretches. He distractedly wraps the bathrobe around himself, muting the outline of a semi-erection. Outside a car horn blares its impatience. Cord yawns, scratches himself and rubs his eyes.

CORD (CONT'D)
 (belching)
 Ahh, shit.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Three semi-crushed, budget beer cans sit on a low table in front of the ancient, worn couch. Another can sits upended, oozing, next to the TV remote and several unidentified prescription bottles. Cord, still in his bathrobe, stands over a kitchen counter, fidgeting like he has to pee as he tears open envelopes. A harsh ringtone sounds. He picks up his phone, scans the display and reluctantly taps it.

CORD
 Yeah?
 (beat)
 Yeah.
 (beat)
 Yeah. I'll have another in a
 couple hours.
 (beat)
 Three or four minutes... tiny-
 titties.
 (beat)
 Fourteen, looks twelve.
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORD (CONT'D)

(beat)

Don't know. Maybe she'll text it for me later, so let's hold off til tomorrow.

(beat)

A buck? ...a second? ...and two for puni? How much for full view? Thirty seconds. Sponsors?

(scoffs)

Those cocksuckers.

(beat)

Yeah, same account. He has the number.

(beat)

Yup.

He taps at the phone screen and puts it down. Immediately, the ringtone repeats. Irritated, he picks it up and looks at the screen. Outside, a motorcycle proclaims its power.

CORD (CONT'D)

Fuck...

He slaps the display and pulls it to his ear.

CORD (CONT'D)

(exhaling)

Yeah.

(beat)

Yeah.

(beat)

No, it's still there.

(beat)

You can synch it with your asshole for all I care. Get it the hell off.

(beat)

Yeah. Ya know. Shit brown with a gold cross. Remember grade school?

(beat)

Yeah, it is. I know the fucking Bible for Christ's sake!

(beat)

That's your shit, not mine. I've tried everything. It just comes back. I can't figure out...

(beat)

So... I'm fucked?

(beat)

Yeah? Yo' mama, bro!

(laughs)

(beat)

Well, it's toast for now.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORD (CONT'D)

I got a virus that took me down for three fuckin' days. Some jerkoff tagged one of the assets. I almost lost everything.

(beat)

No. I got it from a new site... forget the name ...Pinky something ...maybe. I dunno.

(beat)

Yeah. Right through my firewall. Punched through. A bareback worm, I guess.

(laughs)

It got ALL my files. But... It didn't hit the backup.

He looks at his Command Control Center and nods proudly to his foresight.

CORD (CONT'D)

Yeah. Saved my ass.

(beat)

Anyway, I would have never hooked her up if I knew she could download to my phone.

(beat)

Synched phones? Who did that?

(beat)

Uh huh. Yeah. Well, tell ma I'll give her the damned payment if she just dumps ALL the Jesus crap.

(beat)

I just want it GONE.

(beat)

Yeah? Go synch your ass with a doorknob, OK? Hey, I gotta go.

Cord firmly taps the display once, then fans his index finger across it several times. He glares at the screen for a long second before putting it down.

CORD (CONT'D)

(muttering)

Motherfucker...

Outside, a siren wails above the traffic noise as the clock strikes the quarter hour.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cord, draped on the couch, absently works the TV remote as the changing flicker of reflected light echoes off his face. He is clean shaven, coiffed and wearing an ASU tee shirt and jeans -- looking very much like a miscast, aging actor in a low budget romance comedy. The beer cans and 'script bottles are gone. Behind him, the computer monitors sit dark while their tiny, strobing power lights below betray the continuing workload. Copies of "Teen Vogue" and "Discovery" are stacked on the edge of the couch table, barely covering the sweat rings etched below them.

Cord rises and moves to the window. Flickering strands of outside light snipe into the room -- accompanied by the background chorus of traffic sounds. He squints through the smeary glass at some unseen activity below.

CORD
(muttering)
Get a job... fuckers.

As the clock dutifully begins announcing the half hour, Cord pushes the window shut and pulls down the shade. The diminishing shafts of the final evening light now only project as silent silhouettes on it. The clock's now muffled chime continues until done. The buzz of a door bell follows immediately, as if in sequence...

CORD (CONT'D)
Thirty minutes, my ass.

Cord turns off the TV and moves to the door. He peers through its peephole, unlocks and opens it.

CORD (CONT'D)
(smiling)
Hey, hi! Great timing. I'm hungry.

In the hallway, BILLY WHITE, 17, looking freshly washed and dressed in clean white sneakers, low-waisted jeans and a referee-striped tee shirt, holds a very large pizza box precariously in both hands.

BILLY
Hi. Uh. Mr. Cord? Extra Large
Pepperoni Special?

CORD
Yeah. Yeah. Come in.

Cord steps aside from the doorway and folds back into his space as Billy takes two evaluating steps forward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORD (CONT'D)

Great. Great. Hey, you're new at Piesonoo. Just put that on the table. What's your name?

BILLY

Uh, Billy. Over there?

Without waiting for verification, Billy heads for the only cleared space available -- on the couch table. Cord follows, pulls his wallet and begins paging through the white snippets filling it.

CORD

(laughing)

Pies-On-You? Sounds like pussy porn, Billy-boy.

Billy finally levels and off-loads the pizza.

BILLY

Um. I guess it's supposed to sound like *paisano*, but most people say pie-sun-new. They think we're an Asian bakery or something.

CORD

How 'bout piss-on-you? I'll bet you've heard that one a lot.

BILLY

No. Not really, um, I guess.

(beat)

Ah, that's \$18.75.

Cord, still probing for anything green, moves behind Billy and gestures to the magazines.

CORD

You read those?

BILLY

Um. No. Well, yeah. I have.

Cord picks up "Discovery," hands it to Billy and discreetly puts his wallet back in his pocket.

CORD

I work with their editors. Other places, too. I find models for them. New faces. Young, good lookin'... and smart, like you.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORD (CONT'D)

The guy on the inside back cover?
I found him. He's one of mine.

Billy opens the magazine to the inside back cover and ponders the picture of a pretty girl shilling for acne care.

BILLY

(perplexed)
Him?

CORD

No. No. Go back a page or two.

Billy slowly works back through the magazine until Cord slaps the page. He points to a small, mid-page ad showing a fit young man managing an SUP.

CORD (CONT'D)

Nice, huh? Great exposure. I placed him. He's doing VERY well now. He's your age. You're eighteen... nineteen...?

Billy scans the other page images that overwhelm the tiny ad, then returns to it.

BILLY

Yeah. I'd like to try that.

CORD

Well, Billy, I can make it happen for a nice looking guy like you, if you have what it takes. Modeling is great money and... always guarantees getting laid. You like girls...?

(laughs)

Boys...? Cars? Why with the right car you can...

BILLY

No. No. SUP. Standing up paddling. It looks cool. It's supposed to really give your core and upper body a workout.

(long beat)

CORD

We can make that happen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The ever-diligent clock barely announces the three-quarter hour through the closed window.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

A proud Cord stands encircled by, and focused on, the Command Control Center as the darkened monitors begin energizing. Billy stands shifting off to the side, looking back at the pizza and its attached ticket.

CORD

Of course, it's all about exposure.
And that's my specialty. How
famous do you want to be? And how
much money do you want?

Billy watches silently as the screens illuminate. From outside, another siren announces from a distance... and quickly grows louder.

BILLY

Wow. That's close.

CORD

(absently)

That shit goes on all night.

Billy turns his attention to the window, pulls the blind aside, fights through some airborne dust, then finally raises it.

THROUGH THE WINDOW TO THE STREET SEVERAL STORIES BELOW

An ambulance's emergency lights fire circular flares against the adjacent parked cars. As the ambulance's siren silences, two figures exit the cab and out of sight behind it.

THROUGH THE WINDOW - PANNING UP

Across the street, just behind the ambulance, is a crisp, white church. The attached rectory has a broad, flat roof. Its large steeple reveals the source of the clock. Half of its windows show light. On the roof, two competing streetlights create intersecting shadows across the large cardboard boxes that sit huddled next to the HVAC units and parapets. Plastic bags swirl to fill the corners.

BACK INSIDE AT THE WINDOW

BILLY

What's that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORD

Where? Across the street? Oh. The
bums climb onto the railings, hoist
each other up and sleep there.

(beat)

Piss, too... piss on the church.

Cord laughs at the thought.

CORD (CONT'D)

I-ron-nee, Billy-boy.

Billy looks out again, surveys the adjacent rooftops, and
returns to scanning the church rooftop tenement.

THROUGH THE WINDOW RETURNING TO THE CHURCH ROOFTOP

BILLY (O.S.)

Up there? In boxes? What about the
shelters? What happens when it
gets cold? Or rains? Why are they
outside?

BACK INSIDE

Cord finally looks up absently from his fumbings at the
Command Control Center.

CORD

Don't know, Billy-boy.

Cord looks at Billy by the window, then joins him.

THROUGH THE WINDOW TO THE STREET BELOW

The emergency lights continue, but no one is visible.

CORD (O.S.)

Nothing to see here. Move along,
folks.

BACK INSIDE AT THE WINDOW

BILLY

I didn't realize anyone lived on
our church.

CORD

Uh, yeah, THEY DO, OK?

(beat)

YOUR church? Ha!

(beat)

You really think your priests...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORD (CONT'D)

...or whatever... don't know what's
on their own roof?

Cord laughs mockingly.

BILLY

I need to tell them.

CORD

They know. They know. They just
don't want those losers inside
stinking the place up.

(beat)

Otherwise, no one would show up and
pay them money.

BILLY

Well, aren't we supposed to...

CORD

...to mind our own damned business?
That's what I do. And it works.

BILLY

(resolute)

But, whose business is it then?

CORD

(impatient)

Fine. When you're rich, they can
all live in your guesthouse, OK?

Billy ignores the jabbing question as he continues to process
what he's just learned as he looks down.

THROUGH THE WINDOW TO THE STREET BELOW

Two, rather substantial, figures stand bookended by the open
back doors of the ambulance. They lean inside, then pull
back and sequentially close the doors. Moving around either
side, they re-enter the front cab. The pulsing emergency
lights finally cease as the headlights come on. Slowly, the
ambulance pulls away into the night.

BACK INSIDE

Cord pulls the blind back down, turns and moves back to the
Command Control Center. Billy remains next to the now-shaded
window.

CORD

Show's over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Cord motions back to the Command Control Center.

CORD (CONT'D)

Now, this is cool...

Billy moves back to the couch table, almost protecting his delivery.

BILLY

You know, we should probably settle up.

CORD

I thought you might be interested in being rich and famous, Bill. I can get you there. If you want. Everything you'd want. There's just a few things we have to do first...

BILLY

Yeah, well, I've got to get back to work.

CORD

You need to think of yourself. If you have the choice, why not be rich? And popular? And, how about that car? A really cool car? People would die to be you! An American Idol! Think about that.

Billy notices that the monitors have now all freshened and various cam feeds and videos fill their screens. Hair, elastic and young flesh mix on each. He looks down at the pizza box and delivery ticket, then back at the monitors.

BILLY

I'm not really interested.

CORD

What? You want to be a piss-o delivery boy your whole life?

BILLY

Well, maybe for now, yeah.

(beat)

Um, I think that was \$18.75.

An exasperated Cord retrieves his wallet, fishes out a multi-folded twenty dollar bill and thrusts it to Billy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORD

Well, I tried to help you, but you
won't get far in this fuckin'
world, kid.

Cord's words hang for just an eye blink... then all hell
breaks loose.

The room rumbles as it fills with a ear-numbing, low
frequency blast of THE HORN -- sounding like a ocean liner
emergency alert. A pale orange light outlines the edges of
the window shade as the Command Control Center darkens. Cord
grimaces as he covers his ears.

CORD (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Holy shit!

Then... several seconds of blissful silence... followed by a
second blast from THE HORN... slightly louder and fully
overwhelming. The light, growing deeper in its color, pushes
past the shade and fills the room. Cord stands frozen,
holding his ears trying to keep his mind inside his skull.
THE HORN grows silent once again.

CORD (CONT'D)

What--The--Fuck?

Billy, wide-eyed and breathing deeply, looks over at the
shaded window -- quickly being overwhelmed by an encroaching
tangerine light.

BILLY

I gotta go.

CORD

Hold on. Hold on. It's just a
police copter or something.
Finally getting those bums off your
roof.

BILLY

Um, I really gotta go now.

CORD

Wait. I'm a little short of cash.
I'll have to owe you the tip. A
big tip. Let me give you my phone
and email...

Billy, ignoring Cord's offer, turns towards the door, then
stops with his back towards Cord.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BILLY

I'm sorry.

Billy continues towards the doorway as Cord moves to block his path. A little late, Cord grabs his right arm from behind as Billy opens the door. The entire hallway basks in a soft orange glow.

CORD

Listen to me...

Billy turns and looks directly at Cord.

PULL TIGHT ON BILLY'S FACE

Billy's eyes fill as he purses his lips.

PULL BACK TO TWO SILHOUETTES IN THE DOORWAY

Cord, wordlessly, releases Billy's arm. Billy, now unrestricted, moves through the door and into a cool, creamsicle light. As Billy disappears down the hallway, THE HORN bellows forth once again. Cord, pressing his hands back to his ears, closes the door and tries to gather himself.

CORD (CONT'D)

(shouting to no one)

Shit! People are sleeping here!

STOP!

And, seemingly with that command, THE HORN stops once again.

CORD (CONT'D)

Thank God. Jesus Christ!

Cord exhales, runs his hands halfway through his hair and attempts to reattach his brains. As his head cocks down, he sees a folded twenty dollar bill on the floor. His thoughts return as three deliberate thumps land on the other side of door. A slightly grinning Cord pulls it open.

CORD (CONT'D)

I knew you'd...

The intense energy of the light, now a deep neon blood orange, pushes the door out of Cord's grasp and pins it against the opposing doorstop. Cord gasps, shields his eyes and turns away. Suddenly desperate for air, his throaty panting mimics the death throes of a drowning victim. Unseen hands seize his ankles and unceremoniously up-end him to the floor.

UP ANGLE - CORD'S PERSPECTIVE

The room colors spin together as a dizzying vortex of orange, red and black as they converge with the sound of a desperate emphysemic wheeze.

TIGHT ON CORD'S FACE

Cord's eyes are wide open and attentive. He weakly spits and gulps for air like a fat-lipped fish drowning out of water.

DOWN ANGLE - FROM CEILING

Slowly, heavily, Cord twitching bulk is dragged feet-first by the unseen hands through the doorway and into the all-encompassing brilliance of the red-orange light. The indistinct, guttural groans grow silent.

HALLWAY - FACING INWARD

We move back through the open door and into the now vacant room. The brilliant light continues to overflow around and through the shaded window as the bellow of THE HORN sounds once again.

INT - LIVING ROOM - TIGHT ON LAMP

The table lamp, its own light now darkened, yields only the addition of another, lifeless moth to the others already at its feet.

And, with the puff of an unseen breath, they are gone.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END