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Maren Loveland

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A NIGHT WITH THE INVESTMENT BANKERS

by

Maren Loveland

The waiter sets the glistening steak in front of me: a gorgeous piece of meat that shines as though covered in a layer of plastic.

Fake steak for fake people with fake names and fake faces.

Even as I stare ahead, I can feel the blood-filled juices—the last warm remnants of an unnamed animal—seeping out onto the pristine whiteness of the plate. I gaze unblinkingly into the face of the man across from me, a man I do not know and do not wish to know. Yet he is there, talking and talking and talking about his villa in the south of France, the faultiness of the American educational system, and the uselessness of history. I cut the meat into tiny pieces to avoid looking at his suede suit jacket and thin lips. My focus is on the pointed blade of my knife. Thin. Delicate. Deadly. It reflects the light like the scales of a butterfly wing.

I feel the overpowering urge to plunge the knife into the man's vulnerable chest, to end this ceaseless egotism and empty-headed heartlessness for the benefit of mankind, which has enough on its plate as it is. "The Dinner Party Hero," they would surely call me. "Well, I do what I can," I would coquettishly reply.

But I sit with my ankles crossed, and I smile and nod and smile and nod with an unnatural frequency, hoping my fraudulency is detectable. I see my lipstick smeared like a bloodstain on the rim of my glass. I think about the poor dead cow, the realest being at this table. I grip the knife tighter.