

If you were to stand on a certain Brooklyn balcony and look ahead, the roof of the building opposite would be visible. It's ugly and concrete. But if you were to look further, not up or down any one building but across to the distant side of the city, there's a world of velvet and spectres. The space ebbs to the beat of the time between the funk and jazz age, and lights flicker in a pattern of infinite Morse code. There would be stars but there aren't because of the smoke, and the gutters below are crowded with newspaper and holy rugged people.

Two men, one young and one middle aged, walk through this night, faces painted and lips red. The older man swings a pair of high heels through his fingers. The younger wears his.

This is their city, as seen from a window that faces the street in the same building as that balcony; a hotel that went bankrupt in 1964 and would close its doors in 1973. The walls are covered in moth-eaten green velvet and soaked in oil-lamp glow. It smells of bath salts and central heating.

Silently they mount the steps, one gently opens the heavy wooden hotel door, and they enter. The room is dim, but a desk is visible pressed up against the back wall, behind which a man sleeps. Too much furniture is sprawled around the foyer, and the men step carefully to avoid it.

*Call for you, Sammy.* A voice from behind the desk suggests the man was not asleep after all. The older man, heels in hand, looks up. He's quiet in appearance; blond and faded, and always sleeps with the windows open.

*Who?*

*Crisis. Few minutes ago. When did you two leave?* The concierge is sitting up now, sipping on a cup of something he produced from a dusty shelf.

Sammy walks over and takes the phone. *A few minutes before that.* He dials a number.

*Hello?* The voice at the other end is breathy.

*Kip? It's Sammy.*

*Sammy. Look, you gotta get back down here.*

*What's going on?*

*Well ya know that pig? Yeah, Ray wants it gone.*

Sammy went silent. He scratched his nose.

*But it's been at Crisis for weeks?*

*Ray's caprice I s'pose. Anyway, he wants you to deal with it.*

Kip uses fancy words and thinks himself an intellectual but Sammy knows he's like the rest of us.

*I was barely in that show. Get the other girls to do it.*

*Yeah well one's out of town, one can't drive, and one's passed out on the couch upstairs. It's on you kid.*

*It's 3am, Kip. What am I supposed to do with a pig in New York City?*

*Take it to the Bronx. They'll deal with it.*

The line goes dead, and he passes the phone back.

Sammy turns to the young man - dark skinned, with usually close cropped hair hidden in a platinum blonde wig. He looks on, bored.

*We gotta go, Lou.*

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The early hours of the morning are at once the most peaceful and the most alive. The motley crowd who pass when you sit on a step and wait quake and pulse. Three prostitutes, an ex-con, and a teenage runaway. A broken down jazz band and a gnarled police officer. The drugs and the love blur the thousands into a million-scale web.

The club had been more or less how they expected it. It was a Tuesday, so everything was winding down by now, leaving a gallery of empty glasses, broken bottles and feathers. The other girls disrobe and go home to their lives and wives.

The whorl of the city accommodates a pig with ease; the pilgrimage goes unremarked amongst the folks with the moonlight tan. Leaving Crisis, Kip had given them some left over nylon to wrap around it in a sort of leash, but it doesn't make a difference. It's a cumbersome thing, a pig.

The neon of an all-night diner paints stories on their backs. Blue of the autumn, red of July. The congregation wander past the tobacco shops and the market traders, pawn shops and sleeping dogs. Little has changed since Stonewall.

Lou, bent double, with arms around the pig's neck, suggests they let it go, and let the screeching streets take their course. Sammy doesn't like that. Alternatively, says Lou, a deli could put him to use. Sammy points out the deli is owned by the Goldstein family, who are unlikely to want a pig. Lou swears. He never even liked bacon until he lived with Jews.

Sammy pauses. *There's a café a few streets down that some of the old girls use to go to after shows. They've got baklava and Turkish coffee on the house for anyone there after 2am. Do you want to sit down for a bit and figure things out?*

Lou narrows his eyes. *What about this?* He nods towards the pig, struggling in his arms.

*They've had worse.*

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Everything is dark and wooden, other than the few electric lights that hang from the ceiling or off the wall. The place is empty apart from a figure in the back, and one surrendered waitress. She has olive skin and dark hair, and blends into the room out of familiarity. The men usher the pig into a corner and barricade it in with some couches, which they then sit on. The woman brings them coffee. She looks at the pig, sniffing the floor.

*What's its name?* She puts a little plate of baklava on the table in front of them.

Lou glares. *Doesn't have one.*

The waitress furrows her brow. *You should sell it. My sister's married to a pig farmer up North. Them things are expensive. You could get some decent cash for an animal like that, y'know. One hundred maybe.* The pig shifts its weight, seemingly intrigued by the waitress's words. It revels in its own worth.

Lou sits forward. *Where do we take it?* The waitress takes out a beat notepad, tears off a few used pages, and scrawls something on the back of one. She hands it to Lou.

*She'll talk you through everything. Call in the morning.*

Lou looks over the paper briefly, before folding it into a pleat of his dress. Sammy opens his mouth a little, as if to speak. Lou waits, but he is silent, and takes a cup instead. They finish their coffee, spend some time coaxing the animal out of its corner, and are on their way.

By now the two men are getting used to the pig's movement. One stands on either side, Lou at the front and Sammy behind, each leaning down to hold it as best they can. The pig, for its part, seems to quite enjoy its jaunt around the city.

When they shuffle into the lobby, the concierge is asleep once more. They take the pig up the debauched staircase, and through a domestic maze of hotel rooms and hallways.

And here, without effort, without struggle, the pig makes a decision. It does not squeal or writhe, but slips into a trot, and through the arms of the two men who, in vein, grasp at its hide. Where it wanders, they run – madly looping nylon, frantically clutching, futilely chasing, unsuccessfully blocking. It pauses at a bend in the corridor.

Sammy tenses, ready to dive. The pig follows suit.

*Don't you fucking move.* Lou's arms are wide and his body is low, head turned towards Sammy. *If you get me evicted I will piss on your floor.*

The pig nestles into a shelf, spinning slowly, nose to the ground, as if preparing itself for sleep. Sammy gently steps left, left again, reaches out and swings open a door. Flaking magenta paint and memoir dust show the room is occupied— maybe the old German lady, or the heroin addict. People don't really leave the hotel any more. Whoever you are, what ever brought you to its doors, once you have crossed the threshold you are one of us.

The pig does not notice the new room that has appeared where something solid used to stand. Sammy moves from the threshold. He looks at Lou, and in that moment many things are discussed; silently, but resolutely.

*MOVE BITCH.* Lou steps as he shouts, ushering the animal forward, while Sammy blocks the other side of the corridor.

The pig runs, faster than a pig has ever run before. Into the room. Past the wardrobe, past the bed, past the piles of dirty clothes and bare canvasses. Towards the window. Past the window. Through the open window. Into the air, outside the window. Down from the window. Down towards the street. Down towards the truck that drives past at this moment.

The addition of the pig oddly makes no difference to its movement. The motor is quiet, and the wheels turn a few inches off the ground. The truck seems to drive by the earth's slow rotation, now into the suspended night.

The men are silent. Sammy points into the room, and at first Lou believes he is pointing at what has just unfolded. Instead, he points towards the bed, where a withered woman sleeps, unaware. Lou swings the door closed with rather more force than Sammy would have. The men run down the stairs, skipping the last few with an urgency neither has felt since childhood, and fly through the lobby.

The street hasn't changed. The light, the sights, the smell of ash and the sound of it settling. The truck is gone and our world is still.

So they sit. They sit against the brownstone steps, pig lost in the night, and glitter paving a road up to the stars.