Dancing with Animals

Hired to pet sit for the wealthy while they enjoy a costume party, Jude unexpectedly leaves their home and cat before stopping by the party late in the evening.

The empty water bowl and grimey food dish were what bothered Jude most upon first entry. A close second was the cliche *Angel* that bedazzled each, giving even those unaffected the experience of a mild astigmatism. However, Jude could appreciate the irony of being hired to cat sit while the Owners attended an animal themed costume party, and upon seeing *Angel*’s large blue eyes look down from the mezzanine he also could understand what led the Owners’ to choose such a worn out name. If there were a cat in the image of an angel, it was this one. She had an inimitable air of grace and perception that you couldn’t help but feel, an effect which Jude was acutely aware of while he slipped on the Owners’ suit and tied the heavy leather shoes with double knots. Angel then began slinking over to gaze up at Jude with those moon eyes–he held her in his arms. “What a lousy place to find an *Angel*” Jude humorously mused to the cat. Angel did not reply, unsurprisingly. It was almost certain that Angel had never felt the expensive materials of the black suit jacket, just as it was equally certain that the jacket’s uniform color had never been marred by the occasional stray cat hair. A night of firsts and lasts.

Underneath the Moon’s light the Great hall stood there, steam squeezing out of its cracks, in the same way that old milk begins to ooze from the bottom of a soggy carton. The Great hall’s spires split nearly all the clouds that passed overhead into small pieces, a shame for any cloud gazers who might be downwind of the place, and the huge windows that revealed the chandeliers inside cast light enough for children to play ball at any hour, if there hadn’t been tall stone walls all around the property, that is. Inside, old men and women wore dirty costumes of animals, mostly the same ones–a dog barking at the dancers, a pig squealing for the waiters, a bird cooing over the gaudy decorations. The Owners sat at the front, very close to the music performers. They agreed the performers were poorly dressed, and wondered why the Hosts of the party hadn’t bothered to bring in a more upstanding band. “They are fine people, I suppose, but couldn’t they find a nice suit to wear?” But as the night went on many Guests, including the Owners, found themselves disinterested in the music and more so in taking breaks to smoke just outside the front or back doors. Even though they were removed from the happenings of the party while smoking outside, many of the Honored Guests could not help but comment on the waiter’s service or the dancer’s dress.

“Of course I loved the service, but the waiter was a bit slow.”

“It’s not that the dancers weren’t beautiful, it's just that the dresses weren’t so flattering.”

“The chefs are fantastic, though the meat was just a bit cold.”

As the night continued on and Jude had just finished a fine imported cigar from the Owners’ humidor, he decided it was time for him to get dressed for an evening outing–across town he was needed so as to take care of some animals. He was the best pet sitter in town after all. Before he left, he made sure to fill up Angel’s food dish with a generous scoop and to fill the water bowl from the cooled glass bottle of water. “You take some, you give some,” Jude muttered to himself. He then began the oddly long walk across the property to the garage where the spare cars were kept, thinking ‘you know, if they didn’t have a chauffeur to bring their cars to them whenever they needed, I am sure they’d be in much better shape. I guess that’s besides the point.’ Opening the unlocked door of the garage and grabbing the first pair of keys off the shelf, he tosses his bag in the passenger seat then starts the engine. He was heading across town towards where the ribbons of clouds formed and fluttered in the light from directly below. Just before leaving the property, though, from atop the low brick wall Angel’s blue eyes could be seen basking in the moonlight as they caught Jude’s attention when quickly slipped by in the cold air.

“This is NPB, National Public Broadcasting, a public broadcast meant to help keep you, the public, in the know. Today, violent riots continue in the capital City as known accountant for criminal group behind local business terrorization beats allegations of money laundering and racketeering.”

The sleek car disappeared into the dark and velveteen evening.

Interrupting the party, the Host clinked dramatically on his crystal glass with their silver spoon.

“Oops! I’ve gotten a bit overzealous it seems”

The glass fell to the ground in pieces and shattered when it hit the hard floors. As two of the younger waiters quickly cleaned up the broken glass, the host quickly resumed their speech.

“I apologize for interrupting the lovely time that everyone is most undoubtedly having, but I have just received word from across the way that one of our esteemed Guests who had to decline an invitation tonight in order to deal with an ongoing and unjust court case has just beaten the allegations!”

Just as suddenly as the music had stopped it started up with the unreserved clapping of the guests.

As if the exclamation from the Host was an uncovered cough spreading through the air over the Guests, the news spread like a contagion of speech. Everyone at the party was nearly unanimous in the way they responded “thank god” here and “how marvelous” there. Although there were many varied personal reasons for their responses. One guest had his taxes done by the man. Another was a close personal colleague. Many had ties to him through one way or another, and even more would have been in jeopardy of a similar lawsuit had he been convicted.

Coincidentally, right as the news had lost its immediate appeal for conversation throughout the party, Jude arrived.

“Isn’t that one of the Owners’ cars?” asked one of the Guests.

In the brief spell between when everyone had fled the scene and the police arrived, it was silent–save for the nearly inaudible sound of Angel gingerly walking amongst the stillness. She strode amongst the dogs and cats and birds and pigs and fish and single man in a suit that were strewn throughout the dance hall. The music had stopped, again. The band had all managed to flee unscathed, save for the occasional bump or bruise from the commotion. The waiters and dancers too. Now the only one that remained amid the hot, messy Great hall was Angel, scanning for untouched food and drink and then napping on those who’s heat hadn’t quite left, yet.

No one ever noticed the cat hair on the suit Jude wore, either.