

Legs sprawled out on the train floor, she brushed another layer of blue eyeshadow on her eyelids. She balanced her phone on the seatback for a mirror. Other riders avoided the seats in her section, side-eyeing her makeshift vanity. She didn't notice. The house music booming in her headphones muffled her awareness of the public space. After redoing her wing four times, she leaned back and posed with a duck face. She then sprayed herself with magazine sample perfume to mask the smell of public transportation. *Perfect.*

She waited for her Uber outside Grand Central Station. She felt like a city girl. Wobbling drug addicts and eager partygoers passed by. Even at 2am, she could count on one block in the city to have more life than her entire suburb. A white Toyota Camry pulled up to the curb. She checked the license plate and hopped in.

In the Uber, she texted Lea again to check on her cover: *we are having a sleepover at Mia's, her mom driving us back in the morning.* Lea responded immediately: *yusss, get good vids.*

When the Uber slowed, she looked up from her phone. A buzzing line of clubbers crowded the sidewalk. She cursed to herself when she saw three girls in the same sparkly black set as her. She exited the Uber. As it pulled away, she snuck a final peek at herself in the window.

Faint bass rumbled from the door. She joined the back of the line. As it inched forward, she tested her memorization of the birthday, address, and name on her fake id. Once she was sure she got it down, she took swigs of brown liquid from a crumpled plastic bottle. It was half a shot from all the liquor in her parent's excessive bar cart. She gagged as she threw the empty bottle into oncoming traffic. When she made it to the front, the bouncer checked out her sparkling set. He didn't even look at her fake id. She practically ran through the entrance and down the steps, chasing the intensifying beat.

She stood at the base of the stairs. Blue overhead lights enveloped the crowd. The mass's silhouette with bobbing heads poking out looked like a choppy ocean. She thought back to all the dance parties she had alone in her mirror, the music in her headphones muffling her parents fighting or housekeeper vacuuming. This was so much better. She joined the edge of the crowd and started bouncing with them. The heads started moving frantically as the melody broke down. She felt the tension build in her body as it obeyed the rhythm. The sea grew still for a second. Her movement paused in unison. The bassline kicked in. Her body exploded with energy and movement, hands flying up. The bass thumped from the depth of her chest to the tips of her fingers. She felt weightless— free from the burdens of her stifling suburb, college applications, and friend group drama.

Red lasers scanned the dancefloor. Bright white lights pulsed to the beat. She pulled lip-gloss out from her bag to apply a fresh coat. She felt a hand grab her butt. She whipped to her left. A sweaty old man in a muscle tee winked back at her. The blood drained from her face. She put her lip gloss into her bag and wiggled her body out of his grip. Shaken, she rode the disorder of the beat drop forward. The crowd grew more concentrated. She could barely move her shoulders. She took deep breaths, trying to find the beat in her chest again.

The flashing lights disclosed the anonymous silhouettes. Bright white eyes glowed, either rolling back or wide open. Mouths hung ajar. Hair matted to sticky foreheads. Heads flailed from side to side. Arms dangled in the air. She looked to the stage to escape the crowd. She was close

enough where she could see the middle-aged DJ's smaller movements: his twitching hands, dripping sweat, tight lips.

The song slowed. The lights dimmed. The DJ exited in the shadows. She could hear voices, chatter, for the first time. While people were waiting, she reached for a fake friend, inching her way even closer to the stage. She finally stopped when there was only one row separating her from the barrier.

Two loud thumps echoed across the speakers. White beams flashed. Cheers erupted. He walked up to the stage wearing his classic helmet: a mirrored cube. She watched so many videos, he felt like a video game character. She couldn't believe he was real, standing right in front of her. He took over the room. Thumps multiplied in sync with the flashing white beams. The snare kicked in. She tried to bounce, but the crowd was pushing forward, pinning her between the girl in front of her and man behind. She could barely breathe.

The woman in front of her started hyperventilating. The people next to her motioned and screamed at the crowd to push back. No one listened. The beat drop was approaching. It was his most popular one. The bass exploded. The force of the crowd lifted her boots off the ground. She was floating. She heard crying over the melody. The woman in front of her was curled over the railing. The security guard ran over and pulled the limp body over the barrier. The crowd squeezed her into the empty spot. The railing dug into her lower stomach.

He transitioned into his next song. It was a new release. Only real fans knew it. She already watched the video ten times. The familiar introduction numbed the pain in her stomach. She moved her hands to the complex rhythm, syncing with the lights. He lifted his cube head self-consciously and evaluated the reaction to his new song. She saw her distorted reflection in his front square and sung to herself. He read every lyric on her lips. He nodded at the security guard and pointed to her. She lifted her arms to be carried over the barrier. She couldn't remember a time where she felt more special.

She walked up the stairs to the stage, pausing to take a video. She watched the crowd through her phone. In the blue light, pairs of neon yellow eyes floated in the sea of blue bodies. Countless hands thrust in the air. It looked like everyone was drowning. She danced over to the DJ stand. As she approached, she couldn't make out a face, only her distorted reflection in the cube. She two-stepped to the beat. The tip of his finger touched her side. She thought it was an accident. Then, she felt his damp arm snake around her waist. A shiver went up her spine. She kept on dancing. He grabbed her tighter. She stared blankly into the crowd. He let go to transition to his next song. She took a small step away, hoping he would focus on the music again. But once the next song was queued, he clawed at the air by his side until he latched onto her thigh. She closed her eyes and moved to the beat. He inched his hand up her skirt. She tried to focus on the ascending notes, pretending she was dancing in the mirror at home.