

Everyone Came But No One Was There

A submission for the Short Story Contest

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I hated wearing ties more than anything in the world, and yet there I was trying to tie one in my dark, dishevelled room, hoping to not be shamed by my family again for struggling so hard to force it around my neck. Granted, it might have made it easier to tell what was going on if I had turned the light on, but not only do I have a certain inexorable disdain for overhead lighting, the sun was already extending its ethereal fingers across the few patches of hardwood floor that were still visible along the floor of my room.

To make matters worse, it was a red and white checkered tie that barely reached my waist when it was on correctly, and yet my mother insisted that I wear it because of the “significance to the family,” AKA it was my grandfather’s. Other than that, it had no other significance other than being the main source of my formal torture. I’d blame my friend Wally for making me have to wear it today, but I caught myself. Then again, he always shit on me when I wore this tie, so I secretly hoped I wouldn’t see him today.

“Hurry up, Ryan, we’re going to be late!”

“Almost ready, just got to adjust this noose here nice and tight.”

Instant regret washed all over me, but my parents were well versed in my sardonic sense of humor to know better than to scold me for trying to work through my feelings. They loved to watch my struggle in my tie, after all. As I continued to fiddle, I turned around and gazed at my room. It looked like a bomb had gone off in a minefield, with shrapnel and dismembered limbs everywhere. Sunlight was pooling like blood on the floor and walls. I could almost taste the

imaginary blood in my mouth when my mother barged in and fixed my tie herself.

“You’re getting better, Ryan. Still have room to improve, of course, but you’re getting there. How are you feeling?”

I looked her in the eye, and for the first time in four days I couldn’t come up with a dark quip or witty response.

“I’m feeling. Is dad in the car already?”

“No, he’s doing the lights thing that he always does.”

“It’s not like we’re going to be gone all day, right?”

My mother gave me that knowing look that usually reads “tell him yourself,” or at least it reads like that to me. My dad has this tradition, if you could call it that, of running around the house figuring out which lights he wanted to turn on or keep off, so as to make sure that it looked like there was someone home when we came back late at night. That being said, it is just past the crack of ass in the morning, and so instead of confronting him about it, I just got in the back of the worn-down Subaru Outback and got ready for a dry ride listening to a podcast about Carole King or some other musician from before my time talk about their music. Did I mention I really have been this dressed up?

The ride was easy, thanks to the look back into the life of Lionel Richie and the minimal traffic on the Mass Pike. I wouldn’t have minded a bit more traffic, to be honest, or a good car crash. Would have made the ride more fun, at least. When we finally got there, it was surprisingly easy to get a parking spot. You’d

think there'd be a few more people there, but it might have been everyone came at a different time. We all stepped out into the crisp autumn New England air, and when I took my first breath outside, I could feel just how tight my tie was around my throat.

Let's get this over with, I thought to myself, I'd really rather not have anyone see me in this too much today.

I was surprised to see so many people inside. *I wonder where they parked, or maybe they parked down the street or something, so it was easier to get back in their car afterward.* I didn't really hear a whole lot of noise around me; for the most part, everyone was dead silent, or speaking in hushed tones. The line was short enough at least, so I got behind my parents as we inched along into the next room.

I could feel a few sets of eyes on me as we made our slow procession into the function room, but all I could think about were the hideous lighting choices. Now, I am well aware that I am biased when it comes to lighting but holy shit do I notice it when it looks like fucking garbage. Like, I get wanting to have some candles lit around a room, but when it's the only source of light? At the very least, in that case, things would be consistent, so it could work, but for the love of God don't then go on to put a bunch of lamps with ugly fluorescent bulbs next to the fucking candles. Who hurt you and locked you in a dark room as a child? Is this some kind of revenge against the dark?

“Ryan? Go ahead.”

I realized I was just standing and arguing with myself internally while staring blankly forward, so I turned to nod to my mother and walked forward up to the bench. I felt my stomach start to flip like an acrobat that had been forced to join the circus to support their family or risk being thrown out onto the street to fend for themselves. I hated how weird my mind gets in these situations. What am I supposed to do here, anyway? Say hi?

I tried to get a few words out but they seemed to get stuck in my throat. I could feel tears begin to trickle down my cheeks, and yet all I my mind went back to was the fucking light. *Makes sense why Mom wants me to take that medication,* I managed to get into my head before I stood up and staggered to a chair where I promptly burst into a quivering mess.

I could definitely feel the eyes on my now, and could almost taste the sorrow in their eyes. My hands started scratching furiously at the tie around my throat, as it was getting harder and harder to swallow down my sadness, and as I ripped it off, I gasped loudly, trying to catch my breath.

When I looked up again, I met eyes with Veronica, the mother of a friend. She looked as emotionally drained as I felt, so when she knelt down and rested her hands on mine. It was nice.

“I know you two were very close, Ryan. I’m so sorry you have to go through this, too.”

“I’m just happy that Wally didn’t say anything about my tie, Ms. Harrison. It always feels like a noose.”

I tried to apologize to her but she just waved me away and said that it was okay. The worst part was, I guarantee that if Wally had decided to kill himself in any other way, she would have been laughing with me. I wonder if he left the lights in room on when he did it.

It was a quiet ride home.