

Reflections

Jamie Sunden felt a blast of air when she stepped through the white French doors of the laundry room. She wrinkled her nose at the wall of strong aromas that permeated her nostrils, but smiled all the same. It would be part of the aesthetic.

She could already see her old critics curling their lips at the sight. They'd call the idea "reaching", her tastes straying far from the established norms according to the world of modern art. But after hearing their gripes at every installation she'd attended, her skin had become like steel, not that their comments ever bothered her before.

They just didn't understand.

They couldn't grasp the potential this room had to offer. Already, Sunden was plotting out her performance, step by step as her gaze panned across the rows white box filled with swirling, wet clothes. Forget the fancy architecture the *rest* of the hotel had to offer, it just bled formality, something seen time and time again.

Sunden craved the unconventional. And this cesspool of disinfectant and dryer sheets was the perfect source for her next vision.

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Despite her best efforts in trying, Juanita could only smell the stench of a cleanliness overload.

The tanned twenty-something was trailing all of Sunden's supplies close behind her as Jamie had scouted ahead to get a good look at the location. Juanita grimaced each time the wheels of Jamie's excessively large suitcase caught in one of the grooves scarred into the linoleum floor that led to the laundry room.

Prestigious. Of course, she thought bitterly.

Present at every one of Sunden's installations, and each time they were left wrung out to dry, at least that's what the collective gaze of their "audiences" told Juanita. She could almost feel the snooty lips of their critics twitching upwards into mocking smiles pressing outwards with the utmost disdain.

At this point, posing like some backwards crossover of the Mona Lisa and a spherical Picasso painting was just a means to cover the heating in her dingy little apartment. And to shut up the old woman who kept banging on her door, ranting about her tardy housing payments. She had hoped this new venture being located at the uptown Hilton would maybe give it a bit more production value, maybe imply that Sunden actually had some class or basic knowledge of the arts about her.

Juanita chuckled.

As if that was ever her intention. Juanita had worked with Jamie long enough to know they wouldn't be using something like *actual* Hilton interior. Jamie had a tendency to gravitate toward the strange and unusual, and Juanita could respect that, if it wasn't anything *but* her livelihood that was at stake. Or what little was left of it.

Unlike her artistic compatriot, the full blast of the laundry room caused Juanita to stop, doubling over from the extreme force. She had to catch herself, else the bag she was carrying would be a very uncomfortable cushion to fall on.

Righting herself (and letting out a few mumbled curses) she went to meet with Jamie, who was currently getting acquainted with a jug of cleaning solution.

"Jamie, I'm not so sure about this place. Are you sure this is where you wanted?"

Jamie reluctantly pulled away from her new friend, staring at her partner with a strange look. A reversal to how these conversations normally would start.

"What do you mean? This space is full of opportunities, you just have to look. Juanita, I'm already coming across so many elements here!"

She continually gestured to the starkness of the white architecture, tracing its shapes with her fingers, dancing along the floor with that deluded grace Juanita couldn't stand.

How could somebody be so ignorant of themselves!? The perplexity of it only served to fuel her frustration.

"I don't think a laundry room is the most pristine of places. This gallery is featuring lots of scenic locales, we can't enter that kind of environment with a set piece like this! They'll laugh us out!"

"Are you still hung up about those? You have to come at it from a different perspective."

Juanita could feel the enamel of her teeth being scraped away as she ground her jaws together. These arguments never got her anywhere, but she always tried to make a point, the futility making it all the more infuriating.

"Yes, and that's always led to those looks they've given us. I've been seeing more and more since we've started! Do you not notice those!?"

Jamie wasn't fazed. A reaction Juanita was forced to get used to if she was to keep from going insane and strangling the woman.

"That means our work is effective. It's drawing their attention to our piece!"

"Not in the way you think!" *And definitely not to our piece.*

This was getting her nowhere. It rarely did. But her self-contained rage was just itching to reach forward and throttle the oblivious woman half to death. Maybe even further.

“You really ought to lighten up,” said Sunden, her attention shifting back to her new set. “Stressing out isn’t going to do us any favours for the performance.”

Juanita felt an incisor crack.

She fully believed it could have been, but this sound was far louder. That, and Jamie also flinched.

Like the speed of light, Jamie was gone before Juanita could even see her move. Juanita really didn’t feel like getting removed from the premises due to one of Jamie’s outbursts of spontaneity, so letting the bag fall over with a loud clatter, she chased after the artist.

A maze of retreating back through corridors and finely carpeted hallways led her back to the lobby where she spotted Jamie standing with several other people, frozen. Through the space in the crowd, Juanita saw it. One of the lobby’s chandeliers had fallen to the floor, shattering instantly, crystalline shards shredding the deep red carpeting without mercy, scarring the wooden panelling beneath, jutting upwards; a garden of glass brambles.

She squinted as some of the light caught off the glass and permeated her pupils. And as they dilated, she remembered every gala, every glance at her as she gave her best to abide by the material she was given. Never criticizing. Never questioning. Never having an independent bone in her body. Desperate to live, desperate to find something to live for in this cutthroat industry of culture. And in those shards she could see them all. The looks, the condescending elitist gazes boring into her a thousand fold. But in it rested something else. Whether it was of her own volition or the convenient placement of her position, she saw something, and it called to her.

She would never be able to explain, but if she could she would swear again and again that she would have gone to it. Anything to get her away from that insane woman who knew nothing of her own self-appointed craft. And it was then that every clenched muscle finally relaxed. The motion itself was involuntary. The smile was not.

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Jamie was staring down at the glass. It was a miracle no one was under it. She wouldn’t have been met with argument, various passerby still staring at the broken structure, astonished by their good luck. Her thoughts were interrupted by a pull on her shoulders, pivoting her form to face Juanita’s manic expression.

“Jamie, get the equipment.” The woman seemed to be vibrating with excitement, a few hairs falling out of place to lie astray along her creased forehead.

“I...what?”

“The *equipment*, Jamie, get the equipment!”

Now Jamie assumed the role of the perplexed. “I don’t understand what you mean, I—”

“Don’t you see it? You were looking right *there!* *That* is what this installation needs. *Look!*” Juanita spun her back around to observe the wreckage. But all Jamie could see was the jagged remains of a previous beauty.

“Juanita, what are you talking about? Look at this mess, it’s not safe, we have to leave and give the staff some space for them to clear all this up.”

“*Mess!?*”

Juanita’s grip left Jamie’s shoulders. The minor convulsions started to turn into something else. Jamie saw Juanita’s features contort, creases warping her face slowly into a snarl, her lip peeling back to show the grinding of teeth she had always managed to keep so well hidden.

“You call *this* a *mess!*?” her voice was shrill. Jamie never heard her timid associate ever scream like that, let alone wear such ghastly expressions.

People’s attentions were starting to shift from the accident towards the two women.

“Juanita listen,” Jamie spoke softly, trying not to encourage any more of this abnormal behaviour. “It’s not—”

“*No!* *You* listen,” Juanita snapped, jabbing a finger in her direction. “I am *through* with your constant protesting against any single point I try to make, when I finally muster up the courage! *Every* exhibition. *Every* performance. Every single one ends in *disaster*, but you’re too braindead to see it!”

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Juanita brushed past her with a fierce stride, getting closer to the sea of scattered glass. “You see no value in anything except for the worst possible thing there could be! So many years ago I could have been doing something great. And here I am, stuck with you, still going on with this tripe! And I have to suffer through it because it’s the only way I can have a goddamn *home!*”

Her dress caught under her heel, the briskness of her pace having built up a momentum that could not be stopped. Like the voice that was jerked from her throat, Juanita’s back arched at the jarring sensation, and she was airborne. A few seconds that stretched an eternity, ending with a final crash next to the base of the demolition. The brief respite only served to infuriate Juanita further, her fists pounding into the ground with indignant fervour.

“It’s not fair! *It’s not fair!*” Her fists unfurled and snatched up a clear shard for her to inspect, the only thing that could calm her, causing Jamie to gasp in alarm.

“Juanita, put that down!”

But she didn’t hear Jamie at all. Her eyes were plastered to the slender piece she held in her hand, to the spectrum of light flooding off of its ridges. “This is true art.” She was gone. Lost

to the colourful rays emanating from her obelisk. Years of suppression all culminated into one single outburst of pure genuine emotion. And to her, it was blissful.

Juanita's movements felt slow, she could feel a slight rotation, like she was dancing. She felt nothing but joy, something she had not felt in a long time.

In her exuberance, she could not hear the crowd's echoing throes of horror, or feel the warm tickle of scarlet creeping down her arm. It wasn't until she collapsed to the soft carpet, out of breath and vision beginning to blur, that she saw the radiant gleam of the glass that was embedded in her wrist. Jamie appeared to be moving through water, distorted and slow, as she sprinted across the stunning décor of the *Hilton* to reach her partner, just as Juanita's eyes slowly started to shut.