

Corporate Nightmare

Fiction

The day started absolutely normal. Absolutely normal, I swear.

And by normal I mean *normal*. Like, beyond normal. Get up, re-tie my tie twice to make sure it's perfect, make coffee, and go to work. Normal morning-before-soul-sucking-job stuff.

Well, when I got in my car- a used rustbucket with a bajillion miles that the original owners probably got for, like, twenty dollars and a stick of gum- things started going... sideways.

I climbed into my car. It roared to life like it was dying. The world outside was dreary and grey, like snow after three days of rain. It was still pretty dark, so I flicked on my headlights. When they finally came on, though... They were spiraling colors, a kaleidoscope of reds, greens, and impossible blues. They swirled and danced, cutting through the dull morning air like when you filter white light through a prism, and all the rays refract and bounce off themselves until they become a rainbow. I blinked once, twice, and rubbed my eyes. The lights didn't go away. If anything, they got brighter and more vibrant.

I shut the headlights off. I turned them back on. Normal headlights flashed. I just shook my head. Hey, it was early in the morning. Maybe it was some trick of the light, some sort of... atmospheric phenomenon. I dunno what I thought.

I drove into work, pulling into the parking lot. Someone had decided to stick their nice, shiny new Mercedes in my spot. Probably Mark. Ugh, Mark. Such a loser. I snagged the spot

next to him, parking just a little too close on his driver's side. He'd have to squeeze to get in if he didn't want to scratch his precious car. Serves him right.

The next strange thing that happened occurred when I walked into the front desk. I showed my card to the woman sitting there, some secretary lady. She looked up at me, squinting at my card.

"Sir, that is not a corporate issued I.D."

"What?" I looked down at my card. Sure enough, it was covered in similar patterns to the headlights, though it didn't whirl like them. It looked like a third grader had decided to use it for their art project and covered it in melted crayon. My picture wasn't even visible. "Er- sorry. I could've sworn this was it. Uh, maybe it's..." I started rifling through my wallet. I couldn't find any other I.D. That had to have been it, but...

"Ah, Mr. Cole! Just the man I was looking to see." My boss stepped out of the doorway, grinning at me. "It's alright, doll, I know 'em. You really gotta take better care of your stuff, man." The desk lady waved me in, going back to her computer. When I looked over my shoulder, the screen was covered in the colorful eddies.

My boss started talking to me about the latest *reports-he-needed-on-his-desk-by-the-end-of-the-day-or-Cole-the-Board-will-have-me-flayed-I-swear* when I turned to the water jug, the classic kind you'd find in an office that bubbled every so often.

But... the plastic wasn't blue. Or maybe it was, but the water inside certainly wasn't clear. It was filled with the same colors. I stared at it for a long moment. My boss didn't seem to notice, still yammering on and on.

This had to be some kind of prank. Someone messed with my I.D. card and the water jug. Maybe my headlights, too.

He followed me to my cubicle. A headache had started to form between my eyes. I sat at my desk as he leaned over the side. I had no idea what he was talking about. His voice had become the scratching sound of a dry brush on a canvas, until-

“Mr. Cole.. What do you have on your hands? Is that wet paint?”

I spread my palms. They really were covered in globs of wet paint, the same colors and pattern as the headlights and the card and the jug. I stared at them for a moment, before wiping them on my pant legs. All that managed to do was get my pants covered in paint. My hands didn't get any more clean.

“What the...?”

“Mr. Cole, you should know by now it is against company policy to have wet paint in the office.

“That's not dress code.” Mark chimed in from the cubicle to my left.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, bewildered. I obviously didn't want to be covered in paint.

“I'm going to have to ask you to leave.”

“What is happening?” Outside, the windows were suddenly covered in splatters of the multicolored paint, like someone was chucking balloons at them.

A large man suddenly appeared behind me, grabbing my arms, which were now covered in paint as well, making them slick and oily. I did not struggle, however, and allowed him to drag me to the front doors.

He tossed me out of the front doors, who's windows were now opaque, into the rain. I say rain, but, like the jug, it wasn't water. The clouds, the raindrops, all of it was bright and colorful.

I put my hand out to catch some, as I became somehow more drenched in vibrant paint, like if Van Gogh did Carrie instead of Stephen King.

In fact, the whole landscape before me looked like it had been painted with oil, like Monet decided one day to quit the water lilies and turn to suburbia.

I smiled.

And woke up in my art studio, surrounded by my paintings. I had fallen asleep in front of my easel. Thank God, it was just a corporate nightmare.