

There's already giant Christmas trees erected, even though it's mid-November. Their artificial, ice blue glow illuminates the empty mall exterior that me and a fag friend walk by after a punk gig. The singer in the band reminded me of a lover I had some years ago, and left me somewhat scared that the world is just gonna keep pumping out the same punk kids, chaotic and confusedly queer, echoes of people that had been forming for decades now.

It's only in the past year I realised a few important things:

- ★ As a faggot you open out into a weird hall of mirrors
- ★ As a faggot you decide to say things you shouldn't
- ★ As a faggot your phone autocorrects the word to "daffodils"

As me and my fag friend pass by the mall, we fall to laughter when coming across a camping store. In the window is a giant advertising campaign of the alien twink who came on to him at the club recently. This model's name is Ryan. My fag friend says that it makes sense to see Ryan's face printed larger-than-life. I agree, I can't imagine them in person - pore-less, high cheek-boned, lips like gigantic cunt.

I get home at about 2AM. The ambiguous exchange of sexual energy from all my looking makes me horny in this murky way, so I engage in my pathetic post-club ritual where I shake semen out of my dick lazily. I've been on Lexapro (technically the off-brand Lexam) for probably about a year now, and I can still cum but it's an uphill battle and often leaves me wishing that I'd just keep edging.

I'm a platinum card gay - which is embarrassing in 2021 when every cool young person seems casually bisexual - but I've taken to watching straight porn in this weird way to fetishise straight men. They have tattoos on their hands, they're quiet while the women over perform, they smile when they eat pussy, they roll their eyes back in a brief relenting flash when they keenly get their dicks polished. Queers enter this weird battle in sex where we imprint desires between ourselves and others. In my simplified assessment of straights, their sex is between two objects that don't complicate each other.

I wanted to appeal and connect with straight men more, especially the ones I see around who carry skateboards and reveal boxer shorts under jeans, letting us know that their dicks flop around inside, enacting an image of casual boyish-maleness that evokes the MTV I don't fully remember. I buy a cologne online - Commes des Garçons collaboration with Gosha Rubchinskiy (was he cancelled?) - which the MECCA website tells me "Recalls notes of rubber and tar, this edgy, urban scent draws its inspiration from hot sidewalks and the freedom of youth. Wear with ripped jeans and a nonchalant attitude."

I laugh at the quote and buy it cause I like the smell, but I'm still conscious that I'm embarrassingly sold on the ad's message, secretly craving it like specific porn searched for in a private tab. I fantasise that when I walk past these men - unbearably straight - that we will recognise each other's scents like dogs, sniffing at pried asses, opening for a tongue, a finger.

I'm wearing the perfume when we go out to an exhibition opening a week later. The artist who's showing is a good friend, who also knows Ryan, the model with the fucked up pouty lips. She introduces us. They sell confidence, and at once remain hyper-sexual by being an image, but are so desirable that they're totally inaccessible and somehow neutered. My fag friend says when they were gonna fuck that he expected to melt into a puddle like a wicked witch. Speaking to Ryan feels impossible - they shouldn't have a voice. When everyone else is giving same old answers, Ryan doesn't - "Doing a few shows like... oh yeah, I'm doing a show next Saturday, this i-D thing. I'm flying to Tokyo on Sunday at like midnight, then doing Amazon Fashion Week in Tokyo too". They speak with enough excitement that it doesn't feel pretentious, they wrap you up in their energy.

We stay late at the exhibition, drinking until the older gallerists seem pissed off we're still around. Ryan invites everyone (except, obviously, the staff) to kick-ons at their parents house. It's kinda a long way but if we split the uber in bigger groups it'll be cheap. I sit in the front while my fag friend, some random, and Ryan, who all giggle in the back. Ryan proclaims how they always have parties cause their parents are never home. They just got a huge Christmas tree up that we all have to see to believe. I think they're tryna flirt with my pal when they recall that around this time they had a party under the tree that ended in a formless orgy. I feel like a handbag. The uber driver is nonplussed. I picture all the IG

models lying beside a fire, curled up under the tree dropping gifts into arms and orifices that all opened up for them. They know every desire is as pre-formed as a petal, ready for plucking. I imagine them sprawled out on the street beneath the gigantic fake tree at the mall. Since they're all so flawless, they can only be sculptures, laying in caress like the bodies found at Pompeii. The blue light takes all vitality, rendering their heat as frozen concrete.

At Ryan's, we huff nangs under the tree. I think it's a real pine, and although impressive in its neatness, its evenly spaced electric lights feel too neatly dispatched for any real joyous holiday spirit. Turns out there's no fireplace, and everything is crisp and white; carpets, walls, plastic-looking benches. The energy is chilled, everyone just lying all over everyone else, but no one's totally fucked up. I stay slightly aside, one of few people on couches, but no one really notices. Blissed on a nang, it's pornographic to watch everyone on the floor. I could grab any torso clad in pristine elastics and cottons, but they're all like Ryan - it's better to look and admire, just like I'm still at the exhibition. I'm constantly full of hunger. I'm never satisfied. Being horny is cringe.

Someone dims the lights and puts on this Pet Shop Boys song from 2016 called 'The Pop Kids'. It's playing real loud. Ryan and the girlies get up, recognising it immediately from the washy fake choir-y intro. This is them at their best; knowing they're being watched but performing spontaneity and glee. It's so convincing that I wonder if it actually is real. The posh guy who sings on the song evokes "the early 90s", a time before any of us were born, but also after The Pet Shop Boys rose to fame. It's not the band's biography, so we're in unity imagining a beautiful time none of us were present for. It's a song about being young and yearning for a club utopia, a nostalgic dream of a perfect night that's never quite happened.

A straight boy comes downstairs. Maybe he's someone's brother? He's skinny, hairless, and has a punkishly shaved head. He only wears dark brown plaid boxers and white tube socks. I think he's gonna tell everyone off for being too loud, but he smiles at Ryan and the dancers, shimmies past everyone on the floor. They notice but don't get up, too tangled up in each other.

He's holding a beer and moves to an empty gap beside the tree. He starts miming into the bottle and thrashing harder than the song requires, but we all eat it up. By the time the chorus drops - a garish house piano hook designed to be played in a mall, yet still kinda banging - we're all up and jumping more than dancing. It's all very school-disco-core. Many pull out phones, videoing the boy in boxers and socks gleefully screaming. The cold white flashes match the lights of the tree. Everyone slows down while he perfectly lip-syncs this monologue at the bridge: "It was a wet wednesday night / we were worried that nobody would be going out / how wrong we were / When we turned the corner there was already a queue stretching down the corner / we swept straight in..."

The rest of the night isn't really eventful; the dance-floor tapers off and people disappear. I meet the guy who was miming. He comes over while I'm standing at the periphery. We're both sweaty and with his hand on my lower back says he read a recent piece I wrote about Tsai Ming-liang movies. I kinda avoid his compliments cause I'm a dickhead. He introduces me to his girlfriend, a pretty girl with long dark hair and glasses who's quiet but laughs a lot. I stand with her and watch this guy get his jeans and white shirt from the corner of the room. It feels like syrup watching him slide jeans over smooth legs, the zipper pulled up reminding us what could be underneath. She notices me watching and laughs. It's kinda sexier to know your partner is hot rather than yourself, channeling someone else's desire from a distance, passing through your own private life. As he buttons his shirt from the top down, leaving one last peak of a navel, she says they're getting an uber and I can get a ride to my place with them.

The guy sits in the middle, and I don't know if it's leftover nang residue in our brains, but we sort of cuddle, all three in the backseat speeding home too fast for our brains to appreciate. I never get their names, and nothing happens beyond a hand on a leg, my sneaker being kicked off by the tube socks that rub against my bright red Ralph Lauren socks.

That night I have a dream that my house is on fire (I'm always paranoid about electric Christmas lights), so I nonchalantly leave and walk the suburbs. The fire is really distressing, but the dream doesn't let me do anything else but walk. It's only the afternoon, but in the ennui of life (having a home burned down), I sit on some stairs outside a closed cafe. These are fancy houses, but really just glorified apartments because they're so small

but cost so much. In one, there's a window about head-height above the people walking by on the street, lightly shielded by branches. A man is totally naked, laughing loosely and facing out onto the street. We look at each other; I stay still and he locks his eyes on mine. He leans in and kisses the glass towards me.

I wake up with a hard-on. I've finally let the hair over my back grow free and each follicle in the bed receives the sensation of pilled sheets. I feel like a wolf. I roll onto my stomach and fall back asleep. In a new dream - an extension of the previous? - I kneel on a carpet. We share a shaggy affinity. In a moment, lifetimes spill across my spine. I don't cum, but I still feel it building.