

Screen Saver

by Rylan Morrison

Part I

The phone rang in Carl's home office. "I want to see this screen saver Kevin is talking about," it was Beth, Carl's recently separated wife. Their sixteen year old son Kevin has been staying at Carl's house while Beth is house training her new dog, Snapple; a rescue mutt she adopted from outside of the Fairway in Harlem. She explained that she had to do intensive one on one re-training since the previous owner was adamant about feeding the dog with a large, almost comical spoon.

"I don't know what you're talking about...he called you specifically to tell you about a screen saver?" Carl was tight with stress, he is the lead architect and developer on a new condo in the newly gentrified section, DUM-AS, (which stands for Direct U-turn from Manhattan-Almost Scary.) Carl's condo is one of a pair of new condo's erected at the same time. The pair was dubbed "The Lost Sisters" by people in the area because they stick out like a pair of Southern debutantes in a mechanics garage. The other condo was designed by a developer named Kloogin, Carl's primary competitor who appeared from Switzerland one summer and whose modernist ode to castles seem to pop up over night within a block from Carl's developments.

"Well, I'm coming over to drop off his laundry, so I'll just see for myself." Beth hung up the phone after inviting herself over to Carl's brownstone in Park Slope, a few blocks from Beth's three bedroom rental. Carl stood there with his land line in one hand and his blackberry in the other. A series of BBM's sprung up: "Hole shit Carl!" his lead Project Manager mistyped, "collapse on left corner News chan 6 outside get here now!"

There had been concern that the engineer on the project was a sketchy advocate for cheap materials and for having a "let's see what happens" attitude, something no one finds refreshing in an engineer whose chief purpose is exactness and foresight.

Carl flew into the crazy math ones mind formulates right before crisis mode, two steps before instincts react on autopilot, three steps before acceptance of an act out of ones control, four steps before wild blame and disbelief that one's life and career has been forever altered, five steps before maniacal laughter, six steps before finding a solution and moving on. This was the trajectory Carl was set upon and this is why he fell with exhaustion into the upholstered easy chair near the window, a by product of step one.

Kevin heard the buzzer first and struggled with fiber board door of the spare bedroom next to Carl's office. He pulled his t-shirt over his crotch and shimmied into the bathroom to find his sweatpants. The buzzer rang again, a kind of bitchy Beth like buzzer move. Knowing well that Beth couldn't hear through the walls, but as a way to fuel whatever was what about to happen next, Carl belted out "COMING!!" and attempted to marionette himself to standing. "Jesus Christ Dad!" Kevin shot towards Carl as he made his way to the door.

Part II

The three of them stood in front of Carl's desktop, which was littered with open windows. "This is ridiculous," Carl was boiling. "I have to go to the job site, Beth!" he leaned into her. "I can't stand around waiting for a screen saver to appear!!" They all continued to sit or stand, staring, waiting for the screen to turn. "You can change the preferences to make it go on quicker if you need to go so badly," Beth too was becoming impatient, but she had to cling to her reason for stopping by, to see the legendary screen saver that Kevin couldn't contain knowing about. "Just forget it, I shouldn't have even told you mom." Kevin tried to get up from the chair but Beth held down his shoulder.

"Beth, you don't understand," Carl pleaded, "they saw a known arsonist leave Kloogin's property." Carl had used the crazy math and the time they had been standing there to devise a story; one that would develop and become so complex that Beth would have no choice but to feel pity for Carl, and to blame "the sick world we live in."

“What does that have to do with you?” Beth was killing Carl's plot before it developed. Just then the screen turned black and there was silence. By means of random pixels an image appeared; a crude, novice painting of a grand orgy taking place in a tropical setting. Beth gasped. Kevin laughed, and Carl just stood there. “Why...do you even... have this dad?” Kevin managed to get out between laughs. “Yeah, Carl, what is this?”

Carl had no idea why an orgy appeared on his monitor after ten minutes of no activity. Carl had no idea why he made up a story about an arsonist. He just shrugged and stepped back. Beth and Kevin remained fixed to the intricate group sex scenario entangled amongst large ferns, pools of water, an occasional tiger skin loin cloth lifted, shimmering boulders often in the wrong perspective, bodies becoming lumped smudges as the scene dissolved into the large volcano erupting majestically behind them. The orgy-ians were blissfully oblivious to the red rapids of magma, mere minutes from destroying their exposed flesh, and ruining a good time.

“Seriously, Beth, I don't know what that is. My mind is so far from dealing with that, I have a crisis in DUM-AS that I need to get to.” He grabbed his leather briefcase and a few other random bits and pieces of business from his desk and fled.

Part III

Amidst stop and go traffic down Atlantic Ave, the car ride to the job site was a flurry of ten second screaming matches with various members of Carl's development crew over speaker phone. His head was buzzing with strategic plot thickeners to tell Beth, and mental flashes of brush stroked genitalia.

“Beth...we have to rip down the whole project...because of insurance...if they try and pin the burning of Kloogin's condo on me I go to jail...yes that is why we are ripping my down my condo.” Carl imagined this conversation happening over mussels and white wine for some reason. Beth in a handsome silk shirt dress, soft in an aura of candle light, while she sat across from him with her arms crossed, waiting for all of this to make sense to her. “NO NO NO!” Carl

screamed out loud while shaking the steering wheel, breaking into a guttural laugh on the edge of balling his eyes out.

He shook it out, and tried out another script; “Beth, thanks for meeting me here, you look pretty. Listen, Kloogin and I are partners now, we are going to demo *both* of our condo's, come to an aesthetic agreement and rebuild. It's a good thing, a power move.” He knew that Beth would never buy this, any of it, it was over, they were over. She finally had what she always wanted, her own room, albeit five blocks away, a pet, and to excuse her son from her life when it was convenient.

But there was something desperate about wanting to see the screen saver and wanting to be there when Carl was there, there was interest, curiosity, a fleck of hope. And this was the kernel that Carl was trying to pop open with his fable. He had to be the good guy, the one who needed her, the innocent victim. “That's it!!” Carl sped with more fluidity.

When he pulled up to the site Tom Sacamouth, the surveyor, rushed to Carl's car. “We have it under control Carl, we think it was more than structural, it may have been something historical, below the surface.” Tom was walking almost side ways, talking fast with lots of hand gestures. “Thanks for the update, Tom, where's the crew?” Tom, stopped and pointed towards the fallen sister, with yellow teeth falling out of the left side of her mouth, her eyeglasses smashed on her face, a few strands of rebar poking out like stray hairs. A mere block away Kloogin's snobby, darker sister, with elegant black details, pressed linen-like paneling stared, with a “Who? Me?” look from her empty glass lobby.

All Carl had to do now was stick to the conspiracy, position the players, document the evidence and convince everyone else beyond doubt. “Alright men, let's get the facts straight.” Carl positioned one leg on a tipped cinder block and scanned the small anxious crew, the engineer was sitting Indian style and eating a falafel. “What time was it when you last saw Kloogin?” There was a dumbstruck pause across their faces. The engineer stared mid chew. “You think *Kloogin* is responsible for this?” Sacamouth asked with serious

concern. "Woah, woah, woah," Carl held up a hand. "I said let's stick to the *facts*." A steelworker raised his hand, "um, I saw him getting into an SUV on Gold Street, um, like, two days ago."

Carl stared at the sky and sighed; "I'm talking about yesterday, when THIS happened!!" pointing at the rubble. "Carl, man, no one was on the site, it happened at about 4 in the morning," the engineer said cracking open a bottle of San Pelligrino. "Maybe it was aftershock, from that earthquake in Virginia.... or, or Hurricane Irene loosened the sediment underneath," the steelworker chimed in.

"Are you kidding me?!" Carl held up his hand in a backslap motion, "This wasn't natural, this wasn't an *accident*, this was sabotage!" He stormed off to the trailer parked on the site, finding the door still locked he fidgeted with his keys and got himself inside.

Part IV

"Yes, I saw the news Carl, I can't believe it, Kloogin?" Carl had called Beth right after initiating an impromptu press conference with News Channel 6. "I know, it's unbelievable." There was a knock on the trailer door. "Look Beth, the FBI are here...I have to go..." Carl had no idea who it was outside, but the energy between him and Beth was coming closer to shore, and needed more waves to keep it afloat. "Carl, be safe, call me tonight."

It was Kloogin, leaning against the wooden, temporary railing outside the trailer door. He was wearing an elegant black windbreaker suit, black ankle leather boots, and a black Gortex baseball cap. His Alpine features were sullen, deep shadows below his eyes, his lips were chapped, and he hadn't shaved. He looked rough, but wealthy-rough, which would still get him in to a private event.

"Well, well, well." Carl took the shortest route through his story, "looks like you came to confess, Kloogin." Kloogin shuffled a bit, staring down at his boots, "what would I confess, Carl?" Carl gestured a strong fast hand gesture towards the mess, the news van, and the village of workers camped out until further notice. Kloogin squinted under his rim, and turned back to Carl, "Why would I do

this? Why would I want to hurt you? We need each other, I need you, Carl.” Kloogin said pointing to his chest, “we are a movement, we help define the other. We compliment one another, our buildings give forgotten areas new names, life. Together we dance, alone we stand still. Why can't you see outside of your fear? Why can't you allow yourself to come to the other side? You have to heal in order to dance again, I'm just saying Carl.” Kloogin stepped down the three steps from the trailer. “I'm just saying friend, I'm just saying.” He pulled up the hood of his windbreaker and jumped into the back seat of the SUV waiting for him, taking off down the street.

The news anchor and a cameraman, along with a few of Carl's crew scurried towards him, anxious to take whatever was said between the two men and run with it. Before they could fully approach, Carl yelled out “NO COMMENT,” and shut the trailer door behind him.

“This is News Channel 6, reporting live from the semi-collapsed condominium in the DUM-AS section of Brooklyn, no injuries are reported. Earlier today the lead developer Carl Long made a statement regarding the collapse...”

“It has come to my attention that Kloogin LLC, a competing developer, is the primary suspect in causing the collapse, we have serious reason to believe that this was an attempt to sabotage this development...an act of terror.”

The anchor man held his ear piece and continued, “only minutes ago Stev Kloogin, of Kloogin LLC, made an appearance here at the scene of the crime, who spoke with Mr. Long, the only part we were able to catch was from Kloogin ‘I'm only saying, friend, I'm only saying.’ before leaving the premises in a black SUV. No official statement made by officials as of yet as this story develops. Back to you Lemar.”

Part V

“Thanks for meeting me here.” Carl draped his blazer on the wooden chair, piano music lingered around the deep corners of the bistro in Fort Greene. “You always liked it here, so I thought...” She leaned towards him, her face looking distorted in the candle light,

she kept her pashmina on, making her figure look lumpy and triangular behind the small table collaged with street scenes of Paris. Beth interrupted him, "Carl, what's going on, are you alright?"

"What's this all about? I can take Kevin back, Snapple is approachable..." Carl looked confused at the proposition since it was assumed all along she would take Kevin back, he shook his head no, and pulled in his chair. "Listen, I want to say something...to you." He had her attention. "I've made a lot of mistakes, I've made lots of promises I couldn't keep, or didn't mean..." Beth looked insulted. "Carl, you're not going to embarrass yourself are you? We are better separated, you know that." Carl, stuck in mid sentence "...no, I'm am not asking for you to come back home, just listen. I'm sorry for not seeing how I was before, that it took me this long to see how afraid I was, how paranoid, how manipulative I was..."

The waiter appeared at the table. "May I start you off with a beverage?" Carl's palm open towards Beth to order first. "Yes, I'll have a Chardonnay, and I think we are ready to order." Her eyes were asking Carl if this was ok. "Yes, we'll both have the mussels," Carl responded.

