

What if the Dungeon Closes

by Tim Jones-Yelvington

This was around the time when all the restaurants started closing. We'd go out to dinner and find our first choice padlocked, windows white-washed, chairs balanced treacherously on tables. When we got to our second choice, our third choice, our fourth choice, it'd be packed. No one was spending any money, yet everyone went out to eat. And for the restaurant lucky enough to secure their patronage, a stay of execution.

"I feel terrible for all my friends who are losing their jobs," Marlena said, crunching her salad. "It's like the bottom's falling out. People are falling, hanging from the sides of buildings screaming 'help! help!' like in those cartoons from when we were kids."

I nodded. I was tired of this conversation about cartoons from the 1980's.

"It's times like these I'm glad I left corporate America."

Marlena was a professional dom. Men paid her to whip and insult them. She was always telling me how much less exploited she felt than when she'd worked as an administrative assistant.

"You feel like your job is secure?" I asked.

"Most of the time," she said. "But then we'll have a day with fewer clients, and I'll start to worry... I mean what if the dungeon closes? What would I do then?"

I pictured an iron grate crashing, locking. I thought about Marlena's

clients, lonely men, wondered how they'd get by. They'd listen to stale, recorded insults in cramped apartments. They'd whip their own asses, dissatisfied because they always knew exactly where the whip would land. This reminded me of myself trolling internet sex sites, firing five-word missives to Adonises carved from clay, then grabbing my sagging stomach and thinking better of it, erasing my messages, erasing my profile, creating a new one the following day.

It was dark outside when Marlana and I left the restaurant. Winter was coming, the sun set early. Marlana threaded her arm through mine and walked me home. Around the block, shops shuttered, never to reopen.

