

Boxes

by XXXX

The boxes were unusually flaccid that morning, because of the humidity and the bad weather. The glue wasn't sticking, and the integrity of the boxes, no matter how thick, were beginning to fail. Some clients called over to complain about the defective products. Most were gallant. Some were not. Mostly we promised it would never happen again, but this was like promising them that we could control the weather, and as industrious as our workers were, we could not afford to commission a team of shamans to ensure the clarity of the skies through regular blood sacrifices. Our capital, as it existed in multiple bank accounts, could not handle it. I oversee them myself, through rigorous computer-assisted accounting, a skill I had to learn myself by reading books of increasing difficulty and mathematical involvement, along with management, business, and sales.

After five years of college—an extra year gained by a persistent exercise of incompetence—studying literature and literary theory, I found myself at a desk, at my mother's desk, to be precise, as the assistant general manager, the chief accounting officer, the head human resources manager, and as a sales representative. She spends most of her time now playing slot machines on Facebook. “The workers get ideas,” she told me. “You must make sure they don't get ideas by being there, managing them.” A few months ago she installed cameras around the facility so she can watch them from home, but blurry black and white smudges going about their business can only portray so much. She took inspiration from the Bible, as devoted Catholics such as herself were wont to do, and sent her only son.

I called her and told her about the droopy boxes all around Manila, our boxes in different houses and offices and warehouses, sagging in unison as if that was our intention. I tell her the clients were getting

irate. I tell her I studied cadence and verse, rhetoric and sentence-structure. It was holding a few of them back, but most just wanted their boxes to hold their contents, like containers were supposed to do, as was their Telos. Sometimes I phrase things like that—"We must restore these material boxes to the perfection of the Idea, to that Ideal Box in the World of Forms, as Plato reminds us..."—so that I wouldn't feel as if I wasted five years of my life, or am proceeding to waste five months of it.

"We'll handle it," she said. "Your father is on the phone with the clients' bosses."

"Ok," I said, and hung up.

I slumped back in my seat and looked out the window. There was a street vendor selling food to workers on break. I saw Cherry, my executive secretary, eating some fishballs, poking them with a stick while talking to another worker I couldn't recognize. Sometimes there wasn't much to do. Cherry does a lot of the housekeeping. Mostly there are clients to deal with. Most of the time I ask Cherry to let me file the stray papers I find randomly throughout the office. At first she would remind me that doing this was beneath my dignity. I remind her that I have worked very hard over a course of maybe ten years to ensure that none of that silly little thing remained.

In the afternoon, an email arrived. It spoke in the strongest terms possible about the defective boxes, once in a while making references to "trustworthiness" and "social responsibility." There were photos of the boxes involved, which by then were fragile, malformed cubes of paper that almost resembled trash, had it not appeared that perfectly fine bottles were in them.

I decided I should reply. I opened a window and thought for a while what a businessman would say, something reassuring, stern, and professional but also deceptively human and friendly. For a while I

recalled what I would write if I were still myself. I typed: "Go fuck yourself. You bought it you're responsible for it. Shove it up your ass and maybe then it will be dry as a bone." I laughed privately. I erased the whole thing with a deep breath and wrote: "Sir, we have received your complaint. Please rest assured that we are doing all we can to resolve this issue and are happy to address all your concerns."

I hit send and reclined on my chair.

