

## Hallelujah

James is sitting in the living room with the cat while Terry is at the computer. He's shirtless, Terry is, and he lets out a long sigh. "Coffee?" says James.

"Sure," says Terry. Business is slow, he tries to smile, but it's harder to do so these days. He rubs his neck and reads the gray messages, wanting to make enough money to be able to delete them. But no one has shown up. No one with money that is. James brings in the coffee, putting on a brave face and staying out of view of the webcam. Terry doesn't look at him. *Thanks*, he sends a dm on Twitter instead. James's off to the side, making sure the cat is content to stay put. He may have to shut him up in the bedroom later. He sends *YW*, instead, and although the heater is on and the room is 78 degrees Fahrenheit, he feels cold. Cold despite his clothes.

James nestles in with his book, and tries to read the words, but he only stares at the page instead. Terry clacks on the keyboard, sniffs and puts his shirt back on. As Terry runs his fingers through his hair, James watches and says nothing, his mouth purses. *You ok?* He asks, but Terry looks at his phone and then sets it aside. He clacks on the keyboard, and then the speakers ring. Terry removes his shirt again and smiles and sends air kisses across the world through the webcam.

He hates that smile on Terry and hates himself for hating it. Terry had just barely said "hi" to James when he came home from work. It had been a long day for James, but a good one, he had earned another client and his pay would be decent that Friday. "Cool," was the most Terry could say to him. Terry is typing more now, and faster and the speakers ring violently. Terry gets up and removes his pants, then lifts the camera and lets the world get a better view of the bulge beneath his boxers.

A hole yawns open within James, and as Terry looks glances at him, he attempts a smile, but it dies stillborn on his lips. James tells himself it's getting late without looking at the time. The cat that was sitting beside him rolls over and stares at him with its bright orange eyes, he sighs and rubs the cat's belly before getting up. He hated the cat, and he hated his fellow gays, and he hated- no. That is too much, but the thought sticks in the back of his mind. He casts one last glance towards Terry. The computer screen casts him in pale blue and pink light while the speakers ring violently some more, and he removes the underwear. His pale bubble butt then turns, and Terry is facing James now while he moons the camera. Their eyes meet, and their lips both purse, acknowledging one another. James walks into the dark bedroom, leaving the cat splayed and writhing on the couch for attention.

He pulls out his phone, creating a cone of blue light surrounding the silhouette of his head on the ceiling above the bed. He thinks about telling Terry goodnight on Twitter but doesn't. *He probably doesn't even miss me*, is what he is thinking. Instead, he opens a private browser on his phone and goes to a cybersex site. He doesn't log in, despite promotional offers flashing at him, and scrolls down to a familiar face. When he taps the picture with his finger, there is his living room. In the foreground is a coffee cup with pictures of fruit on it, in the background, a fat orange cat with bright orange eyes cleans himself as he sits atop his scratching

post. Terry is splayed out naked in the office chair and is beginning to masturbate. James's eyes descend below the video feed towards the comments, below the automated message from Terry urging him to make an account. The hole inside James widened into a void and he silently heaved. It was one of James's bad nights when he was in a downward swing. The messages, all from people with lewd names, names dreamt of in toilet stalls in high school, were terrible. In his mind, he could see these people coming up to Terry, talking dirty, using him for their fetishes and fantasies. They were like phantoms, one and all, and Terry would respond to them with lewd emojis, driving them phantasms wild. James could imagine them spewing their ectoplasm and then leaving Terry in this void broken, and bloody because his work was done. On the phone's screen, Terry smiled and leaned in towards the computer, and began typing. Then he laughed, he laughed, and James could hear it echo from the next room. Then the video feed disappeared and was replaced with a screen saying that Henry Wilde was in an exclusive private show. The laughter continued in the next room. James turns off the phone and curls into himself on the bed, fully clothed.

In the darkness he weeps.

James was lying there for a long time, though it only seemed like a few minutes to him. He was lost inside his head, seeing Terry's smile and hearing his laugh echo in his head. The living room had been silent for the longest time. He doesn't move as the door creaks open. *He's just letting the cat in, so he doesn't get in the way*, James's mouth tastes of bitter tears, his extremities feel cold and numb. He feels numb all over, truthfully. The door then closes, and James doesn't move at all.

Terry lays on his back next to James. In the darkness he watches the darker patch of James's curved back. He watches as the breaths try to steady themselves into a sleep-like rhythm. Terry licks his lips and decides to say nothing. He didn't cry anymore, couldn't cry anymore, but on nights like this, when he turned his head while laying down, a stream would trickle down his cheek and into his pillow. He had hurt James, he knew that. He lay there behind James's mountain-like spine and shoulders and just watched, he wanted to put his hand on James's shoulder, to kiss his cheek. James pretended to sleep, and knowing that, he left him alone.

Terry turned his head towards the ceiling and stared up into the inky pool overhead. He felt numb where he felt his heart should have been, he felt cold, cold, and tired. He had used what energy he had online, and he was sure not one of the visitors to his room cared for anything more than his s ass or mouth or cock. Except, perhaps for the man who liked armpits. Terry had to smile at all of them, to make them feel welcome, accepted, attractive. The only private show he had was a man who had pretended to be nice but then ended by calling Terry a whore.

Terry was unable to cry anymore, but streams trickled down at night as he rested his head on the pillow. He swallowed a bit of air, and his throat made a sort of like a mattress spring. James then stirred. "Good night?" he said, his voice was raspy and hollow.

"No," Terry whispered, "there aren't any good nights anymore." In the darkness, their hands met and touched. Terry lifted James's hand to his lips and kissed his hand, James placed

their closed hands at his breast. As the sunlight shone around the bedroom's blackout curtains, they fell asleep by each other's sides.