

Red Room

Bells chime from inside the lit computer screen, the number four bathed in a circular red at the top right corner. Your feet slap the wooden floorboards in your bedroom as you groggily make your way to the front of the screen, seeming to respond to the bells' chiming with the harsh creaking of the decades-old architecture. You then claim the space offered by the fragile frame of your desk chair and position yourself firmly in its snug fit, your weight getting swallowed by its left rear leg which seems to dig its way down the floor in your room. A voice in your head warns that it could collapse at any moment, but you do not mind.

You have dozed off again, but the black on the other side of your room's window tells you that it is still nighttime. The computer is still on, its charger light glaring in a deep orange. You have fifteen minutes at most, you realize, before it completely shuts down.

The number four at the top right of your screen pulls your attention. There are four unread messages waiting for your response: one from your friend from high school, one from a random suitor you've been dying to reject, another from your mom, and the latest from a group chat with your college organization. You open the latest one, the only one still popping up new updates every second or two. Everyone is talking about a link sent by the org jokester, stooge. He got the nickname after a petty run-in with one of the org's alumni. He could have been put on probation after that, but not one of the org's executive committee members bothered upon learning that stooge was just "fooling around" and acting on a dare. Not a single word came from the regular members either. You scroll up until you see the first message sent earlier that night.

stooge: YO GUYS CHECK THIS OUT !!!!!

Mara replied to stooge: it's late wth r u rambling abt

Dave replied to Mara: dude's been like this since he was an app yk

Sammy replied to stooge: Spill it, man

stooge: OKOK WELLLLLL

Lily replied to stooge: Bruh what is it now??

Mara: someone really needs to kick him out of this gc asap

stooge: WAIT A GODDAMN MINUTE GUYS I WAS COPYING THE LINK

stooge: HERE IT IS

stooge: www.perfectecstasy.com/redroommaster

stooge: PASSWORD: afTERRhOuRs

Vivian: What is that supposed to be?

stooge: FUNNN ENTERTAINMENTTTT

Lily replied to stooge: Huh?

stooge: DONT WORRY GUYS MY FRIEND HAS GOT IT ALL COVERED

Dave replied to stooge: hol' up what is going on?

stooge: YALL JUST NEED TO GO TO THE LINK AND ENTER THE PASSWORD

stooge: TOO BAD THE OTHERS AREN'T ONLINE

stooge: BUT HEY THOSE OF U HERE CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT NOW

stooge: THE LIVESTREAM'S USUALLY PAID BUT MY FRIEND THOUGHT AN
ALL-ACCESS PROMO IS A GOOD IDEA

Sammy replied to stooge: This is sketchy af

Mara replied to Sammy: everything stooge says is sketchy imo

Dave: but we all love him anyways lol

stooge: CMON GUYS DONT BE BABIES

stooge: IM WAITING FOR THE LIVESTREAM RN AND THERE ARE LIKE, AT
LEAST 300 VIEWERS !!!! IT'S JUST ABOUT TO START !! YALL ARE
MISSING OUT IF U DONT WATCH

Nothing comes after aside from nine circular pictures of nine people that have seen stooge's last message. Your fingers have been itching to discover whatever show is about to go down, then appears a fifth unread message directly from stooge. His profile picture the color of dried blood stands out perfectly against the light of your dying device.

stooge: HEYYY U SAW MY MESSAGE

stooge: GO TO THE LINK NOW

stooge: www.perfectecstasy.com/redroommaster

stooge: PASSWORD: afTERRhOuRs

stooge: 4 OF OUR ORGMATES R ALREADY WATCHING THE LIVESTREAM

Ahh, stooge, what is it this time?

You hear a low grumbling. When was the last meal you ate? Sixteen hours ago? Never mind that. You could eat this entertainment or livestream or whatever it is for breakfast. Stooge might have some loose screws in his head, but you cannot bear not knowing about all the fun. Even you know stooge is fun. They have a term for this: FOMO, the fear of missing out. You've got not much time left, anyway. That deep orange still colors the charger light of your computer. Thirteen minutes.

Your mouse cursor finds its way to the middle of the screen, hovering over the grainy curves of the letters in that cryptic link stooge sent.

You wait. For what? You don't know either.

At last, you click. Another tab opens but nothing appears until after some seconds later, as always is the case. (Your computer's been running for at least 7 years now, and your local internet has never really been as reliable as they advertise it to be.) Then pops a single red message box against a solid black background.

PLEASE ENTER THE PASSWORD TO CONTINUE:

Your fingers make the sound of a ticking clock as they click on the keyboard. Seconds later, another message box turns up.

DO YOU LIKE —?

A garbled voice recites this question. Who and what the hell is that? Your eyebrows scrunch up in confusion as you click "X" to close the message.

Another message comes in. The notification tells you it's from stooge.

stooge: HAVE FUN :)

I'll reply to him later, your mind goes, then a black rectangle forms on the left side of the screen, a crimson-red play button floating in its middle. Above the rectangle are the words "Perfect Ecstasy" in bold and a gray subscribe button. Below is what you conceive to be the title: "Sun Oct 29 2023 23:55:41 PST." Underneath that, in smaller, fainter letters, are the words "From: REDROOMMASTER | Started livestreaming 2 mins ago." At the far bottom is a text box assigned for live comments.

Is this the fun stooge is hyping so much about? You read the title again and chuckle to yourself. Whoever thought that title was going to lure in viewers definitely needs some marketing lessons.

A sneer is still painted on your face as you click the play button, and then, as if by some epiphany, you remember something. This is from stooge. Stooge! A “fun entertainment” sent by the stooge himself! This something is far from nothing, and not a single soul but you must hear a single decibel from this video. So you bend over your desk and pull the bottom drawer out. You let out a soft grunt as you search through the tangled web of black and white wires for your earphones, then comes a scratching noise. The left rear leg of your chair has burrowed its way further back across your bedroom floor, causing your weight to sink deeper into its direction. Have you perhaps gained a few kilograms lately?

You finally find your earphones and plug them into your computer, but what is it with old objects and the strange buildup that always gets collected in them? Your fingers struggle to stab the earphone jack into your computer. Once. Twice. Thrice. There. Finally.

You straighten your back, careful not to add any more burden to your already fractured leg chair. The livestream has just loaded, and you wonder whether your computer can survive to finish it.

A masked man waves on the screen — or is it a woman? You can’t really tell, not when the person’s entire head is shielded from sight by a full-head mask. The person’s all-black, loose-fitting ensemble does not help either. Not an inch of the person’s skin is visible to you, except for the eyelids that roof the pair of deep-set eyes, their upturned outer edges telling you that a smile is lurking from behind. Is this stooge’s friend? You hear yourself muttering under your breath.

The person waves a second time, as if to brandish an unseen weapon, and then moves away from the camera to reveal a room bathed in a bloody red color. It’s the same red you remember from the photography class you have taken before, the similar shade that washes over the room where photographs are developed, except this time, it is not photos that are hanging on the strings cutting across it. Knives of all kinds hang suspended along them. You squint and lean toward the screen in an attempt to make out their differences, but you could

only name a few. On the walls are splatters of some liquid you can't exactly identify, but your eyes follow a trail dripping down to the black-and-white checkered flooring that is soon dyed red. A lump in your throat forces you to swallow hard. You catch a glimpse of your computer's charger light that is now blinking in that same deep orange. Eight minutes.

The masked person has been circling a woman whose arms and legs are chained onto a wooden chair in the middle of the room. She is gagged, and a soiled cloth is wrapped around her head, concealing her eyes from the gaze of your own. She is dressed in nothing but her underwear, its black material slightly glistening underneath the dim light of the lone red fluorescent light bulb hanging overhead as if it's soaked. Soaked with what?

Your ears are flooded with continuous beeping sounds as live comments begin flooding the right side of your computer screen.

ZoominZit: how long is this gonna be for? 11:58pm

pickapoke: what are u talking about? it's literally just started 11:58pm

ZoominZit: yeah... but idk how much longer i can stand that pimple on her face 11:59pm

pickapoke: oh my god! where?! 11:59pm

ZoominZit: it's on her right cheek 11:59pm

pickapoke: jesus christ! that's huge! 11:59pm

ZoominZit: REDROOMMASTER!! DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!!! 11:59pm

Then you see an ad pop up at the bottom left of your computer screen.

Achieve that smooth, glowy skin in as fast as 7 days for as low as P495!

It's the same anti-acne facial wash you were talking about with your high school friend the other day. You have thought of purchasing it yourself, to be honest—early adulthood has been bringing you nothing but clogged pores and blackheads, inflamed skin and pustules—but your weekly college allowance always cries in objection. Ugh whatever, you think to yourself while running your knuckles over that painful bump on your chin.

At the mention of the pimple on the woman's face, your own eyes scramble to find that blemish yourself, your eyeballs whirring in their sockets until, at last, you do. The inflamed bump is sitting just below her right cheekbone and is surrounded by some dark spots as you

have examined. It is like a sunny side up egg but with the whites made red, its yolk swelling and runny and ready for a climactic burst. It is the kind that hurts with even the slightest touch, the kind that towers and casts a dark shadow when viewed from the side and under the harsh sunlight. You find yourself typing a comment in pure disgust as pure as the concentration of bacteria you know inhabits the woman's face.

Anonymous9437: You could tell her to at least wash her face, you know.

"Don't fret, ZoominZit, pickapoke, and every one of you watching." The masked person says in a tone that sounded, more than anything, far from the human voice's normal frequency. It registers in your ears like a machine that hasn't been oiled for the past four decades: distorted and corrupted. "I'm just gonna... put some calming cream on this part," the masked person announces as they scan the woman's right cheek. "You've got some disgusting shit resting on your face, lady. A model couldn't look like this, eh? Must be the reason you're no longer one. And there's even pus!"

With that, the masked person theatrically gasps, raising their hands to their mouth in reverse jazz. "Wait... I don't have a calming cream... but I suppose you do 'cuz you're a woman, am I right?" The masked person bends down and points to the woman, giggling in bouts. They reach for one of the knives hanging from above, one that you suppose is a paring knife. It's among the smallest in the set but still sharp enough to have the woman's flesh punctured as the masked person stabs her right cheek with it. Once. Twice. Thrice.

It is now your turn to gasp at the sudden attack. After the first stab, the woman does not move an inch, but once the blood starts pouring out of her holed cheek, you also start to hear a disgruntled groan from her, her arms and legs writhing in their chains. It was a brief moment of what seemed like an initial shock and not knowing what had just happened. There were only pressure and the feeling of something wet filling up the crater that now lies in the woman's cheek and into which the pus-filled bump has sunk. Then, its uneven edges start to sting and well up like a paper cut as they make way for those thin spurts of blood to trail down her jaw.

The masked person wastes no time and scoops the blood dripping from the woman's cheek with the blunt side of the paring knife, lifting it back up and then sliding it across her stained face as if to spread some organic, healing ointment.

“Perfecto!” exclaims the masked person as their body convulses with laughter. Another stream of live comments fills the right of your screen.

NightStalker: Now you’re ready for date night, mi lady :* 12:01am

Acingluna59: ready? she ain't half as ready as ur excited dick is 12:01am

NightStalker: How y’know I have a dick and not something else, huh? 12:01am

You blink fast in disbelief, recognizing the same comments coming out of that “suitor” everyone is pushing you to date. That is not a suitor to you, however, but a vulture patiently biding its time until it can leap onto you and feast on the carrion of your corpse.

NightStalker: Fuck it I want a taste! Come at her, redroommaster! 12:01am

Your computer screen glitches as the same message box from a few minutes ago flashes.

DO YOU LIKE THE —?

You close the message box yet again as two bell chimes fill your ears. Two new messages. You see one from Stephen, that asshole of a suitor.

Stephen: babe when are u gonna say yes to me? im too horny right now i cant even focus on what im watching

And another from stooge.

stooge: R U ENJOYING SO FAR? :D

You give no response to either of them and roll your eyes, turning your attention back to the masked person who belches that same, maniacal laugh, its sound now playing an unceasing requiem in your own head. They trace the outline of the woman’s bloodied collarbone, going down to reach for her heaving chest. They cup her breasts, squeezing them and chortling as they do so, and go down even further to slide their hand into her undergarment. The woman quivers, and, if you are certain, might have even emitted a soft moan. You feel a hot breath under your nose, discomfited yet somehow aroused by the scene. And then the masked person speaks.

“You, you vain bitch... I think you deserve a pearl necklace tonight,” the masked person says as they dig their hand deeper into the woman’s soaked, skimpy clothing, “but I’m gonna... I’m gonna pleasure you first. Isn’t this what you models want? Flaunting those tits, those asses.” The bulge of their hand from under the woman is now moving in a small circle, making her arch her back and open her legs wider as she lets out suppressed moans. The roof of your mouth feels dry now, and you swallow hard as you feel your own undergarment becoming hot and damp. The masked person takes their hand out and examines their index and middle fingers. They glisten under the dim light of the room, and you see globs of pale white liquid adorning their lengths. Then the masked man brings those fingers down into the woman’s mouth, momentarily taking off the gag drenched in her saliva, and swirls them inside, greasing the insides of her cheek with her own lube. Your legs twitch at this scene, and you blink fast to try to suppress a pressure building up inside your hips, but your release comes nonetheless.

“Now you deserve a pearl necklace,” declares the masked person as if the necklace – whatever it is – is a price to be won. The woman lets out a loud gasp as they bring the gag back into her mouth and pull the chef’s knife from the string of knives above. She sounded like all the air in the room had been sucked out, leaving her to drown in her own blood. “Should I put it here?” The masked person scratches their head while pointing the knife’s tip at the woman’s neck. What a deranged actor, you hear your own breathy murmur.

“No, no, no,” the masked person is now shaking their head, “the night is still young. You’ve got more to enjoy.” Their voice trails off as they slit through the woman’s chest just below her collarbone, blood drippings ornating the deep curve cut against her raw flesh. “I don’t know if they make red pearls, but they should now. This is gorgeous.” The masked person continues. The woman could only let out a faint whimper, the beads of sweat on her rusty skin becoming saturated with red as her own blood possess them. You spot another thing that has turned red: your computer’s charger light. Four minutes.

Perturbed is not strong enough a word to tell your current state. Your body is numb, super-glued in place in your seat. Its perfect fit for you is no longer a worthy contender to counter the vile digital scene of the past five minutes or so. Another surge of live comments pulls you out of your daze.

contagioussucker101: that sagging belly's not gonna go away on its own, would it?

Cmon redroommaster! give her a better shape! 12:03am

daddyoww: what a fuckin good idea 12:03am

0bsessedcarnivore: @contagioussucker101 i second that :D 12:03am

A muffled laugh comes from the masked person just as your computer gets notified of a new message. You take a look at the other tab. It's from your mom.

Mom: Hey, honey, are you still awake? You missed dinner! I prepared a healthy and nutritious meal for you today. And don't worry, this will make you fit into that Christmas outfit better. 🙄

You scoff at your mom's message and go back to the livestream, brutally digging your fingers onto the keyboard as you type a new comment.

Anonymous9437: ALL WE WANT ARE FUCKING SKINNY BITCHES!

The masked person has their left hand suspended in the air as if it's trying to reach something. Their muffled laugh starts anew as they walk toward the camera. Their eyes go from right to left a couple of times until a burst of indistinct laughter erupts again from them.

"You fat whore!" Their mechanically distorted voice comes out as a rumble as they approach the woman, gliding their gloved hand along the dangling knives above. They stop just a few inches before her and examine a particular knife, running an index finger along its smooth, silver edge.

"Don't worry, darling. I'm gonna mold you in just a few. This carving knife..." the masked person continues, nodding their head in curious satisfaction, "...it never fails to get the job done. Not even those surgeries are a match for this. Soon you'll be looking perfect... like a sculpture!" They cackle, their shoulders bobbing up and down while gripping the knife's brown handle and removing it from suspension.

The masked person closes the gap that was once there between them and the woman and traces her navel with the shiny tip of the knife. "I am guessing, and so do others, that you might need a bit of a trim... around here, here, and here," they say in that ghastly tone you have

now echoing in your head while they sketch their impending gory art on the woman's body. "It might hurt, sting, and bleed a bit, but what is beauty without a little nasty pain?"

Yeah, no dress is gonna look good on you with that stomach, you hear yourself thinking with your jaws clenched. Your fingers are curled in tight grips on the edges of your desk as you await what happens next.

One swift swing of the masked person's arm is sufficient to form a precise slash with the carving knife directly on the woman's midsection. They go for a second, then a third swing, creating a longer, deeper gash and exposing her insides out in the open. You feel queasy at the sight of a nude-pink rope giving in to gravity and peaking their way out, looking more like red under the single glare of light from above. You have seen this before, or at least, something similar. It is those long sausages that are hanged and displayed at the local market with all their meat and fat wrapped in some transparent collagen casing and tied into pre-portioned lengths. But those hold their shape better than this one. This one is a long, semi-deflated mass woven with snakes of veins and small and big clumps of blood, and its rubbery skin boasts a particular glimmer under the weight of the woman's body.

The masked person is not satisfied, apparently, as they go punch the chair from behind her, making one end of this rope—her large intestine—come sagging and falling onto the checkered floor. It is now a curled up lump of shiny guts hanging onto the woman's gaping and blood-leaking midsection.

The masked person erupts in a peal of roaring laughter, poking the woman's now semi-deflated stomach and pointing to the camera and back again. "Now she's perpetually fit!" You strain to squint your eyes and take the best look you can at the woman from your side of the screen. You detect no sign of activity from her except for the continuous pouring out of blood from her wounds. Her head is perched limply on her neck, her shoulders are slumped, and her skin is unrecognizable beneath the dried paint of life that colors it from the outside.

Your own body is immobile too as you sit aghast. Your eyes are glued to the far end at the back of the room, but you can still see a new text pop up just below the rectangular video box:

331 watching now | 298 have liked this video

You can also see in the periphery your computer's charger light now blinking red. One minute.

A ding comes from the other tab. Why does stooge keep messaging you?

stooge: LIVESTREAM'S ABOUT TO COME TO A CLOSE ! HOPE U ENJOYED
THAT AS MUCH AS I DID !! MAKE SURE TO SEE HOW IT ENDS :">

Again, you send him no reply and go back to the livestream. But then the screen starts to glitch, and as you await another one of those annoying message boxes to pop up once more, a different one appears this time. No, it's not actually a message box, but a list. It is a long list of names of people you do not know except for the few ones that you recognize at the end:

Dave
Sammy
Vivian
Lily
Stephen

Then what flashes next is a photo with you in the middle of it. Your eyebrows are scrunched up, and your face is lit only by the light of your computer screen with the deep orange tinge of its charger light. You know when exactly you made that face, or when that picture was taken.

The photo flashes once again and disappears before you can attempt to move a limb. Then the masked man approaches the camera – you. Their eyes are bloodshot and red, their veins like overgrown vines encroaching on the single dying border that separates you two. They utter one last line in that rumbling, distorted mechanical voice:

“Do you like the Red Room?”