

I'll Pay More If You Let Me Watch

By Zoe Farzam

There was God in the scan-lines
last night. A palpable Presence seeped
its way out of the box and manifested
itself as a Cathode-ray-cathedral before my
very eyes. Dimly lit circles of obstructed
teeth formed themselves into rows before
being molded into a smile-shape and driving
in circles around my head.

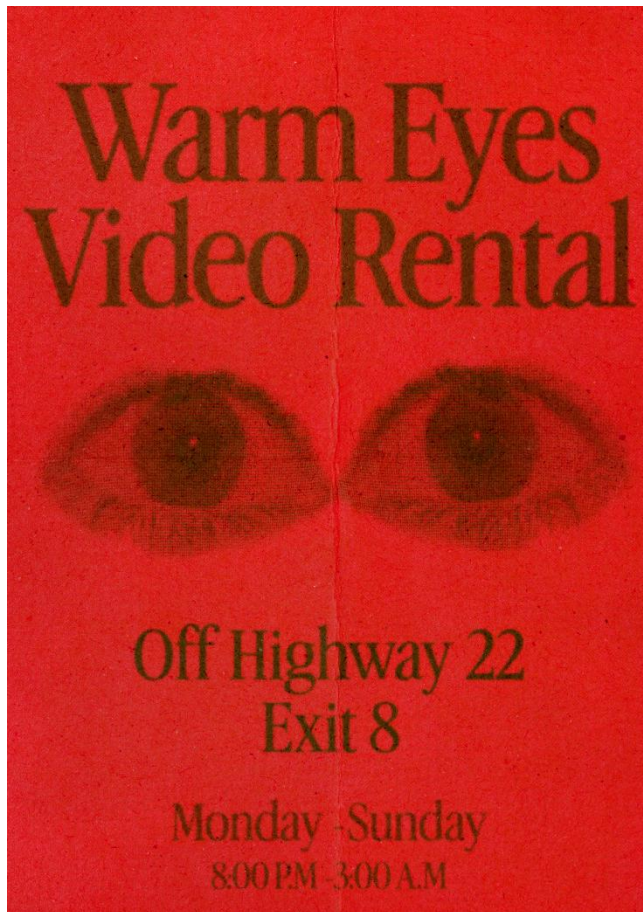
God laughed through the static.

“What do you make of this, Jen?”

“I don’t know, Ron, he sounds crazy, just ignore it. He enjoyed the videos. Just leave it at that.” Jen spoke flaccidly.

“It doesn’t matter if he enjoyed the videos. The tape he put on the note got a buncha adhesive shit on the front door and it’s catching dead bugs and stray hairs. It’s gross.”

“It seems like you have another satisfied customer!” Jen mocked, forcing out her customer service voice, and plastering the same rehearsed grin she had perfected over three-hundred-and-eighty painstaking days, behind the check-out counter of Warm Eyes Video Rental.



“I’m not in the mood for kidding. He’s overdue on the tapes he rented out last week.”

“Do you know the guy?” Jen asked.

“No. I don’t talk about my buyers. You should know this by now.”

“Okay, well, are you gonna do something about the shit on the door?”

“I’ll go check my office for his notecard, and I’ll see if there’s a phone number.”

“And then do what? Ask him to clean it?”

“Funny. How about you clean the door, then?”

Ron crumpled the note and whistle-exhaled before he departed towards the back of the store, checking each row of videos for the first letter of its title.

“Hey, wait, Ron, one last thing,” Jen called out, projecting her voice towards the back of the store.

“Yeah, what?”

“Can I go home early?”

“You forgot to sort horror.”

“What?”

“*Jacob’s Ladder* is at the end of the ‘I’ section in horror, Jen.”

“Sorry.”

“Maybe you can use your last hour to put it back where it belongs.”

Maybe that asshole could have done it himself.

Warm Eyes was segregated by genre. The action, drama, and comedy sections compromised most of the storefront and the majority of the movies available for rental. Most customers found something they were perfectly satisfied with here. However, behind the arrays of high-budget Hollywood pictures, stood the sections for those who sought out flicks away from the norm: The Skins and The Guts section.

The curtains to The Skins were made of black see-through lace; not dissimilar from the underwear the women wore on the movie covers in The Skins. Ron tried to be coy with his naming conventions, but it wasn't a well-kept secret that he kept porn in his video store. Teenagers tended to sneak behind the curtains to giggle at the boobies; Ron would usually scream his head off at them.

The Guts section was locked by a door behind a suede crimson curtain in The Skins. Ron kept the key for the guts section around his neck. The door was only ever unlocked for Ron's "buyers." Every film in the guts section was concealed by a black plastic slipcover which censored the real movie case.

Ron advertised the movies he had in The Guts to his potential buyers as being "the sickest tapes humanity has ever seen." He used to call the *Faces of Death* films "bitch shit" in

comparison to his stuff. On the rare occasion Ron spoke to me about the movies, I gathered there to be a strong element of "movie magic" at play during the production. Still, he took an insurmountable amount of pride in distributing his films, and it only took me one-hundred-and-eighty dollars to be in one.

And I can still remember everything, down to the feeling in my gut from the nerves of it all. It was like I had swallowed an anvil.

I still remember the sounds my footsteps made down the hallway from the door in The Guts.

from the floor of the doorway, down an indefinite hallway, a strip of duct tape runs continuously, only breaking to make space for the entrance of rooms which branched off its' paths

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Ron's office.

*this is where ron does his work
file cabinets are stacked on top of each other
all the way up to the ceiling
each cabinet is filled with
thousands of notecards with
names and information
of his buyers*

*ron usually remembers to lock
his office door*

The blacklight room.
a simple game
a timer runs indefinitely here
two chairs sit facing each other
the tension between them
splits the room in half
a room lit only by a blacklight
the timer will stop when the
room is fully illuminated
it locks from the outside
there is a leaderboard whiteboard
1. 36:02.44
2. 40:52.12
3. 42:08.31

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The lights on set burnt my skin. My hair had been matted to my head from the sweat. The table put splinters in my chest. I saw my body in chains through the distorted reflection of the camera lens which faced me. The film ran and the contraption screamed at me; I screamed back at it.

"Play dead!" Ron belted at me through his teeth. I could see my weeping face in the gloves he was wearing. He pretended to dig the knife deeper. I went limp. The lights went off.

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The curtain.

*there is a world with no light
where most could not see
but i can
and how i wish
i could have stood here
and watch them make the tape*

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*from the ether
i can still see*

**The
Voyeur
ists.**

*please please
i promise it won't be
a problem for you at all
he stands and he watches
because it looks just real
enough to one day perhaps
implore or persuade him
to ask or suggest to the man
that when the next time they
decide to bring another in
if he could get to feel i
t go cold and
watch solemn
light exit the
final swollen
cough of hum
anxiety from the
desecrated
ask of some
one else*

The

couch.

*there is a black sofa
obscured by shadows beneath a veil of weighted curtains
cracks on the leather flow from the headrest and seat
like estuaries of imperfection and tainted relaxation and enjoyment
here lies the memory of a once brand new and brilliant brown cushioned chair
now here stands a piece of furniture tarnished by overuse and collected stains
it holds me and stands with me and watches with me from an unobstructed view in the darkness*

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I ran to the bathroom and stared at the mirror.

I ripped the collar off.

My neck looked like a silver ring on a sunburnt finger.

I could barely recognize the woman in front of me.

Mascara sob marks trailed symmetrically on her swollen face.

The bathroom was quiet when I went in.

I cried, and I wailed when I saw myself.

I heard the echo of my calls.

And then a muffled grunt.

And then the sound of slapping skin.

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1. 36:02.44

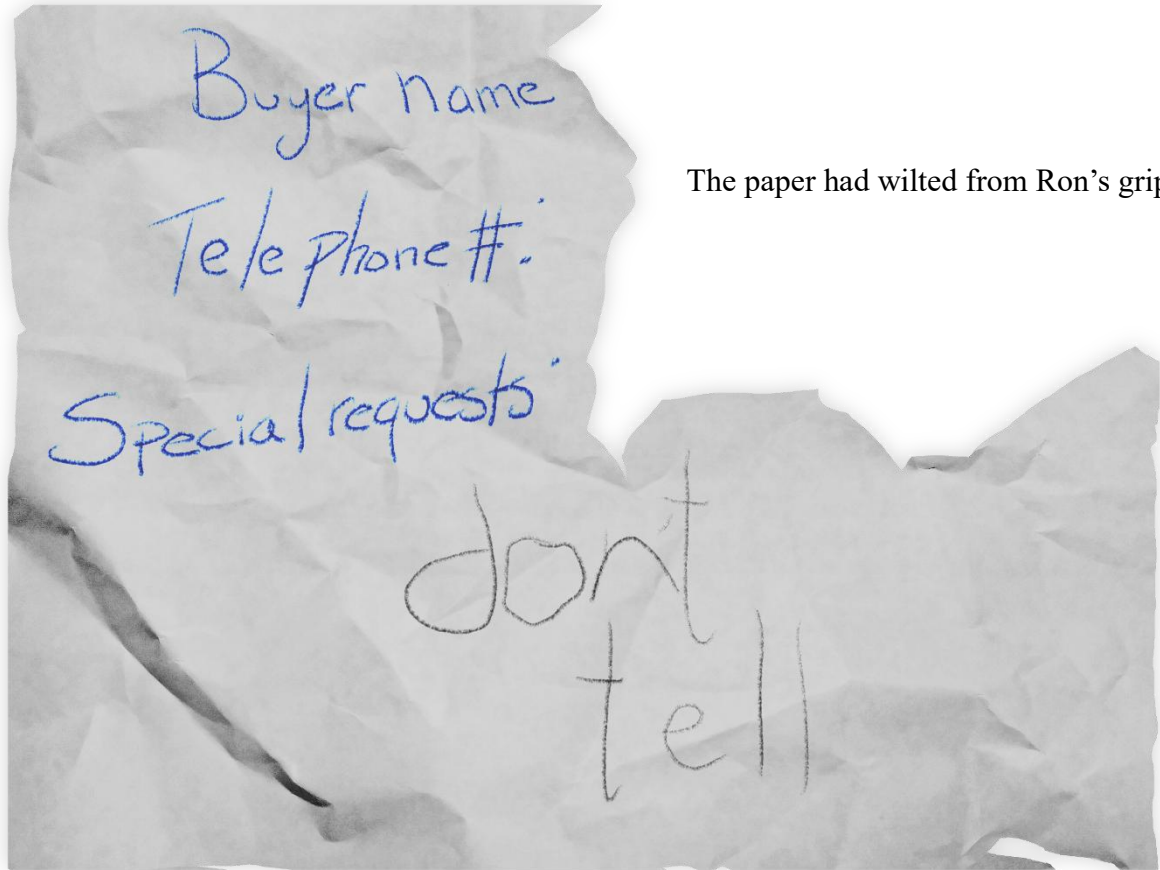
2. 39:05.09

3. 40:52.12

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“What the fuck!?” Ron hollered, from the distant insides of the building.

A tapping sound grew louder. And louder. And louder. Ron’s sweat-drenched hand threw a note down, before he stormed off without saying a word.



The paper had wilted from Ron’s grip.

Then, light leaked through the windows and spilled itself onto the counter. It exposed the vast emptiness of another miserable early morning void to Jen’s unsuspecting eyes. Like an untrained actor on an empty stage, with a spotlight illuminating every drop of fear and every clogged pore to a judging audience, Jen could not help but stand statue-still and stare at the light.

Only then could she make out the contour of the vehicle through the reflection of the headlights. Then, everything went out. She could not hear the hum of the motor anymore; in its’

places was only the mechanical whirring from the ceiling. She could not see the lights anymore. Her dilated pupils contracted their retinal aperture blades back into their usually dazed semi-open-semi-closed resting state. She shuddered when the sickeningly familiar front door chime rang. *A slanted, crooked, man* walked in.

“return”

“Excuse me?” Jen inquired.

“return”

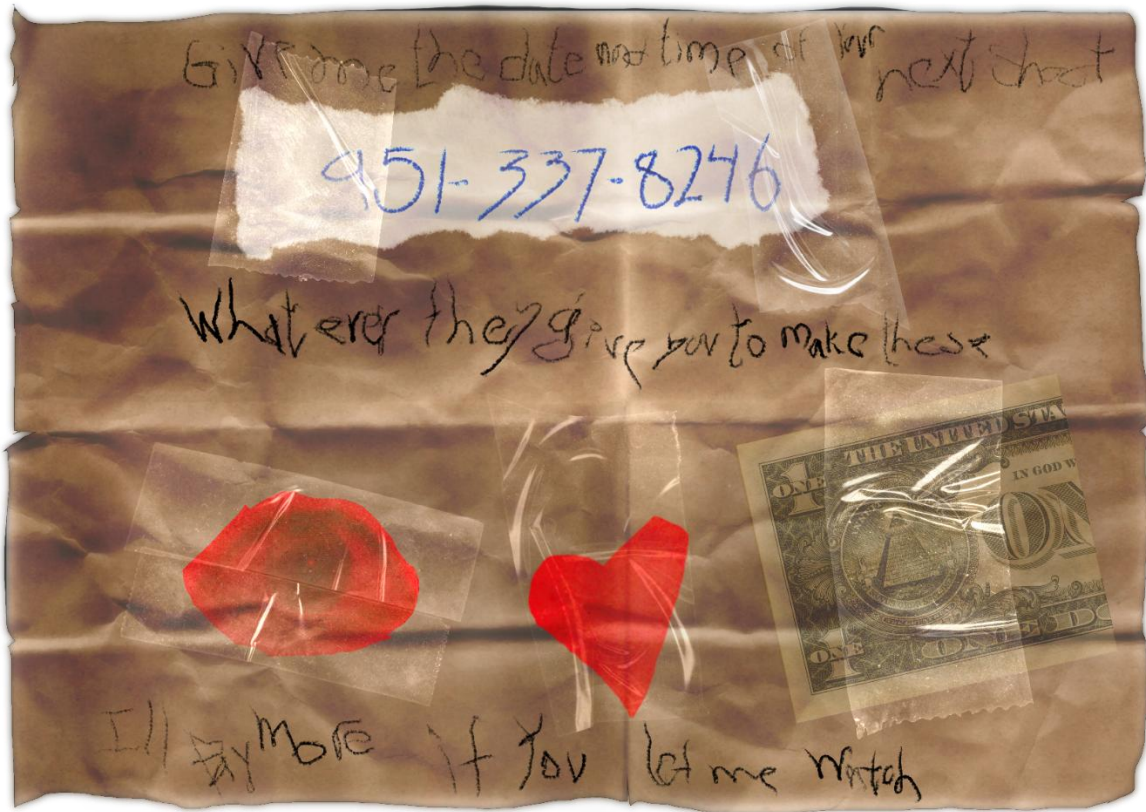
Four video cassette tapes with black slipcovers landed on Jen’s counter.

“Gotcha.”

Jen had started to scan the barcodes on the VHS tapes before the man reached his gnarled hand out onto the counter to grab the videotape closest to him. He ripped off the slipcover to reveal the cover which lay underneath the censored exterior. The man stared at the cover, and then back at Jen. A photo of her own screaming face stared at Jen.

i saw you bleed
i saw the man's gloved hands
reflect the camera and the lights on the set
through the eye of a needle
pressed up to the television
i saw a single blemish in the screen
although i could not see your face
i could sense your agony
your fear was palpable in the air and fogged the reflection of you
i could sense your agony
in the hollowed-out black cloud of visible lifetime regrets
your face grew warped and vague
your body faded into the background
in the blood that you spilled from the first-ever lashings
on an un-strechmarked back
in the leather bindings that choked your wrists to purple
in the tears that you spilled when your brain could process the pain
i could sense your agony
yet, that sense took another form
when i saw the reflection on the man's gloved hands
be smothered away by melted, crimson, gelatin
i could see your agony
and now i can touch it
i heard the blood spill onto the floor
i heard the coughing and gagging and the begging for air
i saw you bleed
i saw the man's gloved hands cut your throat open
and now i see you in front of me
i see your screeching mouth on the cover of the tape
and i saw the light of humanity ripped from your husk
but I still see you behind the counter

The man exhaled and unfolded a sheet of paper from his pockets.



*give me the date and time of your next shoot
whatever they give you to make these
i'll pay more if you let me watch*