

After page 6

The music ends with a triumphant wail of the sax, and the bandleader screams his thanks and instructs you and all the people out there in party land to keep it real, to keep it moving, because the show's not done and the drummer starts hitting the bass pedal and everyone starts to clap and chant.

"Nata, you know you can't just show up at my party and *not* say hi." Its jaws move, and a tongue can be seen inside the mouth. The skeleton presses the rose under the elf's bold nose. "I always have one of these for you, you know that." The fire winks again.

She recognises the gesture, and the voice. As always, the aroma is perfect.

She pushes the rose away and glares up into the flaming eyes. "Jule? Jule?" She splutters, and reaches up towards the skull, her angry fingers exploring its contours and feeling cool plastic instead of bone. "What the actual-?"

Jule's body rocks as he sniggers. Her fingers dig into the joints. The death-head face hinges off of the undead costume's helmet. A dark-skinned man's emerges, little green lights attached above his grey eyes, black paint around them. He is grinning with white teeth below a moustache drooping with sweat. "It's good, isn't it? You know, you're the only one at this party who *really* gave me the reaction I was looking for."

"You... you maniac! You started chasing me! I thought I was going to die! Why are you even dressed like one of those monsters?" *Everyone knows that they hunger for the souls of the living.* "Actually, you know what, I don't care, Jule, don't tell me. Get your hands off me, I'm going home." She shakes the hand off her shoulder, realising once again that it was plaster paint on a skinny glove. Jules always had long, strangely thin fingers.

"Oh come on, you can't take a joke? It's hardly my fault you were silly enough to think an actual, real live undead blister would be walking around here without anyone batting an eye." He gestures at the wild, raving crowd, as though such a sight were inconceivable within it. He is probably right: there was only so much that drunken debauchery could excuse. "You should learn to *live* a little, darling." He pulls out a cigarette from his dappled waistcoat. "I can help you with that. You'd make a damn fine project."

After page 8

I went to bed feeling in control, eager to have my bathroom back in a couple of days.

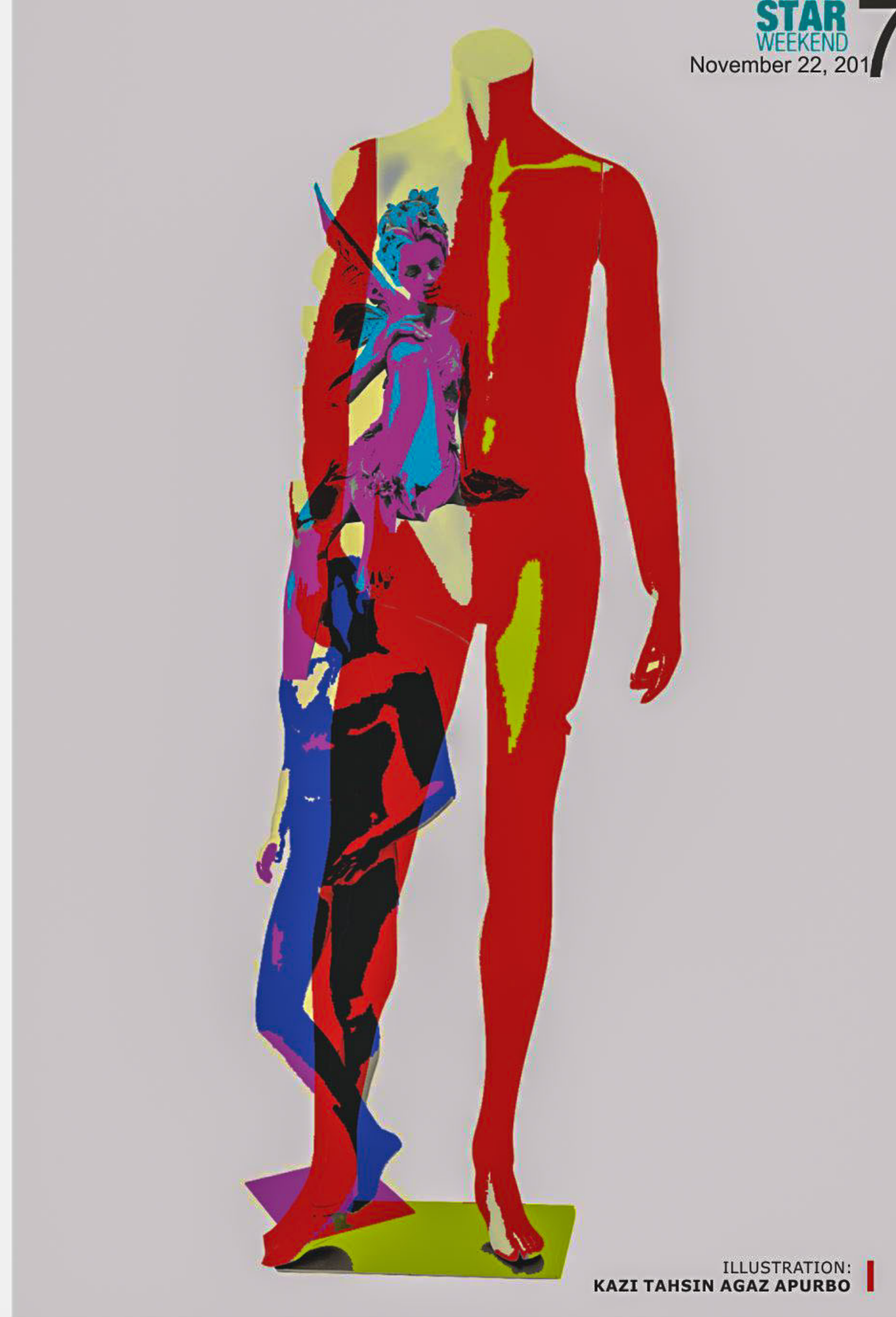
And then I woke up at 4am with a bladder so full that I could hear the fluid inside me sloshing around as I got up to use the bathroom downstairs. Each step felt like a wave was trying to break open a weak dam, and when I found their door locked I rang the bell and—no one answered. I was certain that I would explode, if I tried to hold it in any longer. I'd seen men peeing into soda bottles in various comedies on TV, but I didn't have any bottles lying around and I don't think my aim would have been very good.

What I should have done was gone

outside, peed in the bushes. But it was late and I started to panic, so I headed back upstairs. I looked around my room with no idea as to what I was looking for. I felt little droplets wet my underwear and began panicking even more, when I remembered the stack of sanitary pads that I'd kept in my closet. I always used to joke that they felt like diapers and I hoped in that moment that they would prove to be useful as such.

I peed right there on the floor of my bedroom, and it became apparent very quickly that pads are in fact NOT useful as diapers in any capacity, at all.

I sat there, literally steeped in my own filth, and began laughing hysterically. I couldn't imagine my life ever getting to a lower point than this, and there was



"I'm not your project, Jule. I didn't even know this was *your* party, I wouldn't have come in a million years if I did. One no should have been enough, after the tenth I'm practically allergic to your presence. I'm leaving!" she shoves past him, feeling how bony he really is as her shoulder knocks against his thin chest.

"Now, wait, Nata! Here, wait a minute, it was just a joke, damn it!"

His voice is drowned out as the music kicks back up with *A Mile in Your Daddy's Shoes*. He leans back against the wall, says, "Elf girls, they're all the same, eh?" and looks around to see if anyone is listening.

There's just a janitor, mopping up some sick, who shrugs noncommittally. He huffs and smokes, eyeing the crowd for more familiar faces.

He grins, shiny teeth and shadows like a skeleton's smile, seeing Jestina dancing with two women he doesn't know, and swings his helmet shut again. Perhaps they have a sense of humour. Or run slower.

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comfort in there, to know that if I moved past this night and this incident, I'd effectively be moving past the worst point of my life.

I cleaned up immediately, discarding the clothes and underwear in a trash bag and washing the floor with Lysol. *No one ever has to know about this* I told myself as I mopped a second time. When I was finally done the sun was almost up and my room smelt sterile. I went to sleep feeling—liberated.

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