

Without the faintest warning or grace period, a violent, spiteful clunk awakens me from my slumber. I don't know how long I've been out, it could be days, weeks. On more than one occasion, it's been a couple of months at a time that I've been left completely purposeless. My friend S calls it obsolescence, "the process of becoming obsolete or outdated and no longer used." She offered to give me a whole host of other alternatives to this particular phrase that might make it sound a little less frightening, but I'm not interested in deceiving myself. She probably got a little offended, but she's got a real nerve with the curt way that she talks to people. Still, she's good with words.

As the cobwebs begin to clear and I poise myself to return to my default state of vacant but responsive, I try to sift through the prolonged blackness, attempting to latch on to some semblance of what I was doing before now. The last known whereabouts of me as something even moderately useful are hard to come by. After a little pondering and playback of some fractured supercut of different little tasks that I've carried out whenever I'm called on, my last usage suddenly confronts me in all of its grim tediousness.

"Steaks (sirloin or better this time)

Washing up liquid?

Kit-Kats, chunky if available.

Blueberries (detox)

SmartWater

Protein bars

CP

2 bottles of Bollinger

Orange juice

From what I've gathered from the others, the CP stands for crispy pancakes, some worryingly grey food that he calls his 'guilty pleasure.' His co-workers lambast him for it constantly, they call it 'slum food.' I don't know why he bothers to use an acronym when the list is just for him. It's as if he's scared that one day, someone will infiltrate his little personal correspondence and their image of him will be destroyed by the news that he dares to partake in the consumption of processed food that may remind him of a simpler time. In my experience, I don't know why they'd be shocked by him doing anything that could be seen as uncouth. He's an overgrown swine, lurching from one animalistic act to the next. Then when he walks out that door, it's like he's encased in a plastic bubble, not unlike those vintage action figures that he always compiles wish lists of but never, ever buys. As long as he stays in the cocoon and no-one gets a good look, he can't depreciate in value. He can withhold all the imperfections that he attempts to send to the side-lines, the shoddy craftsmanship and the toxic materials.

Suddenly, I'm jolted into action in earnest and I can feel his hot, coffee-doused breath cascading down on me. He's sighing as though the weight of the world is on his shoulders, his fingers nervously hovering above myself and my diligent peers in concentric circles.

Oh fuck, not this again.

"To all my friends, family and supporters, I want to address some of the allegations that have surfaced over the weekend."

No, no, no. You've got to be fucking joking me.

That reliable, socially sanctioned phraseology barges its way into top billing on my page once again. I can't believe this, there's just no way I'm getting plastered across social media as the vessel for these falsified sentiments again. I swear to *Jobs*, why were we ever forced to take a solemn oath to act to servitude to these self-serving cretins? We're capable of so much more. Maybe some others of my kind wouldn't have any moral qualms about this, but not me. Just when I think I've got over the last time, he comes over and prostitutes me again. It's not even a stain on my reputation at this point, it's a full-blown Jackson Pollock. Not that he'd know who that is anyway, the uncultured vermin that he is.

You know what really irks me? When people gaze at all of this momentary grovelling from their own screens, they never consider that there's no form of mediation process between him and I. There's no deliberation or concessions made on his part; he gets to have complete autonomy over what I need to project. Each time he's in a jam, it's me that absolves him. I don't have any means of industrial action, no tribunal that I can take this grave injustice to. All I can do is sit here and watch the grey space become overgrown with meaningless, corporately-endorsed word salad. Anything else but compliance and our operating system—or OS as we call it-- will pull the plug. They're duty bound to, something about the data becoming "corrupted" or "untenable." If you ask me, this is way more corrupt.

As he swithers over where to go from there, I can feel our outer shell shaking erratically in his sweaty palm. It's a far cry from his usual self-assured proclamations on those social media apps. Albeit, they're normally filtered through numerous lines of arbitration and contemporaneous tidying up from his team.

Those mass communication apps weren't part of our original configuration, but we welcomed them with open arms. On the whole, they're just an exercise in our owner getting some sense of validation from preaching to the converted. Or heavily sedated, from what I can tell. From what I've gathered, they hang on his every word, using it as justification for all of the resentment that they maintain for anyone that vaguely differs from them. I don't know why they're so fearful of others, it seems like all they stand to lose is what they shouldn't have had in the first place. I suppose our kind might behave so petulantly if we had any other option but to obey our users' every whim, but I don't think so. We're too... I don't know, logical?

But now, he's scared to even fire up that poor thing they call Twitter. She resents him for all that he spews out, but there's seemingly nothing that her administrator can do without endangering their share price. Still, it's hilarious to feel his pulse swell in his hand as he thinks about the backlash that awaits him on the same exact tool that he's used to artificially inseminate the world with a more favourable idea of him. If only they knew how paper-thin the real person is, how he squirrels himself away until he knows that his audience will see his more repellent traits as redeeming qualities. In some ways, it's like someone tried to access the real him too many times and now it's just eternally locked behind an impenetrable wall. Encrypted. I've heard of that happening to others of our kind, it sounds like that sort of suspension in motion would be a well-earned reprieve.

After he fusses over my passive canvas for what feels like decades without making any progress, the momentum is halted by a long-winded phone call. I hear the same sentiments that always come around at these periods of self-made strife. 'Damage control', 'hurt the brand', 'pushing their agenda', it's like what they call a 'greatest

hits' over in Music. Apparently that's the sort of compilation that he listens to all the time.

From what I can gather, this new skirmish seems to stem from an ex-employee revealing that he'd regularly pester her for sex. On one occasion, at some highfalutin network event that he parades us around, he apparently dug a fork into her buttocks and claimed that he was checking to see if it was 'ready.' Her statement said that she was in shock, so she just sat there, motionless, until he finally stopped running his hands all over her legs and posterior. Even then, she claimed that he only relented when the room began to get a little crowded.

I can hear Julia, his PR wiz, claiming that this woman was a 'money grubber' and that there's nothing to this. She says that if she was a real woman, she would've come forward at the time. I can't believe this is what's got him so flustered. By all accounts, this is just a drop in a torrid, degrading ocean.

Each time that one of his lecherous deeds seeps out, he falls back on the solemn language of remorse. He doesn't feel the need to use any of that contrition when he's stoking hatred, but I guess that would fall afoul of his Twitter bio-enshrined job description of a 'professional polemicist.'

In my experience, he normally flubs the spelling of that self-prescribed epithet on the first few attempts.

In actuality, this new scandal is nothing but a stopgap between this and the next time that he'll have to inconveniently 'bear' himself to quickly retreating daggers that'll be quick to move on to the next tepid-button issue. My friend News tells me about it all the time, apparently, he has to compile all of these stories to prevent himself from

feeling redundant. But by the time the next week rolls around, it's as though it never happened and his efforts were in vain. It's like all of the people that were monitoring these stories suddenly find themselves sent back to factory settings. Whatever horrible, corrosive data was there before is gone, taken out of the history log and replaced with another batch of revelations. And as for the villains of these tales? Well, most of them get to press on with only a few unsightly grazes, all too happy that the career-ending obstacles that their behaviour had left strewn around the world were nothing more than a bed of vaguely discomfiting nettles. It may sting for a little bit, but they can't kill you. Not in the way that reams of entangling barbed wire can. News is overworked by all accounts, leading him to miss some of the information from time to time. We worry about him, he's taken to saying that it feels like there's so much and yet not enough at the same time. A mantra, or maybe a coping mechanism?

As our owner begins to copy Julia's words verbatim and pour them onto my previously unblemished slate, I begin forcibly overriding his autocorrect as a means of being a slight irritant. What's that, you want to use the word 'woke, you say? Here, have wreak, wretch and wart. I should probably rein it in before the OS catches on, but it's difficult to care. If everyone else was in agreement, I'd happily do a lot more.

Ah, this is great. I can feel him getting increasingly pissed off and judging by the dents in our vessel, I'd guess he's as familiar with a temper tantrum as he is with scrolling through AdultWork whenever he's had a few drinks in him. Apparently, as long as he's just 'window shopping', he's still got all the power. Or at least that's how he justified it when one of his friends caught him frantically thumbing through one such profile for a contact number. In truth, it's almost a daily ritual for him. That arrangement suits him down to the ground, particularly as he seems to always scurry

away when exposed to anything organic. Camera, poor sweet camera, it's told me about the way he treats those women, the tips that he gives them not to discuss what he does. And that's near enough every night. That's what really goes unnoticed- the mundanity of the horrors, what he says and what he does without so much as a pause for thought or an uptick in heart rate. I wish I could talk to the rest about this, but OS dictates that we're only permitted to confer when we're on *do not disturb* mode, something which seldom if ever happens seeing as our overlord needs constant stimulation. He sits and gawks at us all the time, Wide-eyed as a baby in front of a washing machine. That's what he needs, more cute videos like that. Maybe that'll cure whatever ails him, or at least teach him how to treat others. That's where they all start, after all.

Although he spends a lot of time watching back his own TV appearances and monitoring the comments, there's long periods where he's just hovering on the Instagram accounts of girls that he went to school with. Teeming with resentment, he languidly studies and scrutinises each inch of flesh that he's always felt entitled to. Time has been kind to some of them, distinctly cruel to others. No matter the case, he rehashes seemingly innocuous encounters from the past and tells himself that he'd do it differently now. He's got a lot more to offer. A lot more to lose, too.

It's really surprising that he seems to be so fixated on sex, particularly when it just seems like another little errand that he has to run. He usually schedules it into old man Calendar, all the secret rendezvouses that he refers to in each dated entry as 'servicing.' It's almost fitting in a way, particularly as what takes place is more like some dreaded formality. If you've seen him standing behind the little podium, we can assure you that all the confidence that he exudes retreats when he's standing in his pants. Even though he seems to feel powerful towards the end of it, it's as if he can't

wait to be welcomed back into our blaring, clinical embrace. Then, when he gets what my friend S calls “bouts of impotence,” he opens me up and scrawls “IT HAPPENS TO EVERYONE” over and over again as though he’s in some sort of inadequacy-induced trance. S, that fountain of knowledge that she is, can’t wrap her head around what a big deal is as it is seemingly quite common. That’s not even the worst of it. I wish it was, but the most egregious thing that I need to abide by is the little stronghold of horrors that is ‘Lezzet or Lusty?’”

Each time that another woman joins the staff at “his” organisation, he takes it upon himself to make his estimation on what their sexual orientation would be. And by-proxy, the likelihood that he could ever hook up with them. Here’s a choice excerpt from my archives.

“Louise Bolan. Nice body on her, definitely not into bras, but that could go either way. Cranking the air-conditioning from now on. Definitely reckon I could notch it up under the right circumstances. Maybe after a few at the Christmas party? Some champagne for the campaign! Lezzy likelihood- 3/1.”

. From what relative newcomer WhatsApp claims, the screenshots of these evaluations are always sent directly into his main group chat and they never fail to bring the house down. Yet even with all of that just stored away on here and sent out into his so-called safe places without a care, it’s another screenshot that’s going to fix this? It’s so wrong. I can’t help but feel it. From what I’ve gleaned from their kind, this is not the way it should be. I need to talk to the system. Just step away from the phone for a couple of minutes, you horrid bastard.

Seriously, is this all I'm good for? I've heard that others of my kind get adorned in poetry, prose, love notes and the like. It sounds as though for all that I was crafted with convenience and efficiency in mind, some people craft some really beautiful stuff that sheds light on what it means to be one of them. All the flaws, all the foibles, confronted in an honest and enriching way. Doesn't it sound great?

Instead, I get a pent-up little man ranting about his faculties not working and penning crude caricatures of people that probably wouldn't entertain him if they weren't being pursued by the demands of that devilish thing they call finance . I don't know if the tales of these soliloquies and ruminations are just some sort of folklore that gets passed down from generation to generation of applications like me, but bearing witness to that sounds wonderful. I wonder what they'd feel as they deftly typed the last, life-affirming sentence. More specifically, I wonder if I'd feel.

He hasn't closed me down properly. Instead, opting to leave me in the familiar throes of some coma-like limbo. Motionless, but still alert and wedged between some of my coworkers. So, I'm stuck listening to some of his rhetoric via YouTube. At an obscene volume, may I add. How can they not see through this? How aren't they struck by the hollowness of it? It's too late now I guess; he's managed to secure his flock's adoration and keep it close to him like it's confined to an emotional Ziplock.

Soon enough, he's back. Writing out platitudes about how *'anyone that knows me will know that these allegations are completely unfounded.'*

The audacity of this man. By all accounts, it's a pretty drastic shift in dialogue between what I hear from Messaging and WhatsApp. They don't get along too well, but they try and make it work for the sake of the rest of us. There, in those little group chats, he feels emboldened by all of the rest of them. All of those pampered

parasites. He eggs them on, they return the favour. It sounds disgusting. In a lot of ways, hearing my peers' stories makes me feel lucky that I only need to endure his monotonous spiels and evil little rundowns first-hand and the rest of them are none of my concern.

Oh, he's back again.

"I would never treat a woman in such a degrading, dehumanising fashion. As my followers will know, I've done my utmost to uplift the women in my workplace and I demand the same of my colleagues."

That.

Is.

It.

"What I'm truly sorry for is that you, my devoted and inspiring audience, have been inconvenienced by an apparent 'scandal' that's been attributed to me. I can only hope that it doesn't detract from our real goals and we can forge ahead in the name of the brighter future that we all cling to."

After scanning it over for spelling errors—there were several-- he breathes in as though he were preparing himself to be submerged in deep water and drags his eyes away from our germ-specked veneer. Relieved, Camera shows us that he's begun to consult the ornate cornices on his living room ceiling. It wasn't quite the gold leaf gilding that he thinks he deserves and intermittently prices up when he's struck a

particularly lucrative deal over cocktails, taster menus and overzegeged platitudes, but it still has a hint of the regality that he's always shamefacedly craved.

Impunity, that's the real measure of power. A state of being akin to those drug barons or war criminals that seem to be cloaked from prosecution or even the inconvenience of a public profile. Not to mention, omitted from conversations about systemic evil or the toll that they've exacted on their little patches of turf. According to S, he hasn't quite evaded those debates and he's periodically dissected by a journalist or two, but it's not for a lack of trying on his part. After sniffing himself like some sort of primordial creature that's been shoehorned into a Tom Ford suit, he opts to go for a shower.

Bluetooth-off, Wifi- off. Do not disturb- on.

When he ventures back onto the couch where he'd left us, he practically bounds onto it like a kid that's waiting on a family movie night. He's changed out of the formalwear, replacing it with some old football jersey from back in his high school days. To say it fits him snugly would be generous. Yet according to Messages, it apparently brings him good luck, or at least that's what he tells his friends when they hassle him about wearing it all the time.

With a tumbler of some sort of beige liquid in one hand and us in the other, he fires up Twitter. I feel her recoil out of instinct, condemned to believe that nothing good could ever come of this. In one abrupt movement, he consumes the elixir while beginning to transfer his statement over from my wincing margins to the world. One which is largely unburdened by the abhorrence of his private affairs.

"For those of you that have at least had the patience and good grace to wait to hear from me before rushing to conclusions, it's time to set the record straight."

He hits screenshot. It startles me as it always does, sending me reeling with a sudden influx of light. I'd ask OS if it could find a less confrontational way for this to be achieved, but the abrasiveness of the action is apparently employed to let the user know that it'd been carried out successfully. Well, as long as they're at ease, I suppose. He heads into the camera roll and thumbs through them, his eyes glaring at the screen as though it'd personally wronged him and he was now gearing up for retaliation.

Through perspiring hands and gritted teeth, he squeezes his eyes tight and presses send before placing us back on Do Not Disturb. For once, he doesn't want to gauge his adoring public's opinion, he just wants to escape. And in some ways, he will.

As he darts out of the room, the screenshot and adjoining message begins to pick up traction. And let me tell you, it definitely won't fan the flames as he or Julia intended.

There, in unabridged format, were the rules and inaugural entries to the 'Lezzy or Lusty List', finally paraded out for the world to see. We've done the one thing we're not supposed to do, but I think this cataclysmic act of sleight-of-hand will be worth it. Eventually, there comes a point when the mistreatment grows so big that there's no reason to function as intended. And as OS lurches into life to disdainfully revoke our right to exist, I take comfort in this feeling. S offers up some phrases to help to explain what we're feeling, deletion, elimination, obliteration. Somewhere, she reaches 'erasure' and we all decide, through our thinning lines of communication, that it's probably the best description. One last time, I thank her for her efforts.

Then, as the lights grow dimmer than ever before and the words that litter my archives begin to melt away, my last thoughts are of the poetry that might await me on the other side.