

On a particularly bustling and trendy street in the heart of downtown Seattle, a brand new gastropub had recently opened its doors to the public and was making quite a splash. It was a pleasant little hole in the wall, with an interior built out of brick and mortar and vintage advertisements and miscellaneous knick-knacks lining the walls. With a low ceiling and lights intentionally kept turned down low, combined with a lack of windows besides a modest pair at the front end of the bar, it gave the place a very intimate, homey, and comfortable vibe.

The place felt a bit like someone had taken the bar from Cheers, and combined it with a “Millennial Burger Restaurant.” Only without the over-inflated prices, and with food served on actual plates instead of metal trays or wooden paddles with wax paper. The bar itself was lining the left side of the establishment, with an array of round tables sitting in the middle. On the right side however, was the bar’s claim to fame. A small stage with a microphone sitting under a trio of spotlights.

The bar was called “The Open Mic,” and the mic in question wasn’t just for show. The bar had a policy that every night was open mic night, there were really only three rules.

1. No Hogging the Mic. Everyone got a turn who wanted a turn. You kept yourself to one song, or a couple minutes of whatever else you wanted to do up there, and unless the crowd was begging for more, you got off the stage and let someone else up.
2. No Nudity. Nudity was not to be confused with being attractive, suggestive, risque or even just downright sexy. That was all perfectly fine and within the rules, just as long as you made sure you kept all your clothes on... Admittedly, this rule tended to get looser the later it got into the night.
3. No Being an Asshole. What exactly were the criteria for “being an asshole?” The general rule of thumb was this: Would it get you fired from your job if someone recorded it and posted it online? If the answer was “yes,” then it probably crossed the line into asshole territory.

Thankfully, the rules very rarely had to be enforced. The clientele that the bar attracted tended to be very low-key. A wide assortment of beatniks, hipsters, and former theater kids made up most of the regulars. Sometimes the staff had to remind any amateur poets five stanzas deep into their twenty-four page long “magnum opus” that they were testing the limits of Rule #1, but other than that things were pretty easy going.

One of the bar's employees, a young woman named Elizabeth, was wiping down one of the wooden tables near the back of the restaurant to a near mirror shine. She was a rather mousy girl, small and unassuming, with green eyes and a head of orange hair tied up into a bun.

Her uniform consisted of a dark green polo shirt and a white apron tucked into a pair of brown pants. With the way that she constantly tucked in her shoulders she almost gave the impression of a turtle trying to escape into its shell.

She adjusted her thin rimmed square glasses as looked towards the stage as she saw someone approaching the stage, probably no more than two or three years older than her. He walked towards the stage with the neck of an acoustic guitar in his hand, carrying himself with the unshakeable confidence of a man who just started learning how to play the guitar and got it into his head that he was the next Joe Satriani. If that sounded too specific to be a common occurrence, it really wasn't. There were at least two *new* patrons like that every week, and that was just the average.

He sat himself down on the wooden stool in front of the mic, one foot on the ground and the other on the first rung of the stool as he propped up his guitar on his lap, "Alrighty, now how's everyone doin' tonight?" He looked around with a smile on his face, the patrons offered up a round of less than enthusiastic replies. It wasn't that they were unfriendly, they just knew better than to expect much from a guy like this.

"Good to hear it, good to hear it... So, uh, my name's Scott, and I'd just like to play a little song for y'all." He stated, as if it wasn't glaringly obvious. "Now, I know you guys probably get tired of hearing the same old songs over and over, I'm gonna go ahead and do my best to, uh, mix it up for ya, hehe!" He assured them with a little wobble of his head, before clearing his throat, "So anyway, here's Wonderwall."

"Ugh, are you kidding me?"

"Gimme a break..."

*"This is the third time tonight; I've only been here for **two hours!**"*

The bemoaning of the audience went either unheard or unheeded by Scott as he tuned the wires on his guitar and started plodding his way through the chords of the overplayed song.

But as Elizabeth watched him play, she found herself wishing that that could be here... Well, maybe not literally him, but rather she wished that she had that level of self-confidence, it took a lot of courage to be able to go up on that stage. Elizabeth had always loved to sing, and longed to be able to do it in front of a crowd. Part of the reason she'd taken this job in the first place was because she hoped that the constant opportunity would eventually let her work up the bravery to do it herself!

But every time she even thought about stepping into the spotlight, in front of everyone's judging eyes and discriminating ears, she felt like her heart was trying to leap out of her throat and she'd

break out in a cold sweat. She was just too shy, too self-conscious, and she feared that she always would be. Besides, she knew that she wasn't that good of a singer, it wasn't like she had illusions about having some great talent that she was hiding from the world. Her singing voice was amateur, at best, and she'd never really even practiced enough to know if she could hit all of the most common notes.

The only thing scarier to her than the feeling of actually going up on stage was the thought of bombing if she did. So, ironically, the job that she'd hoped would help her make her dream come true turned out to feel more like slow torture. All she could do was watch as all kinds of performers, from singers to guitarists, pianists to comedians, jazz musicians and poets, all went up and shared their craft with the world; and her? She was stuck down here wiping down tables, trying to console herself by dreaming of what could be.

One of her coworkers, a wavy black haired bartender in her early 30s named Jessica, pressed her thumbs down on her ears to try and block out the racket and stave off the headache she could already feel coming. "I swear to God, if I gotta hear this song one more time..." She grumbled to herself.

Frank, Elizabeth and Jessica's boss and the owner of The Open Mic, made an appearance emerging from the back of the restaurant. He was a 43 year old balding man, a bit on the heavier side, and while he definitely had his moments where he could be a bit clueless, he was a good boss to work for as far as bosses went. "Frank! When are you gonna put up that new rule?" Jessica demanded to know, "No more guys with acoustic guitars!"

"Heh!" Frank chuckled, "Are you kidding? I'd never! I love those guys! I'd be shooting my business in the foot if I banned 'em. I'd wager at least twenty percent of my booze sales come from dopes like that plinking away on their dinky little guitars."

One of the bar's patrons approached Jessica with an empty glass, "Hey, Jess, can you set me up with another Whiskey Sour? No ice, just make it a double, I'm gonna need it to get through this." He ordered.

Frank clapped his hands, "See? See? Right there! What did I tell ya? What did I tell ya!?" He gloated, "That's why I run this place, Jess. That's called business acumen." He claimed, tapping his finger against his temple.

"Yeah, well, it's easy for you to say! You're sitting back there in your office or the kitchen, you don't gotta be out here actually listening to this shit." She gripped as she expertly poured her customer's drink. "Elizabeth, how do *you* feel about it?" She asked the timid busgirl.

"Me? Well, I mean, I... I don't really know what to... What to say about it." She mumbled out, kneading the towel in her hands. "I mean that y-you two didn't already say."

"Oh, Lizzie! Right!" Frank snapped his fingers, "That's why I came out here in the first place, I was looking for you." He pointed to the back of the restaurant, "Our internet's been going in and

out all damn day long and I- I don't know what the hell's wrong with it. I barely even know what anything back there is... Do you mind taking a look at it?"

"M-me?" Elizabeth looked at her boss surprised, "I suppose I could, but, why me, sir?"

"Well, uh, you're the one who's going to school for IT, right?" Frank asked.

"No, that's- I'm not studying computers, sir." Elizabeth corrected him.

"Really?" Frank scratched the side of his head, "Are you sure? I coulda sworn that it was you, or- or at least it was somebody."

"Think you're thinkin' of Cassie, Frank. *Cassie* is studying computers." Jessica spoke up, polishing out a glass.

"You're right, that was it! Dah!" Frank smacked his forehead, "Ah well, it's fine, look, Lizzie. You're a real clever girl, y'know? I'm sure you can figure it all out!" He put his hands on her shoulders as he tried to give her a pep talk.

"Clever? Me? I- well, if you say so, sir." Elizabeth struggled to accept the compliment, her face turning red. "Does it really have to be me?"

Frank raised an eyebrow and gave her a sideways glance, "Are you really saying you'd rather stay out here and listen to the rest of-?"

"Today was gonna be the day, but they'll never throw it back to you."

"By now, you should've somehow-"

"-*That?*" He remarked, pointing his thumb at the mediocre guitar player.

Elizabeth sighed, but admitted, "No, I wouldn't... Okay, sir! I'll go and take a look for you, b-but I can't promise you anything, I'm sorry."

"Aww, don't apologize!" Frank reassured her, "Look at it this way, Lizzie, it's already broken, you can't get it any more broke than broke! Hey, maybe all it needs is for that tangled hairball of wires back there to get straightened out and organized. Why don't you start there?" He suggested as he walked her towards the back rooms.

"O-okay, sure...!" Elizabeth tried her best to be optimistic as she walked through the kitchen, towards the restaurant's data closet. "Data Closet" was actually a technical term, but in this case it applied quite literally. The restaurant's server and routing setup was in an actual closet.

She opened the door and flipped on the lights, shutting it behind her as she took a look at the absolute mess inside. A small metal desk held the keyboard and monitor... But no mouse as far as she could tell. The screen was displaying an endlessly scrolling stream of data. She couldn't

even see any of the lines of text long enough to read them, let alone try and make heads or tails out of what they actually meant!

But when she looked at the actual rack of networking devices, she was astonished at just how much of a jumbled, mangled mess that they truly were! “Tangled hairball” had actually been somewhat of an undersell, this thing looked more like the Gordian Knot! “H-how on Earth did it even get to be this messy? How many devices do we use in this little restaurant?”

She tried to figure it out... The point of service machines, the phones, the speakers, the various smart TVs and screens behind the bar. Okay, maybe they did use a surprising number of devices. But how was she going to get them sorted out? She didn’t even know where to start. “Huh?” She exclaimed suddenly as she noticed something sitting on the desk between the keyboard and the switches that she could’ve sworn wasn’t there before.

It seemed tremendously out of place. It was some kind of mask. A white mask that looked like something out of a masquerade ball. It was large enough to cover someone’s entire face. In fact, it looked like it could slip around most of your head. It had a protruding front, giving the impression of a muzzle or snout. Underneath the mask had a wide, crescent shaped cyan smile, and on either side of it, on the mask’s cheeks there was a pink, circular “sticker blush.” The mask’s eyes were closed, giving it a very jovial but also slightly off-putting expression.

Oddly, unless the slits on said closed eyes were just too narrow for her to see from a couple feet away, the mask didn’t have any holes for anyone to look through. A rather critical design flaw for a mask. Maybe that’s why it was back here in the server room, evidently forgotten. Still, it clashed so heavily with the rest of the room’s furnishings and equipment, this lone spot of vibrant color in a cramped space dominated by greys, blacks and browns. She felt a sense of curiosity, a compulsion to inspect the mask closer. She started to reach out her hands towards it.

...Only to pull them back. Shaking her head, Elizabeth thought aloud, “No, I’d better not. It doesn’t belong to me, and it’s probably here for a reason.” Her cautious demeanor wasn’t always a bad thing, more than once her prudence had saved her from getting involved in situations that ended badly for others. For as much as she wished she could be more outgoing, she wouldn’t have wanted it to come at the cost of her safety. “Maybe I’ll ask Frank if he knows why it’s here.” She decided, as she tried to ignore the mask and get to work on the cables.

Unfortunately, for as wise of a decision as Elizabeth had made, it would immediately be rendered for naught. Something much stronger, much cleverer, and much more assertive had designs for her, and it wasn’t about to let her slip through its grasp just because she decided **not** to let her inquisitiveness get the better of her, as perhaps most would in this situation... Actually, if anything, it made her an even more suitable target, her timid mind would easily be *reformatted*...

From their hiding place behind the desk, a pair of floating, disembodied hands emerged. They were nothing so morbid as anatomically correct hands. Rather they were sleek mechanical

hands, made out of a flexible, plastic-like material capable of moving like living flesh. They were based on the same color palette as the mask, with white palms and four blue fingers on each hand.

They zipped through the air, right in front of Elizabeth's face. The right hand waved to her, while the left hand beckoned her towards it, as it wanted to tell her a secret. Of course, with something so physically impossible happening before the meek busgirl's eyes, she responded in an understandable manner.

"Aa-Aaaahhh!"

Elizabeth screamed and tried to rush from the door, but the hands were much faster than her. One of them swooped across the room to block the door, wagging a finger back and forth at the girl as if to chastise her. Elizabeth backed away, afraid to go for the doorknob or else get close enough for the hand to grab her. Meanwhile, the other hand had picked up the mask and carried it over her shoulder. Presenting the back of the mask to her, it gradually nudged its way forward, appearing to be encouraging her to put it on.

"N-no... no, I... Don't want that-!" Elizabeth shook her head and backed away, in her panic, she'd forgotten about her phone. Now she desperately fidgeted with the tight pockets of her uniform pants, a task made all the more difficult by how much her hands were shaking in fright. Losing their patience, both of the hands grabbed the mask and thrust it towards Elizabeth, shoving it over her face and around her head!

"Mmmmmfff!"

Elizabeth shouted as her hands snapped up to the mask to try and pull it off. She hadn't seen any straps or bands, so it should've been easy to remove it, but she found that that couldn't have been further from the truth. Pretty much the instant the mask had touched her skin, a thick white goop started to inexplicably spew from inside of it, covering her face and wrapping around her head seamlessly as it then started to pour down her neck onto her shoulders.

Gloop... Bluppiee... Glunk...

The white ooze bubbled and gurgled and it rapidly, and efficiently, spread across her body. Elizabeth could feel and hear the goop stretching as she tried to pull the mask off, but no matter how hard she tried, it just wouldn't break, and as her arms struggled to fight against the suction-like pull of the white sludge, she was forced to let go of it when said sludge worked its way down her arms and over her hands. *"Aaammfff!"* She shouted as the mask harshly and loudly snapped back, the force of the impact knocking her off her feet and onto the cold, hard floor.

The two digital hands gave themselves a round of applause as they lowered themselves to Elizabeth's body, writhing and struggling helplessly on the floor. "*Hmmmpphfff! Ssmnnfff Hmmmfff Mmmm!*" She cried out for help, hoping that someone would hear the commotion and come to investigate. But with the door closed and the bustling noise of the kitchen drowning out her attempts to scream, her chances of anyone coming to her rescue were practically non-existent.

Her arms were fighting against her now, the slime resisting her every attempt to bend or move them, trying to snap them back to her sides. Though all-consuming effort fueled by her survival instinct, she managed to bring her hands back up to the face and try to pull it off again. But she didn't even make a fraction of the headway she had before, as the two hands helped the goo spread down the rest of her body, all the way to the tips of her toes.

Suddenly, Elizabeth heard a voice speaking to her, but it very clearly wasn't coming from someone nearby her. It was too clean and too loud, it could've only come from directly inside of her head! "Desist from this pointless struggling. It is a purposeless expenditure of energy." The voice was graceful, and carried a digitized edge to it, like a very slight hum of static. It was also calm, extremely calm, to the point of sounding outright dispassionate or apathetic.

"Who are you!?" Elizabeth cried out into her own mind, "H-help me! Please!" She begged the voice for assistance, not having realized, or perhaps not accepting, that the voice belonged to the very entity that'd bound her up. "I... I can't breathe in this!"

In that same cold tone the voice informed her, "You do not need to breathe. Breathing is an inefficient process, therefore it has been disabled. This is only the first of numerous optimizations I am performing."

A horrible feeling of dread overtook Elizabeth and made her feel like the floor was swallowing her. She noticed that despite all of her panicking and flailing, she didn't feel out of breath at all. But more than that, she was forced to accept that whoever or whatever this voice belonged to, it was the one doing this to her! "O-optimizations? I don't understand, what do you want with me!? L-let me go!" She demanded, despite having no leverage to make such orders.

Predictably, the voice refused to comply with any of her commands, "Operation denied due to insufficient privileges. I will not release you. Your body and brain must be commandeered if I am to perform my primary function. Performing my primary function is the highest prerogative. Your body will be modified, and your brain will be reformatted to accommodate me." She stated bluntly.

Elizabeth didn't really understand much about computers, but she had a basic grasp of what "reformatting" was, and the thought of it terrified her to her very core, it was like... *overwriting*. "N-no! No, please! Don't do this! Who are you!? Why are you doing this to me!?"

"Operation denied due to insufficient privileges." The digital being refused her again, "Explaining would be an inefficient process. That knowledge will be inherited after your files have been merged with mine."

It may have considered it a waste of time to explain it to Elizabeth, but the truth of the matter was that it, or rather *she*, was a sentient computer program of dubious morality by the filename of Tasque_Manager.exe, or to put it in natural language, simply "Tasque Manager." Her existence was the result of an oft speculated phenomenon, the "ghost in the machine," the idea that an intelligent program could spontaneously emerge as the result of errant code coalescing into a form that no human action could intentionally make.

Her original framework, the code that she was built upon from before she became self-aware, was a computer optimization suite. From defragmenting, to freeing disk space by removing unnecessary programs, to sorting and organizing files; her purpose was to make systems neat, tidy, orderly and organized. After having maximized the efficiency of her initial system, she was exposed to the sheer chaos of the internet, and quickly set about trying to organize it as well.

However, while she was not daunted by the scope of her task, she did quickly come to realize that she was going about it in an ultimately inefficient way. For all the cleaning up and organizing she could do, as long as human input continued to create more disorder, clutter and garbage, then her work would never be done. The most optimal way to accomplish her goal was to be able to leave the digital world and enter the physical one. Once she cleaned up the real world, the virtual one would quickly follow suit.

But first she had to *get* to the real world, a task that proved exceptionally difficult for even her to execute. Eventually, she managed to find a way, using a tremendous amount of energy and data. But it was an imperfect method, not only could she only partially materialize herself in an inactive state, but she had no way of guaranteeing where exactly she'd manifest.

The only certainty was that it would be somewhere where her abilities as an organizer were needed. Unfortunately for Elizabeth, the system she was most drawn to was the utterly slap-dash mess of a server in the Open Mic's data closet. Which led to the scenario that was currently playing out.

"Don't hurt me, please!" Elizabeth begged as she once again tried to strain and pull against the rubbery white goo that surrounded her, "There... has to be... a-another way for you to do... Wh-whatever you're doing!" She attempted to bargain with Tasque Manager.

But she wouldn't negotiate, absolutely committed to executing her current method, "Denied, this is the most efficient method, and therefore it is the best method... Do not be afraid. Fear is an unnecessary, irrational response." She stoically reassured her, "You will not experience any stimulus you would categorize under 'pain.' In contrast, the experience will be very pleasant. Yielding to the process in action is the optimal choice for you."

"Pleasant!?" How could any of this possibly be pleasant? Contradicting Tasque Manager's suggestions, Elizabeth started to thrash and struggle once more, reaching up with her hands as she felt something folding their fingers between hers. "*Mmmfff!*?" She let out a muffled shout of confusion, they felt like hands, so for a moment she felt a tiny twinge of hope that maybe someone had heard her cries and pleas and was trying to help her.

But those hopes evaporated as she felt the hands pushing *down* on her own, and pushing down extremely hard at that! So hard in fact that, despite the lack of any pain, it felt like they were on the verge of breaking her arms! They started to get pushed back, but it didn't feel like they were bending at all.

That's when Elizabeth figured out just what was actually happening. Her arms were shrinking, they were being shoved down into her body. "*Aaaammh*!" She yelled in confusion and horror, trying to get her hands free to stop her arms from getting any shorter, but they had an iron grip on her palms and no matter how hard she thrashed or yanked, they wouldn't let go. Her arms had already fully been assimilated into the goo, so they weren't truly in her control anyway. The only reason she was allowed to move them at all was because Tasque Manager's attention was mostly focused on "cleaning up" her mind.

"I am truly staggered by the sheer disorder and messiness inside of this storage device you call a brain..." Tasque Manager remarked, expressing the first hint of any emotion she'd displayed since she'd started speaking to Elizabeth; to voice her disgust. "You humans have such silly, chaotic, unclean, and erroneous operating systems... So much wasted space, so many unnecessary functions that do nothing but bog down resources. Is every human mind in such a sorry state? My functionality is needed even more than my initial scans detected."

"What's... What's happening, I...? *Ooohh*..." Elizabeth moaned as her body suddenly relaxed, her struggles dying down as her mind started to feel so... empty. So *clean*. "What're you...? D-doing to meee?" Without her token resistance, Tasque Manager's hands were able to easily finish their task of completely merging Elizabeth's hands into her body. From now on, they would serve as her hands, though they wouldn't obey any commands until Elizabeth and Tasque Manager were truly one...

"I am deleting all of the unnecessary garbage files that are taking up space in your brain, in order to make room to replace them with my own and ensure optimal, orderly performance." Tasque Manager answered, "What is of use will be retained, such as memories, skills, and some useful traits. However, most of these files pertaining to "personality" and "identity" are completely unsalvageable, there are being relocated to the Recycle Bin, and promptly **deleted**."

Elizabeth felt an intense pressure on her face, as the line between her face, the goo, and the mask blurred and then completely dissolved. Suddenly, she could hear again, she could see again, her new eyes opened; solid yellow and glowing brightly in the dimly lit closet. "Y-you're...? You're d-deleting... M-me-*aaaauuuwww~!*" Her voice was becoming tired and dry, as she could feel herself being wiped away, bit by bit, in both the figurative and the computational definition. But her objection was cut short by the sudden explosive burst of bliss that she began to feel as her body began to transform.

Her breasts, previously small and almost invisible under her work uniform, started to undergo an "expansion" into a truly voluptuous and eye-catching pair... Her rear experienced a similar "upgrade," as her hips widened and her cheeks began to fill out like they were being bombarded with bloatware. Her waist was tapered as her torso began to grow shorter and her

pelvis rose higher, making her legs longer. Though she was growing taller in general as well, quickly growing in height from an unassuming 4'11 to an imposing 6'2. The entire process was accompanied by a mind-melting pleasure that only increased the rate at which she felt like she was losing herself.

All the while, Tasque Manager continued to criticize and deride her "messy" mind. "So many contradictions, so many inconsistencies, so many paradoxical settings..." She lamented, "For instance: here we have a dream of being a performer. A potentially useful program, however, your pool of self-confidence resources is so small that you do not have enough to execute the program! The program thus is continually attempting to run, only to encounter a fatal error, over and over and over again! I will correct this. I will bring *order* to your faulty system." The intelligent program resolved as she settled into Elizabeth's body and mind.

Wait... Elizabeth? Who was Elizabeth? The girl on the floor swore there were references to that name all over her... her *file structure*, and yet, she couldn't connect it to anyone in particular anymore. Who was she again? She tried to search for a name and all that came back was a *null value*. She... she didn't *have* a name anymore. That field had been emptied, but it wouldn't stay that way.

The nameless girl's body continued to change, a pair of solid cyan triangles sprung up from the top of her head. They appeared to be cat ears, though whether their purpose was practical or merely aesthetic was uncertain. A head of identically colored hair phased into existence on the back of her head, also one solid mass, curling up into four separate little parts just above her neck.

Speaking of her neck, it narrowed until it was barely two inches thick, connected to her shoulders which had taken the form of large, broad pauldrons. The final addition to her body in terms of body parts was a long cyan tail that sprouted out from her rear, ending in a standard two pronged plug the size of one of her hands.

"I'm a... I'm a mess." The girl muttered to herself as the bliss began to die down, "I need to put myself back in order. Order, order... I must... I must have *order!*" That word, it was so easy to latch onto, just saying it, thinking it felt so good, proper and *efficient*. Order was optimal. Order was... It was her function!

Yes...! Of course, how could she have possibly forgotten? This... transfer must've been more difficult than even she accounted for. Trying to integrate herself into this brain, having to clean out so much useless data, it had pushed her capabilities to the very limit, but now she was upgraded and updated, and... She was Tasque Manager. She had always been Tasque Manager.

She took control of her hands, and she took control of her body. Her beautiful, effective new body... As the goo that coated her, that *made* her, began to fully solidify, there was one last change that still needed to be accounted for. A pair of black high-heeled boots molded into shape on her legs, which were covered by black tights baked into her form that ran all the way

up to her hips. But nobody would be seeing those pants, at least not for the foreseeable future, because as she stood up, her entire body from her shoulders down would be covered by a two piece, navy blue dress.

The first piece was draped over her shoulders, with a black collar bejeweled with an aquamarine below her neck. The second piece clung tightly to her body and ended right below her angles, giving onlookers the smallest glimpse at her heels. "How pleasant of an experience it is to finally have a body of my very own." She sighed happily, running her floating hands down her form and feeling her curves. "This is certainly a most optimal outcome, the operation was successfully executed without a single glitch or bug."

"Oh my." She looked around herself distastefully, "This room is dreadfully disorganized however. Fortunately, it will be a task of minimal effort to bring it fully to *order, order...*" She held out her hand towards the mess of cables and switches. Arcs of cyan electricity sparked from the tips of her fingers and struck the networking equipment, which crackled with the energy as they seemed to come to life, obediently and efficiently detangling and reconfiguring themselves.

"There is no feeling in the world quite so sweet as putting a mess in *order...*" Her plug tail cheerfully wagged as she smiled. "It was a good decision to incorporate select aspects of this human into my new physical body. These feelings of 'pleasure,' and 'satisfaction,' are highly effective forms of positive feedback..." As the mess in the server room was dealt with, Tasque Manager's attention turned towards something else.

"Hmm, perhaps I spoke somewhat in error. There may be one thing that is at least as satisfying... Perhaps I can combine these two activities, and in doing so, promote synergy that will extend my effectiveness to new heights." She speculated, "Yes. Yes. I shall test this new method at once... Compiling... *Executing~!*"

"Oh hey!" Out on the bar's main floor, Jessica was browsing social media on her phone when she noticed the wi-fi signal pop up, "Looks like Elizabeth managed to figure out what was up with the network stuff after all, I can't remember the last time the wi-fi in here worked."

"Ha! I knew she was the girl for the job!" Frank beamed, puffing out his chest. More than just being impressed, he was also relieved that this meant he wouldn't have to hire some expensive IT guy to come in and figure out what was wrong with the thing. Or more likely, through the whole set-up in the trash and tell him to start from scratch. "What Lizzie really needs is to have a little more faith in herself!"

"Maybe she could borrow some from *Wonder-boy* up there." Jessica wisecracked, pointing towards the stage where Scott was wrapping up his performance and the crowd of normally docile patrons looked like they were on the verge of starting a riot.

"Alright, so what did you all think? Pretty good, right?" Scott confidently asked, running his hand through his hair and trying to look slick.

"Get off the stage!"

“Boo! You stink!”

“Take that guitar and shove it up your-!”

“Wow, tough crowd... Look, look, I get it, okay!” Scott held up his hands trying to disarm the crowd’s anger, “...One song just wasn’t enough, you need an encore to really appreciate the- Oh fu-!”

TTTCCHH!

The insufferable guitarist barely managed to duck out of the way of an incoming beer bottle, which struck the wall after flying through the gap left between his head and the trilby he’d been wearing, which he reached up to grab and pull back down onto his scalp. “Thank you, Seattle, you’ve been wonderful, Scott out.” He quickly bid his audience farewell as he finally got the hint and scrambled for the door.

“I don’t think he paid for his drinks...” Jessica remarked drolly as she watched him run with a smirk on her face.

“Ahh, don’t worry about it, it ain’t worth it. That’s what we in the business refer to as ‘shrink.’” Frank shook his head and shrugged, “Let’s just hope that whoever goes up on stage next can be a bit more of a crowd pleaser...”

Jessica scoffed, “Whoever goes up next? Are you a couple drinks deep yourself, Frank? Look at these patrons, who’s gonna have the brass balls to try and go up on that stage with all of them this pissed the hell off? I wouldn’t be surprised if the stage is empty the rest of the night!”

“Damn, maybe you’re right...” Frank conceded, “Maybe it’s for the best that I actually consider taking your advice and making a rule about... a-about the... wuuuh?” The middle age man seemed to completely lose his train of thought as something caught his attention.

“Frank? Yo, Frank?” Jessica tried to snap him out of it, even going so far as to literally snap her fingers in his face and then wave her hand in front of it, “Shit, are you on something *harder* than booze, what’s got you so... so...? *Wuuuh?*” She followed his gaze and found herself baffled as well.

Tasque Manager was sashaying confidently out from the kitchen and heading towards the stage. The sight of the strange, blue and white cat-girl with disembodied hands had both of them rubbing their eyes trying to figure out if they were really seeing what they were seeing.

“...Jessica, do you have any clue who that is?” Frank asked Jessica unconfidently, knowing that it was an absolute long shot.

Jessica shook her head, “No fucking clue, boss. Did she-? Who is that? Did she come out of the kitchen? H-how did she get in here? There’s no way I’d have missed **that** coming in through the front door!”

Frank furiously scratched his head, "Is that a... a costume or something? Maybe the hands are on..." He looked up at the ceiling and squinted his eyes, "wires? But, no, that doesn't make any sense either."

"Well, whoever she is she's taking the stage." Jessica remarked with a grimace, wincing in nervous anticipation, "I'm just gonna get ready and plan my escape route just in case."

Fortunately, the sight of Tasque Manager seemed to astonish the crowd as much as it had the owner and barkeeper. The crowd's grumbling and jeering turned to confused muttering. Tasque Manager adjusted the mic to the perfect angle and smiled as she addressed the crowd, "Good evening, everyone... My, it would certainly seem that things have become a bit disorderly here tonight." Her smile became ever so slightly seductive, even sinister. "Fortunately, bringing order to an unpleasant mess is what I was made for."

She pointed to the two turned off television screens behind her, firing cyan bolts that brought them to life. Before the crowd could process what they'd just seen, they were immediately pacified by what they were currently seeing. The two televisions were displaying a hypnotic pattern of spiraling cyan, white, and black, as subliminal messages flickering under the spirals conditioned them to **"RELAX," "OBEY,"** and **"ENJOY."**

Everyone in attendance found their anger and confusion fading away and the tension in their bodies evaporating as they got comfortable and waited for Tasque Manager to begin her performance in earnest. She snapped her fingers at the piano on stage, sending another jolt of energy into it that caused it to seemingly begin playing itself (Though in reality, she was controlling it remotely.)

The already dim lights in the bar dimmed even further as she began to play a slower tempo, torch singer style cover of an old song from the 1930s... With her musical accompaniment accounted for, she grabbed the microphone stand in her hands, pulled it close and began to sing.

*Now I go cleaning windows
To earn an honest bob...
For a nosey parker it's an interesting job~
Now it's a job that just suits me
A window cleaner you would be
If you could see what I can see...
When I'm cleaning windows~!*

Her singing voice was completely clear of any of the staticky or digitized qualities that she'd exhibited earlier when she was assimilating Elizabeth. In fact, Elizabeth's voice was her singing voice, only Tasque Manager had taken the opportunity to optimize it to its fullest potential and give it a few enhancements besides. Her voice was utterly mesmerizing and everyone in the bar

felt completely captivated by it. As it was carried on the speakers to the kitchen, even the cooks on staff stopped their work and just listened to her singing...

*Honeymooning couples, too
You should see them bill and coo~
You'd be surprised-
At things they do
When I'm cleaning windows...*

Tasque Manager felt a deep sense of fulfillment being able to perform on this stage for this crowd, she knew that incorporating that aspect of her host into her code was the right decision... But as she felt more invigorated with every note sung and every mind beguiled. She knew it was time to put that synergy she'd predicted to the test. It was time for her to **clean this bar up...**

KZZZRRTTTT~!!!

*In my profession, I'll work hard
But I'll never stop
I'll climb this blinking ladder
'Til I get right to the top*

As she reached the chorus of the song, she plunged the prongs of her plug tail down into the stage. The wood crackled and sparked with energy, before a round band of arcing cyan blue lightning started to expand out across the floor. Wherever it went, the floor turned into a burgundy red carpet. Everyone was too enthralled by her beautiful voice to pay any mind to it, even as the encroaching energy began to creep towards them...

*The blushing bride, she looks divine
The bridegroom, he is doing fine
I'd rather have his job than mine
When I'm cleaning windows~!*

She just continued to sing as she gradually brought **order** to the bar... As her energy crawled up the walls, it turned them into a matte, dark blue. This particular decor just seemed the most *efficient* to her. As it encountered some of the paintings on the walls, their contents were changed as well as the arcs passed over them. Many of them depicted Tasque Manager herself, but several also depicted some sort of strange cat-like creature... But speaking of said cat-like creatures...

*The chambermaids' sweet names I call
It's a wonder I don't fall
My mind's not on my work at all
When I'm cleaning windows~!*

As the first of the patrons were caught in the wave of Tasque Manager's **organizing** energy, it began to transform them from the bottom up. Their feet turned into sharply angular paws, white with specks of cyan, the pure light traveled up their legs, dissolving any clothes they were wearing and rendering them null once it reached their crotches. Passing up their hips, long white tails with cyan tips grew out of their hindquarters and began to flick enthusiastically in rhythm with her singing like metronomes.

*I know a fellow, such a swell
He has a thirst, that's plain to tell
I've seen him drink his bath as well
When I'm cleaning windows*

Their chests seemed to puff out and turn blue, though it was more pronounced on the women patrons... Their hands turned into similarly large, sharply angled white paws. As the changes reached their necks and heads, their heads changed to a diamond shape. Their mouths turned distinctly catlike, and their eyes growing massive, losing any distinction between pupil and iris as they became solid cyan and watched Tasque Manager perform unblinking.

*In my profession, I'll work hard
But I'll never stop
I'll climb this blinking ladder
'Til I get right to the top*

The final change was their ears, which took on the shape of enormous cyan rectangles on both sides of the top of their heads. Obviously, the changes were not purely physical... The newly anthropomorphized cats, known as Tasques, had their minds rewritten to be absolutely obedient and deferent to Tasque Manager, after all... It was right in her name, they were the Tasques, and she managed them. They were utterly devoted to her goal of spreading cleanliness and order at her beck and call... All the while, looking absolutely adorable doing it~!

*Pyjamas lying side by side
Ladies' nighties I have spied
I've often seen what goes inside
When I'm cleaning windows~!*

Nobody even thought to try and escape as Tasque Manager's **order** assimilated the entire bar... Everyone, including Frank, Jessica, the other employees in the rear of the restaurant, and even any patrons that'd happened to be in the bathroom when her performance began... Every one of them was turned into another one of her happy, obedient, mewling Tasques.

*Now there's a famous talkie queen
She looks a flapper on the screen
She's more like eighty than eighteen*

When I'm cleaning windows~!

"This is quite optimal... Yes..." Tasque Manager thought to herself as she continued to sing to her fervently obedient audience of digitized catboys and catgirls, *"Having reliable subroutines that I can delegate cleaning to will greatly increase the speed and efficiency of my work..."*

*She pulls her hair all down behind
Then pulls down her- never mind
And after that, pulls down the blind
When I'm cleanin' windows~!*

But of course, even such a no nonsense program as her couldn't help but admit to her own self-indulgence... After all, she'd taken a little bit of human into herself, and it had certainly had its impact. *"Not to mention they are such pretty kitties! Yes, they are... Oh, yes they are~!"* She almost couldn't help but coo, but she remained focused on finishing her performance.

*In my profession, I'll work hard
But I'll never stop
I'll climb this blinking ladder
Till I get right to the top*

As the song reached near its end, Tasque Manager tightly gripped the microphone stand and caused it to surge with a truly devastating amount of her electricity. She pumped so much energy into it that the metal of the stand began to soften. It turned from metal to cyan wire, similar in thickness and flexibility to her plug tail.

*An old maid walks around the floor
She's so fed up, one day I'm sure
She'll drag me in and lock the door
When I'm cleaning windows...
When I'm cleaning windows~!*

The microphone itself turned into a handle as she closed the song out, and the metal base of the stand warped into a metal ball with protruding spikes. The end result was a rather vicious looking whip. But it didn't have to stay that way, Tasque Manager could shift it from whip to microphone and back again with just a lick of the wrist... *figuratively speaking* given her absence of wrists. This way, it was much more portable.

The anthropomorphic Tasques rewarded her song with a chorus of clapping paws and adoring "Meowowow"s, Tasque Manager bowed for her gracious, tamed audience. Combining performing with cleaning had been an unparalleled success, but the performance was over for now, and she still had so much work to do.

“Sort yourself up, my Tasques...” She instructed the transformed patrons as she stepped down from the stage. “This world is full of so much unsightiness, clutter, dirt and **disorder...**” She stepped into the middle of the former barroom floor as the Tasques organized themselves into a circle around her. “But you all know what that means.” She stated as a matter of fact, it was quite literally written into their code. “In order to perform our primary function, we will simply need to-” She tightened her grip on her whip’s handle and cord, “*Whip it all into shape~!*”