It is 2084. August 8th. 16:32:09. Exactly. And everyone knows it. There is no dispute and no question. No air of uncertainty. Yes, there is no uncertainty. The lights are too bright: the glow of screens and neon signs that spell it out. It is everywhere. The time, always shown and always visible, making absolutely sure you know how much of it you are using, wasting. Just in case you dared to forget.

The bar is called Click! Everyone in the bar sits on their phones, phones embedded and implanted in their forearms, charged by their life energy like a parasite or an organ, with their headphones in, listening privately to public music. The bar music is being broadcast and shared to everyone there individually. Everyone reads on their phones: posts and notifications and statuses and updates. They scroll through too quickly to understand any of the content past the obvious. They engage with it only on a surface level, the glossy and glowing surface of their screens. It is not like anything they are seeing is special or new. It is all meta-media, posts about posts. Since it is all that exists in the lives of people, there is nothing to create that is not simply a comment or repetition.

Through the club music Jane hears a ding, one sharp pang of sound. It cries out like a child above the music penetrating her most inner ear. She opens her notifications and sees that “Man at the end of the bar” is offering her a drink. She clicks the bar notification and is presented with Terms of Use and Conditions.

1. Acceptance of terms

By accepting this drink, you, the receiver of the free and paid-for beverage, hereby agree to Man-at-the-end-of-the-bar’s (M@EB, as he is otherwise and henceforth will be referred to) terms and conditions of accepting this drink, those of which fore-mentioned are outlined and stated below. He is therefore not responsible for transgression should it still be in accordance to the latter outlined terms, which he has drawn up and written out, should you choose to peruse them.
She glances at it briefly and pretends to scroll through it, much like she scrolls through everything else: too fast and too absently to come to real understanding. The words glide past, a mere blur is the path of her blank stare. The actual work and effort that went into it, an obsolete and outdated formality. Everyone in this situation is always more content believing that nothing will come of being detached from life, rather than trying to fully understand it. TLDR is simply the way of the world.

She presses accept, her wallet empty and her nerves on edge. Plus, she is flattered that someone took the time to acknowledge her. That rarely happens anymore. The BarBot brings her the drink. It is a dark liquid that seems to move with the consistency of oil trying to mix with water. It swirls and coalesces, only to separate again. She lifts it to her lips and begins to sip it, her eyes still downcast toward the blue glow of her screen. The liquor either tastes like sickly sweet medicine or candy with a kick. Whichever it is, it is sweeter than she expected, a pleasant surprise to her unsophisticated palate.

She chugs it, far too delighted by the rush to worry with moderation. She sets the drink back on the counter and glances up from her phone to look for the man who sent her the drink. She see no faces looking back, only the tops of heads. She resigns herself to her screen again, her patience already worn. She looks again briefly to see a woman at a corner table crying and takes a picture. She posts it to r/socialskills under the tag #cryinginpublic. She smiles to herself as it gains likes and comments. She is just happy to be noticed.

After a few minutes she feels light-headed and the screen blurs up. She hears the sharp cry of her notification alert but doesn’t check. She is too preoccupied with trying not to fall off her chair, which all of sudden seems to be swaying, rather violently, back and forth. Just as she
loses all semblance of balance, someone reaches out and catches her. She looks up to a blurry face of what may be a man. She calls out dryly to a friend asking for help, but no hears her over the sound of the music and no one sees past the glow.

She is getting increasingly unstable as the man leads her out of the bar, saying vague comforting words she cannot hear. The warmth of the drink has completely overwhelmed her body and her wasted form is immobile and nearly blind. She is suddenly thrown down onto a surface that seems to ripple with her movement, and her skin seems to vibrate with sensation when touched. It seems to tingle all over, her whole body numb with constant electricity. She feels a warm pressure in her stomach and then her brain jostling around in her skull, being thrust up against the sides. She is silent and dull, blissfully, although painfully, unaware.

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She wakes up to her alarm, another scream in her ear. She sits up quickly, at first out of fear, and then rises slowly as pain overtakes her. Her head is throbbing and the blood pounding in her ears is a low comforting base tone underneath the harsh pang of the alarm. She moans and holds her skull with both hands, as if trying to steady it. She feels a raw pain between her thighs. She feels like a torn piece of fabric: splayed and frayed, unkempt and matted. In short, ruined. She tries to stand but her legs are shaking and weak, and as soon as she stands she seems to be falling. Once the floor meets her, she feels in more pain than she did when she woke up. She knows the one explanation for her situation. There is only one explanation for the dirty cheap hotel room, her nakedness, and the loose gaping feeling starting at her base and reaching up into her core.
She frantically turns off her alarm and goes to the Click! home page to look at the bar’s posts from last night. There are several photos of her leaving the bar with the man who presumably raped her, but only the back of his head. There are no photos with his face.

She clicks the photo and discovers the man’s name. Jack Smith.

She sits on a stiff bench awaiting the man she accused of rape. She says “accused” because it is a formality, but there is no doubt. He did it. He raped her. There is no uncertainty. He walks towards her and sits down, uncomfortably close. As he does so, he winks with a knowing grin. There is no uncertainty. It is him.

He is tall, with dirty blonde hair that looks soft, broad shoulders, and a wide square build. He has a smooth face with a few acne scars on his left cheek. Objectively she is attracted to him. Under normal circumstances, she would have dated him, most likely slept with him if he had simply asked. But now she cannot bear to look at him. His face and form repulse her, making her shake with anger. They sit in front of the judge: a large square robot nailed to the ground. They await its decision.

“NOT GUILTY.” The boxy mechanical voice chills her. The man winks and stands. As he walks away she screams after him. She grabs his arm and pulls him back, pleading with the judge. He turns and smirks at her, his eyes too wide to be natural, or sane. She releases him in shock and fear. She watches him walk away and round the corner.

She turns to the judge and demands an explanation.

“His right to you and your body was outlined clearly in the Terms of Use and Conditions as such: ‘By accepting this drink you hereby agree to accommodate all the needs and desires of
M@EB. You thus are agreeing to be drugged into sedation and then taken, in a sexual fashion or otherwise, by M@EB at his will and leisure. If you do not wish this you should decline the offer.”"

She stands, stunned, her stomach tightening with each word. She begs and falls to her knees, crying uncontrollably, for the first time forgetful of appearance and presentation. She tries to appeal to this machine, to reason with it, to beg for mercy and justice, a machine that was programmed by a man who was probably more machine than man himself.

Meanwhile, a young man in the courthouse takes a picture of a crazy woman on her hands and knees in front of the judge. He posts it to r/socialskills under the tag #cryinginpublic. He smiles to himself as the first like and comment comes through from one Jack Smith that reads “Crazy bitch.” He is just happy to be noticed.