



S. CRAIG RENFROE JR.

On Bondage

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Crispin, our manager, wore to the meeting a tie with tiny penises all over it. We weren't sure what to do. It seemed wrong to point out that his tie was covered with cartoon penises. Surely he knew that. Later, Sue suggested that he might have put it on in the dark, mistaking the gag gift for a work tie. But at the time some of us wondered if we should laugh. John tried but Crispin just looked at him funny. I had to give a report that day and felt uncomfortable all during my PowerPoint.

The next day, John wore a tie with a mermaid naked from the fins up, and Crispin asked him if he thought that was appropriate for the workplace. John said he guessed not. Crispin said to borrow a different one or go home for the day. I lent John a solid red. I kept one in all the primary colors in my desk. John and I decide the penises were actually a pattern that just happened to look like penises.

The next week, Crispin's tie had a monster on it.

The tentacled beast covered in gore turned out to be Cthulhu according to Sue, who watched a lot of anime so we believed her. Crispin was fifty-three. He drove a BMW. He was divorced but was dating someone much younger. He didn't seem like a Lovecraft fan. Sue suggested it was his lover's idea—young professional women were really getting into Lovecraft these days, she said. Sue liked to believe other people were like her.

A pattern did emerge but not of penises. Crispin's ties during most of the week were the usual florals and strips, but on Monday he would wear something bizarre. It took us pot leaves, Rasputin, and dog shit before we caught on. It was a Monday when we considered our options. Crispin's tie that day was an eyeball about to be slit by a razor. *Un Chien Andalou*, Sue said. Sue said it might be a cry for help. John said that it wasn't. John was mad that only management could have self-expression.

It was a Monday when Crispin hung himself. Sue was right, and she told us so. Much later John brought in a paper bag. He said that he'd bought all Crispin's old crazy ties from the lover at a yard sale. John went to a lot of yard sales. He poured them onto my desk. They were all there. The eyeball landed on top. We didn't talk. Finally, I asked him if I could have Cthulhu, but he told me Sue had dibs.

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The new manager, Bill, wore the same tie every day.
A navy floret pattern. None of us had the nerve or the
love to call him on it.