After promising to send some of my traveling pictures to Zhou Ai, I left New York and traveled by the Fjord truck into neighboring Connecticut. Specifically, New London.

Compared to regular London, the city had been in steep decline for years. The divide between rich and poor was apparent for those who recognized it easily and didn’t just ignore the less-maintained parts during the drive; abandoned, burnt out buildings, an array of graffitied homes, overgrown front lawns, too many shuttered shops to count, plus a motel I checked into (while keep in mind, not as bad as the one I immediately checked out of in New Jersey) with a few reviews suggesting a history of drug dens over the years. Still, at least the housekeeping staff bothered doing their jobs.

I’d settled into my room sometime in the late evening. Having missed lunch, I decided on going out for dinner at a well-liked family restaurant several miles from downtown. There, I ate a hearty portion of white clam pizza, plus a Caesar’s salad and a bottle of their finest beer. During which, I also perused through Howlr to find some comfort for later that night.

Most men on the app didn’t fit my tastes, either being too old, to unhygienic, too much of a top, or obviously trying to advertise illegal dealings. Speaking of which, one profile did catch my eye at one point: a silver bat, aged thirty, wearing lacy underwear beneath a soft bed in his photos, with three rose emojis as his profile name. The description included coded phrases pretty much advertising himself as someone willing to turn tricks for three-hundred dollars in cash.

“Anything else I can get for you, sir?” asked the waiter handing me my bill.

“Yes, one thing,” I paid upfront, “do you know where I can find a working ATM?”

Half an hour and several messages with the rose emoji profile later, I got an address. It was in the middle of a random trailer park on the outskirts of New London, just a mile or so from the city limits. I was to knock four times on the door, give a certain reply when asking a question, then immediately step inside.

I obeyed his orders. I parked outside of a random mobile home, one with the bare bones of decorations or personality, then knocked four times.

“Are you the mailman?” A muffled voice spoke through the door.

Sighing, I replied, “No, but I have a package for you.”

The lad who opened the door didn’t fit the profile’s album gallery. At least, until I stared through the darkness. Sure, he happened to be a silvered bat, but the one playfully posing and winking at the camera in each photo didn’t look…so skeletal. The brightness in his emerald eyes had been replaced with hollow green, like dying grass, with sunken eyebags. His well-groomed fur looked half-clean, as if he’d forgotten to brush it days prior. His wings appeared malnourished too.

“Are you…Sebastian?”

“Yes, I…am.” Pulling myself back to Earth, I immediately cleared my throat. “And you’re from Howlr, right?”

Without a word, the bat weakly nodded and invited me inside. To say the interior was barren would’ve been an understatement. I presumed to have been a living room only contained a small couch facing an empty TV stand, with said electronic appliance long gone. His eagerness to get the money as well as empty cupboards, plus a series of uniforms on a clothes rack and no bedframe told me almost enough about the silver bat’s situation. I’d later learn it went beyond having trouble making ends meet, but involved an apathetic landlord always raising the rent beyond what he could afford every year.

Anyway, we almost did the deed if it weren’t for a lack of sleep. I’d hesitantly stripped my lower half down, then lay back on the barebones mattress, trying to relax as the silver bat began nursing my dogcock with enthusiasm. He didn’t just suck it like a job, but somebody trying to find as much pleasure in the act as he gave. Still, no more than five minutes in, the unnamed silver bat pulled off the shaft to lick at my scrotum. Only to fall asleep within seconds.

It very much caught me off-guard. Abandoning my lust for the moment, I instead knelt to check his pulse and breathing. All checked out good, but he was completely knocked out.

A part of me considered leaving to go back to the motel. The more rational, compassionate side of me knew better. After cleaning myself in the washroom, then pulling the lad up onto his mattress and placing a blanket over him, I looked back into his kitchen again. A part of me knew I also needed to do something. I couldn’t just leave him like this.

So, I performed a miracle.

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The lad woke up sixteen hours later to find me in his kitchen, shocked and later numb with disbelief at seeing me cook a hearty breakfast at his stove.

“Good morning, sleepy head.” I greeted him as he rubbed his widened, hungry eyes. “I hope you like pancakes, bacon, scrambled eggs, all of it on me.” Unable to say anything, the silver bat noticed the partly opened cupboards, then squeaked a mixture of delight and incomprehension at seeing boxes upon boxes of instant ramen, macaroni boxes, and canned foods. “Consider it my payment for last night, kiddo.”

“B-B-But I didn’t get to do a-anything.” He whimpered, ashamed and still disbelieving.

“You gave me a killer blowjob before falling asleep,” I shrugged, then placed the last flapjack on his plate, before bringing the full platters to his table. “Let’s eat up then. You look like you could use it, kiddo.”

“Can you stop calling me ‘kiddo’, please?” He defiantly requested, nonetheless sitting down to stare down at his plate.

“What can I call you then?” I asked calmly. “I’m not going to call you ‘Bat’.”

Licking his lips and trembling in his seat, he answered, “Xavier.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Xavier.” I cheerily handed him a fork and poured myself some O.J. “Now, let’s dig in then, before it gets cold.”

Patiently and never dropping my reassuring smile, I waited until Xavier decided to trust his stomach, piercing a strip of carefully sizzled back and scrambled egg, then slowly gulped it down in one bite. His eyes sparkled from the taste. He lit up like Christmas, then proceeded to ravenously chew on, then savor each morsel on his plate. Xavier devoured his food within minutes, then sheepishly checked the refrigerator, only to sniffle at seeing it filled with butter, milk, eggs, some fruit, everything a silver bat like him needed to eat.

“Can I…Can I make myself some more?” He asked, then flinched. “Ack, sorry, sorry. Dumb question, I know.”

I shrugged. “Hey, it’s your house.”

For the following two hours, Xavier and I talked about anything and everything. The silver bat happened to be a bright lad with a business marketing degree, a keen interest in film theory, as well as punk music and genderqueer rights. He surprised me the most by offhandedly mentioning the flaws of trickle-down economics. Unfortunately, paying off the student loans took their toll on his credit, and he grew desperate enough to start hooking the previous year. It could often be dangerous, and not as well-paying as he liked it to be, but it helped put food on the table, as well as keep up with the exorbitant rent and utility bills constantly inflating.

By the end of brunch, Xavier started to cry, and I didn’t judge him. I merely placed a comforting paw on him as he tried collecting himself. When he did manage to do so, the silver bat asked why I bothered helping a nobody like him.

“Because I used to be a nobody too. And we nobodies need to help each other.”

“Ha!” He chuckled while wiping tears from his eyes. “Still, I…can’t thank you. This…must be a dream. I’m gonna wake up all alone, starving, and stuck in this pit.”

No, he wasn’t. I came to that sole conclusion long before I started helping him clean up the table, then the dishes. “Listen, do you work today? I’m thinking of going around New London to see some sights—the aquarium, a comedy club, the wharf near the harbor, and was wondering if you’d like to join?” I asked, then explained myself before he could rebuke the offer. “I can make it worth your while. Very worth your while.”

Xavier carefully inquired, “Say I accept, how much so?”

“Let’s start off with say,” I licked some remaining grease from my nose, “…a thousand a week? If you can’t afford a laptop or camera to send me photos and video, I’ll happily provide it, but it won’t be charged on you.”

“Woah, woah, woah,” he guffawed with a wave of his paws. The bat stared at me in intrigue, as well as further disbelief at my legitimate offer. “Are y-you suggesting I make you my sugar daddy or some shit like that?”

“Sugar daddy is so informal,” I smiled at him. “I prefer the term ‘sponsor’. But yes, the offer is real. You’ll no longer have to take multiple jobs, prostitute yourself at the risk of getting hurt or arrested, and get to take control of your life. I’ve even got another boy named Rafael. He’s a Cuban sugar bat of mine who lives with me back in Greece. Of course, you don’t have to take or leave the offer right now. All I ask is for a date. How’s that sound?”

For a moment, Xavier mulled it over. Then, he accepted.

“It’s a deal.”

Later that same night, I helped go out with him to buy a new laptop computer.