

Working Stiff

My most unique work experience began when I was 22 at Saks Fifth Avenue. I was hired to hand out credit card applications to customers as they entered the store. The uniform was a tuxedo and the only size they had was a 38 regular. I'm a 42 long, but three months rent past due, I figured out a way to stuffed myself into the jacket and went to work.

Halfway through the first day, a woman approached me and introduced herself. Victoria was in her early 40s, her face and body, the best money could buy. She looked at the tux the sleeves bare reaching beyond my elbows and told me I should have someone dress me better. All I could do was mumble something about how hard it was to find suits that fit with the arms of a Neanderthal.

Before she left the store, Victoria invited me to a bar for drinks that evening and for the rest of the day I pondered what I said or done to deserve the invitation.

Drinks lasted exactly one hour at which time Victoria escorted me from the bar and into the back of her chauffeured Mercedes for the trip to her place.

Her vast Park Avenue apartment had views in all directions. Within minutes we were in each others arms making passionate love in that special way that only a double divorcee in her 40s and an eager 22 year old with orangutan arms can make.

The next morning a note from Victoria instructed me to return at six that night. Attached to the note was a hundred dollar bill for cab fare. She said I could keep whatever was left.

The forty dollars I made at Saks that day paled in comparison to the one hundred dollars that remained after walking to and from work.

Arriving at the apartment, Victoria pulled me to the floor and it was like we were in the middle of a remake of the Graduate. An hour later she told me to get dressed; we had a gallery opening to attend. All I had to wear were jeans, the short sleeve tuxedo was back at Saks.

She took me to one of her many walk in closets and opened the doors revealing two dozen designer suits, all 42 longs, all a perfect fit.

At the gallery, we couldn't keep our hands off each other and quickly returned to the apartment.

The next morning, a note from Victoria instructed me to pick up a few items from the deli, attached to the note was a new one hundred dollar bill. She told me I could keep what ever was left.

This went on every day and by the end of the week, with almost \$700 in my pocket, I knew my relationship with Victoria was less The Graduate and more Midnight Cowboy. It was work.

So, like all obsessed New Yorkers I became a workaholic.

Nothing got in the way of my work, not even Victoria's social calendar which was filled with theater, ballet, and museums. Together, Victoria and I found just about every hidden corner and empty coat room in town and quickly progressed from hand jobs at Hamlet to blow jobs at the Bolshoi to fucking at the Frick.

This went on for six months. You might say I worked myself to the bone. It was a great job. But as we all know, great jobs don't last.

On New Year's Eve, we went to a party that consisted of a dozen or so women, all in their forties and a couple dozen men, like me, in their twenties, very well dressed. An hour into the party, Victoria finished her drink, asked me for the house keys, gave me a kiss and said goodbye. She took the arm a man I had come to know as the escort of her best friend and left the party. I called to her. There was no response.

When I returned to her apartment, the doorman wouldn't let me into the building. Victoria's chauffeur was still there and offered me a lift. As we drove through the night, he smiled and said "Nice tux, 42 long?" "Yeah, what does that have to do with anything?"

It had to do with everything. What I learned was that night I had been given the pink slip by the East Side 42 Long Club, a group of fiscally minded women in their 40s who cut down on the clothing expenses of their escorts by recruiting and sharing young men, all of whom were size 42 long. New Years Eve was the night the club shuffled "employees."

As we drove down Fifth Avenue, distance growing between me and that closet full of suits I mistakenly thought were mine I wondered aloud why they hadn't just transferred me. Victoria's chauffeur either didn't have an answer or was kind enough not to share it.

Trying to make the best of the situation I thought about how I was going to account for the past months on my resume. I considered listing it as some sort of an advertising job because just about everybody in advertising does the same thing to their clients.

But I put my thoughts aside as the car pulled to the curb and before I got out, Victoria's chauffeur offered a suggestion for my resume which summed it up in two simple words: May 1978 through December 1978, working stiff.