

Wriggle

There it was again.

Diane could have sworn that she saw it happen. She took a breath like the one that she assumed was a yoga deep breathing technique although it didn't help calm her down. She carefully examined her hands, praying it would go away but also hoping that it would reveal itself maybe one more time so she could get a closer look at it.

But now she was behind. Diane quickly applied a layer of lotion to her hands. She would have been more generous but again, she was behind. After meticulously coating her moneymakers, she dashed out the door. She had forgotten to brush her hair and teeth but they weren't there to get her face.

Diane Sullivan was a professional at every set she stepped onto. This wasn't going to faze a seasoned veteran of the industry, especially not one on Diane's caliber. That didn't mean that people took her seriously. After all, she was a hand model, one of the least respected communities of models. At least she wasn't one of those models for stock photos.

"Late again, Diane," said Mort, Diane's makeup artist. She couldn't bear to tell him why she was late, for obvious reasons. Clad in too many scarves and smelling faintly of vaseline, he was the type of homosexual that made Diane rethink her stance on marriage equality. She hated having him around but no one could make her hands sparkle like Mort.

"I can't do this today, Mort." She said. "Just get it over with."

Mort got to work, gently dusting her hands with expensive powders and highlighters. Diane, who usually would use this time to book other gigs, was intently watching her hands get ready. It wasn't like Diane particularly wanted to watch the process, as she had already done multiple days of shooting this week but she needed to be sure that *it* didn't make it's triumphant return while she was in front of everyone. Almost immediately, Mort launched into what was sure to be a mind-numbing story about the sex he was having with latest man in a long string of losers. "Please don't let it happen in front of him," she thought. That was the last thing she needed, for Mort to be the reason that she-

And then it happened again. Just below the surface of Diane's skin, something wriggled. Small enough that she barely felt it there, but she did feel it there. The first time she saw it, Diane thought it was just a blood vessel. But the second time it happened she decided after a quick freak out that it was something foreign. Scenarios raced through her mind. Some parasite that entered through that suspect craft service table she ate at last week? A tracking device courtesy of the government? Alien technology? She wanted to let out a scream, a bloodcurdling shriek, but she couldn't. Maybe because she didn't want Mort to notice anything out of the ordinary but Diane suspected it was plain fear that rendered her mute. Just as quickly as it appeared, it swiftly wriggled away, flexing and pulsing its way into her dermis. She touched the area that the wriggle had inhabited. It was warm to the touch and the skin was loose. She gagged slightly.

"Right," said Mort still recounting his dick appointment, "that's how I was gagging on it, which is weird because I can normally suppress my gag reflex if I squeeze my left finger." Diane forced a grimace. She was hoping that was the end of his story. He worked faster when he wasn't

talking. “That’s when he told me that he was lying about his age,” he said. “Turns out he was 56, which I had suspected because of the dick wrinkles.”

A mousy PA with a clipboard that clearly carried way too much nostalgic significance nervously approached Diane and Mort. “Um, they need you on set, Miss Sullivan,” she squeaked.

Diane was already halfway out of her seat by the time the PA finished her sentence. Mort started whining about how he really needed more time to make her cuticles glisten but Diane just waved him away. The sooner the photographer got the shot, the sooner she could safely examine her hand without fruity makeup artists and PA’s finding out her disgusting secret.

“Fuck,” Diane whispered to herself as she walked onto set. What if the wriggle exposed itself while there was a high definition camera pointed at it? Even scarier, what if they didn’t notice the wriggle and shot of it ended up plastered on billboards all over the interstate? “Keep it together, bitch,” she thought to herself. She couldn’t afford to blow this shoot. Wedding ring jobs were one of the most highly coveted gigs in the hand modeling industry and the clients were notoriously picky when it came to what hands to use. If she could just get through this shoot, she would have enough saved to finally get started on renovating her kitchen. Thoughts of exposed brick and glossy marble countertops soothed Diane as she placed her hand down on the table that had all the high intensity lights pointed towards it. Diane sat there, becoming increasingly queasy as the veins in the marble she was daydreaming started to wriggle. Thankfully, she was interrupted by the embarrassingly nervous squeak of the PA who was there to slide the rings onto her finger. The first ring was laid with a huge diamond. “Oh, how wonderful!” Diane said loudly,

hoping to distract the PA. But the second the PA started easing the ring onto her finger, it was back. With a vengeance.

The PA recoiled. “What was that?” she stuttered. Diane could see the photographer in the distance putting some strange batteries into his camera. She knew there was only one way to do damage control.

“What was what?” cooed Diane in the most sickly-sweet voice she could muster.

“It was... I saw...” Checkmate.

“You saw what?” Diane watched as the PA struggled to figure out how to explain what had just happened. She was hoping that she read her correctly and that her social anxiety was not only crippling, but also debilitating. “Come on, spit it out. Are you just gonna stand there like you saw something gross or are you going to TALK to me?” Harsh, but it would get the job done.

“I... I... um, excuse me,” the PA said, whimpering through poorly concealed tears. Diane felt guilty about how succinctly she destroyed the one witness to her wriggle, but it was imperative that nobody saw it before she could figure it out first. As she watched the PA shuffle away in her dirty Converse and Target-branded graphic tee, Diane felt something that she was becoming all too familiar with. The wriggle. She glanced down at her hand. And almost started to cry.

“Diane, sweetheart, let’s get this show on the road,” Shit. Richie the photographer was here. Diane shoved her hand into her purse, desperately trying to think of something that she could be looking for in her purse.

“Just looking for my...” At this point, she was frantically searching for anything identifiable in her purse so she could keep this lie up. Her hand brushed up against her “... parking stub”.

Richie didn't believe her lie but he also didn't respect women enough to care what she was searching for. He was just thankful she didn't say tampon.

“So,” Diane said in her best nothing's wrong voice, “what do you want to start with?”

The shoot was long. Every time she thought they had gotten the shot, Richie decided that he wanted it from a fresh angle. At one point, he deleted half the files from the computer so they started again. Diane was starting to sweat, beads of moisture forming at her temples. She wiped her face on her sweater and little fuzzy strings caught on the sweat. At least it couldn't get worse. Then, it got worse. As Richie was counting down a shot, the wriggle came back. Thankfully, Diane realized that she really didn't have that much to worry about. Richie was either too focused on the shot (highly unlikely) or too busy imagining some porn scenario between the two of them (much more feasible) to notice the skin on Diane's hand convulsing. Richie was no professional. If Diane was the photographer she would have noticed the wriggle right away.

“Right, so I have Dave Matthews Band tickets in half an hour and I'm sure some of those shots are usable. Probably,” said Richie in between picking earwax out of his ears. A flash of divine fury came over Diane in that moment and she might have blacked out from the rage if it wasn't for the fact that the wriggle had disappeared again. Diane decided to call it a draw and within 10 minutes was driving home with a fat ass paycheck in her pocket.

The fat ass paycheck that Diane came back with that day was barely enough to cover the cost of the labor, let alone the premium-grade marble that Diane was eyeing for the backsplash.

And to make matters worse, the wriggle continued to show up. Always at the most inopportune times. Like when Diane invited her boy toy over for a mid-afternoon romp and almost fell off the bed when she realized the wriggle was pulsing through her hand. Or when she was at a black tie charity event that she scored an invite to through Mort and the wriggle started as she was reaching for a crab puff. That was the last fancy event that Diane attended. It was actually the last event in general that Diane attended. The fear of the wriggle making her the laughingstock of the city was growing stronger and with every squirm, Diane felt another nail being hammered haphazardly into her coffin.

“Why don’t you just go see a doctor,” Diane whined, imitating the shrill ring of Mort’s voice. She was fantasizing about telling him about her secret. Diane would never tell him in real life, as Mort would probably give away his social security number if a man with defined pectoral muscles asked him for it. He was too weak to know. Diane needed someone to tell who could take it. But the only person that she knew was up to the task already knew, Diane herself.

After two weeks of re-modeling, the kitchen was in a total state of chaos. Diane hadn’t had running water in her sink for weeks and the stacks of dirty dishes weren’t only taking up space in the kitchen, but also Diane’s guest bedroom and the mudroom. She would have done the dishes herself, but her hands.

There were a lot of things that Diane didn’t do because of her hands. The most physical work that she was comfortable doing was painting her nails or turning on and off the TV. Most of the time, Diane could find a way to make Mort come over and lift things that were too heavy and then they would drive to a shoot together. She knew she could always pull the dead husband card and Mort would come, cooing about the melodrama of it all. But today she was in no mood for

Mort's homosexual antics. But also today, Diane really needed help tidying up. And she could use always use a ride to work as steering created unnecessary wear and tear on her hands.

"I'm ready for my closeup, Mr. DeMille" cooed Mort as he walked in. Diane had no idea what that meant but it was best not to ask what he was referencing, lest she be subject to another rant about yet another movie that Diane had no intention of ever watching.

"Come on in Mort, I'll show you what needs to get done and then we can go to the shoot." Diane led him to the gutted kitchen. Mort daintily stepped over the renovation work, being careful not to scuff his Fenty shoes. It was satisfying for Diane to watch Mort squirm in this heterosexual environment and she made a mental note to find a reason to take Mort to a Home Depot. "It's right over here," said Diane, pointing to a toolbox full of hammers that was precariously perched on top of the fridge that she wanted to get down so she could put her decorative .

"I don't see them," said Mort, in his annoying way. Of course he didn't see them.

"They're right up there, you just have to reach a little." God, how Diane hated that little runt. "Look, it's not rocket science, they're just hammers. See, right up here." Diane gestured broadly to the top of the fridge so that Mort would have no choice but to understand what she was saying. And then as if on cue... it was back. The wriggle, just beneath her dermis, was pulsing and wiggling with a vengeance. Furthermore, it hurt. Diane tried to remember if the wriggle had ever hurt before. She couldn't remember a sharp biting sensation happening when the wriggle showed up at her photoshoot.

"Diane?" Fucking Mort.

“Here we go,” Diane thought as she cherished her last moment alone with the secret. She braced for the inevitable, Mort freaking the fuck out over the wriggle. Diane watched Mort’s eyes track from the box of hammers he was holding to the marble countertop where Diane’s hand lay, wiggling. In the span of five seconds, Mort had gone completely white (Diane didn’t understand how that was possible because she knew how much makeup Mort wore on an average day). Mort opened his mouth to say something and then promptly closed it. He opened his mouth again. And closed it again. All the while, Diane’s wriggle was basically performing for Mort. The wriggle had taken on the air and grace of a figure skater, twisting and turning around the perimeter of Diane’s hand. She couldn’t bear to keep watching it but she could feel every motion.

Diane knew she had to say something to Mort. She couldn’t just gaslight him into not saying anything, like that PA. No. She had to give him something nicer to play with, a story bigger than her wriggle that he could go around and tell the rest of his limp-wristed mafia about. But what about? Diane quickly scrolled through the rolodex of celebrity gossip that she had procured over years of being on sets. Mort opened his mouth to say something. Diane knew she had to act quick in order for her plan to work. “Did you know that Lady Gaga is a scientologist?”

“Yeah obviously,” Mort snapped back. Fuck. Of course that fairy would have known that. “But girl... what the fuck is happening to your hand?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Diane, calmly. At this point, her hand was in a dull throbbing pain. Like the wriggle was slamming itself against her skin, begging to be let out.

“Diane, why lie! What the fuck is going on? Is there a worm trapped in there?” Mort’s usually breathy voice was replaced by a panicked croak and his eyes were bulging out of his head as he cautiously looked at Diane’s hand. Diane knew it was finally time to let him know. It had gone on long enough.

“Mort, I- um...” Diane struggled to continue her sentence. “You know that wedding ring shoot I did a month ago?”

“The one where I fucked the photographer?”

Diane was too tired to express her discomfort at that one. “Yup. That one.” she said as she winced through the pain of the wriggle trying to work its way into her pointer finger. “That was the first time I saw it.” Diane was about to dive into a monologue recanting the disarray her life had fallen into since the wriggle started. She was nearly shocked when Mort interrupted her as she had just assumed that he would attentively listen to her story. She then realized that she didn’t catch a word of what Mort said. “Sorry, what?”

“Oh, my dad was a surgeon in my village growing up, do you want me to slice your hand open for a sec and root around in there?” The thought of Mort rooting around inside her hand, becoming friends with the wriggle was nearly enough to make Diane completely lose her balance. As she gripped the table, she thought about it again.

“Maybe it wants to get out.”

“Right exactly!” Mort said, “I bet whatever’s in there is just lost and scared. I have my butterfly knife on me, do you want me make a little incision?”

“ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR FAGGOTY MIND?” Diane howled. Stars clouded her vision but she wasn’t done. “I AM NOT GOING TO MAKE AN INCISION IN MY HANDS! HOW THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO GET ANY WORK WITH A SCAR ON MY HAND?”

Mort hadn’t heard anything past the sixth word that Diane said to him. She had never treated him with any kind of human decency but he had been quick to forgive. After all, her hands were the best in the biz and he liked that she didn’t care about anything that he had to say. Mort did have a sneaking feeling that Diane was a homophobe and she had just confirmed it. He quickly gained his composure and started making his way out of Diane’s ugly half-completed kitchen. Any self-respecting gay knew that there are less homophobic and richer women out there to profit off of. As he listened to Diane beg his forgiveness, he opened his phone and sent out an email blast to The Limp-Wristed Mafia with the subject line “All Wrists on Deck: We’re Cancelling Diane Sullivan, yes the hand model”.

Mort was gone. Everyone was gone. The construction workers had left for the day. She had left her family behind long ago, and for what? So her hands could be in a few regional commercials? Just the mere thought of her hands caused the wriggle to reach a fever pitch, flailing about, bumping into every bone and tendon in her hand. She couldn’t bear to keep a stiff upper lip for a second longer. Diane felt herself right on the brink, as if one wrong movement could cause her nervous system to fry completely. She debated whether or not to lose her shit. But thankfully, she didn’t have to decide for herself. Diane grabbed a hammer out of the toolbox and brought it down forcefully onto her hand. Diane heard a bone sickening crunch and felt the wriggle start to panic. She was so close, she couldn’t let it get away. She swung down on her hand again, this time missing and shattering her pinky. Autopilot took over and the only goal was

to land a hit on the wriggle. It took Diane three more whacks at her hand before she finally connected one with the wriggle. It stopped mid-squirm and seemed to deflate. Even though she had never been in worse pain, Diane breathed a sigh of relief.

As Diane looked down at her hand, relief turned into horror. The deflated wriggle had detached into two distinct beings. Then the two wriggles turned to four, four turned to eight, and so on until Diane's entire body was covered in writhing creatures, pulsing all over her body. She glimpsed her reflection and watched as her features were distorted by thousands of wriggles. Diane let out one final howl as she grabbed the hammer again.