



Midnight Kisses (Spicy Fat Cinderella Retelling)

Author: *Esme Brett*

Category: Romance

Description: She's a plus size model with big dreams and a serious work ethic. He's a nepobaby whose longest relationship is with his assistant.

Perry Anders is working a fancy New Year's Eve party as the bathroom attendant. It's a rock-bottom moment, career-wise.

Miles Lawrence comes crashing into her orbit with his mind on a wardrobe malfunction. The minute he lays eyes on the gorgeous attendant, his plans change.

One thing leads to another, and they're kissing at midnight—but not the kind of kissing where they're face to face.

After one taste, Miles is hooked, but Perry is focused on building her skincare empire and while Miles is charming, hot and magnetic, a f'boy is as a f'boy does—and not even his meddling mother can change that.

Opposites might attract, but can they make it last in this spicy Cinderella retelling?

Midnight Kisses is a 30,000-word m/f spicy Cinderella story with a fat protagonist. Perry is 27, and Miles is 35. Tropes include grumpy/sunshine, I-can-only-sleep-when-I'm-with-you, and a little bit of stretch k!nk.

Total Pages (Source): 17

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

MILES

Preoccupied with the price of my freedom, I pushed through the bathroom door expecting urinals and faucets, not a blonde smokeshow with tits that could end a man.

A blunt curse fell out of my mouth.

“Pardon?”

Plump, pink lips shaped her query and I temporarily forgot about the situation that had brought me in here.

Reflexively, I straightened to my full height. “I thought this was the men’s room.”

Her large blue eyes flicked to the door and back to me. “Didn’t you see my sign?”

Now I was paying attention, I didn’t need a sign to know that no men’s room would have a lightshow of pink stars on the ceiling, the heavy scent of flowers, or a fucking goddess reclining here on a chaise lounge like she was waiting for a horny reprobate to arrive and pleasure her.

Here I was? —

No, I had more pressing concerns.

“Sorry, blondie. You need to get out. I have a situation.”

She sat up with a huff, which jerked her incredible breasts.

I'd like to jerk her incredible breasts.

Distracted again, I took in her long calves, thick thighs and plush, curvy body which was wrapped in a dress that held her like a satiated lover: attentive and intimate.

Grateful . She looked like she belonged in a painting with cherubs and horny satyrs and miscellaneous other revellers fawning over her.

“What situation?” The goddess asked.

I parted the flaps of my jacket and flicked a hand at my crotch, a gesture that would've been rude as fuck if not for the large red wine stain which ran from my navel to my knees, turning the light grey fabric dark, ruining both my trousers and my mood.

Fucking Rose McNulty and her fucking wandering hands.

She'd been chasing me around the Purkiss New Year's Eve party, shedding subtlety and accumulating desperation as the night wore on.

Angling herself between me and the colleague of Robert's I'd been talking to, she'd forced me to inch back until the reinforced glass and 200m plunge had me at her mercy.

During the day, tourists and thrill-seekers strapped themselves into harnesses and leapt off the observation deck here at the Sky Tower—for fun— which I hadn't understood until the alternative was Rose.

Tipsy, Rose had gone in for a fiddle, forcing me to pull an evasive manoeuvre which

worked beautifully in terms of avoiding digits-on-dick, but poorly in terms of knocking a glass of Martinborough pinot noir down my crotch.

I knew exactly the region of the wine, because the glass had been my father's and he'd cried, " my Martinborough pinot! " as it tumbled.

Now, the Pre-Raphaelite wet-dream hidden here in the bathroom was eyeing my crotch, and not for the right reasons.

"Not to be rude," I drawled to the bathroom woman, because even though I was the CEO of my family-owned business, I'd learned that prefacing my opinions this way kept HR off my dick. "But unless you want an eyeful, you should make yourself scarce."

"I can't. This is my job. I'm the bathroom attendant."

I frowned. "Bathroom isn't a job."

Blondie giggled. "Good Kenergy."

"What?"

"You know." She adopted a silly pout and dropped her voice. "My job is just: bathroom."

She was speaking in tongues. Which made sense, because she couldn't be the hottest woman on the planet and a mental giant. That would fuck up the balance of the universe.

"I need to get the wine out of my pants. So, you—" I snapped my fingers in a point, then jerked my thumb over my shoulder, "—need to skedaddle."

“I should help you.”

If this goddess was anywhere near my crotch, the only thing I wanted her help with would result in another stain on my pants.

“Decline,” I said firmly.

“Truly, I can.” She scrambled to her feet, and the more I saw of her, the more my brain short-circuited.

She was delicious. Soft and sexy, wrapped in a fabric that showed her body to perfection, as befit a work of art.

I stared like a horny teen while she procured a large plastic toolbox from under her chaise and rustled through it.

“Stain remover!” She held up a bottle triumphantly. “Take off your pants and give them to me.”

Right sentiment, wrong context.

“No.”

“You can go into a stall and pass them over the door to me. Everyone else is listening to the speeches, so it’s just you and me.”

That was the fucking problem.

“I’m a safe person, I promise.” Her reassuring smile was wasted on a reprobate like me. “I won’t make you feel uncomfortable.”

Perhaps this goddess could go find Rose and give her a crash course on boundaries.

Rose was a daughter of one of my mum's friends, therefore I'd heard no end of her virtues.

She was single, fun, ran marathons and owned a PR firm—a skillset my mother believed would be useful for me, the cheeky broad.

Yes, I moved around town chasing a good time, but my mother was out of her mind if she thought a non-consensual cock grab was the way to my heart.

Just thinking about it pissed me off again.

The blonde bombshell whose job was just bathroom assumed my dark expression was for her, but instead of being intimidated like a sensible person, she crossed to the main bathroom door and twisted a lock I hadn't noticed.

“Go on,” she waved her hand behind her without turning around. “It's locked now, and I'm not looking. Go into a stall then toss your pants out to me.”

“Not happening, blondie.”

While she was still facing the door in a show of modesty that was wasted on me, I tugged the bottle of stain remover out of her hand and took it to the sink.

“Hey!”

“How hard can it be?” I muttered. “Just spray the thing on the thing— ow fuck. ”

“You need water!”

I waved my hands to activate a stream of water from the sensor-operated tap and scooped it on my crotch. Then, fuck modesty, the situation had become dire and this was her fault anyway, I unbuckled my pants and dropped them.

There was a gasp behind me.

When I looked up at the mirror, blondie was eyeballing my ass.

“What happened to not looking?” I teased.

Her cheeks flamed red.

“I thought you were a safe person?”

“I—” she seemed to choke, “—am.”

“When you’ve finished committing my ass cheeks to memory, could you get some towels?”

“Towels!” She clapped her hands. “Good idea!”

Despite nearly pickling my penis twice this evening—first with wine, then with sodium bi-something—I was having more fun than I’d ever had at one of these stuffy conglomerate parties.

When she came back with towels I did what I could to mop up.

Once I stepped out of my pants she scooped them up, held them under the tap, wrung them, and then dangled them in the hand drier as it roared to life.

“Now that you’ve seen my dick,” I called over the drier, “what’s your name?”

“Call me your bathroom fairy godmother,” she replied drily. “And I didn’t see your dick.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, it’s my job tonight to help guests.”

“No, I’m sorry you didn’t see my dick.”

She returned with my pants then, colour high on her cheeks. What a fucking thing of beauty she was.

“It’s okay, don’t be embarrassed. If you want to take a gander I won’t stop you.” I couldn’t help teasing her, she looked so prim standing there with her pink face and fluttering hands.

I didn’t expect her eyes to dip down my body to study the ridge of my cock, clearly outlined by my thin black briefs.

A grunt fell out of my mouth before I could stop it. It was that primal thing again—I wanted her to see how fit and handsome I was, and to like what she saw.

“I don’t think the stain went through,” she said.

The wine. That was what she’d been looking for. But it was too late. Her gaze was locked on the part of me that wanted it the most, and the response was automatic. My cock thickened under her gaze, leaping a little.

I wasn’t a small man and briefs weren’t made for concealing raging boners. It was obvious I was getting hard.

Her thick lashes fluttered. “I should go.”

“Oh, now she wants to leave,” I drawled. “Now she’s made me strip and sent all my blood South.”

“I didn’t do that,” she protested, dropping her eyes. “I was trying to help. It’s my job to mind the restroom and help people. That—” she gestured in the direction of my crotch, determinedly avoiding another look at the growing bulge, “—is nothing to do with me.”

In for a penny, in for a pound.

“This is everything to do with you, blondie.” I leaned back on the sink, tugging my shirt up so she could get a good look at the effect she was having on me.

“I came in here looking for some water, maybe some paper towels. Instead I find a bombshell insistent on stripping me. Of course thinking about you and my dick at the same time gets me hard. I’d have to be dead for that not to make things twitch.”

She shook her head, her throat bobbing as she swallowed.

“What?” I studied her. “You don’t believe me?”

Now that I was looking properly—at her face, the rest of her I’d already thoroughly appraised—there was a wariness in her expression. Like she was bracing for something cruel. I narrowed my eyes, trying to peel her secrets from her face.

“This is all just very?????...unexpected.” She smiled quickly, unconvincingly. “My ego has taken a bit of a battering today and it’s been hard to...recalibrate. Don’t misunderstand, I know I’m beautiful. People pay to look at me.”

...I really didn't know what bathroom attendants did.

"I'm a model," she explained.

"Ah, of course." For someone to be as hot as she was and not financially compensated for it would be a colossal wrong.

"But I've spent most of the night tonight making other people look beautiful, toiling behind the scenes and trying to be helpful. I wasn't expecting you to come in here and be so..."

"... So?"

"Sexy."

I grinned then, and if I'd looked in the mirror, the expression would be wolfish. I was wolfish. I'd thoroughly earned my reputation for being dogged and ruthless when there was something I wanted. Usually, that was exclusive distribution contracts and access to rich clients. Right now, it was her.

"Sexy," I repeated and she nodded.

"In a dark way. You seem...privileged, but jaded. Charming, but aloof."

"I'm not aloof at all. Or charming. If you asked, I'd be on my knees in a heartbeat, burying my face in your pussy and making you scream so loud your boss would know you were slacking off."

She sucked in a breath, reaching for the hand drier to steady herself.

She was definitely interested.

Satisfaction roared in my ears and in my dick. I wanted her, she wanted me. I had nothing better to do, and she definitely didn't. Bathroom wasn't a fucking job.

“What do you say, blondie? Want to let a stranger eat you out while you're supposed to be on the clock? Come on good girl, be bad with me.”

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

PERRY

My day started with getting fired. Twice.

Now it was thirty minutes before midnight and a gorgeous man in a suit that had to have cost more than I made in a year was offering to get on his knees and eat my pussy.

Well— half a suit. His pants were in my hand. The hand drier hadn't done much for them.

There was no way I could have predicted the turn this day would take.

At 9am on the morning of New Year's Eve, I'd been called mysteriously into my agent's office.

As usual, I was early, way earlier than my appointment time, so I had to sit at reception for an hour.

This gave me a lot of time to ponder all the reasons for the call.

Maybe the curve clothing company that notoriously used the same fat model for everything was branching out, maybe a mainstream retailer was launching extended sizes, or maybe a sales business had come to the radical realisation that fat people also used candles/towels/cars.

Yes, I had plenty of time to ponder all of these scenarios, but still not enough that I

guessed the real reason.

My agent was dropping me.

Liz said her clients didn't have enough 'demand' for plus size models.

"But—" she hastened to reassure me, her hand adorned with chunky cocktail rings heavy on my shoulder, "don't let that stop you from re-applying in the future, Perry! We all adore you here."

If only adoration paid my rent.

I knew my agent meant well and I didn't want to make her feel worse, so I smiled through my hurt and told her I would re-apply again one day.

In my car in the inner city parking lot I let the tears go, but not for long because I had a casting call for event staff in the afternoon and I didn't want to be late. Or worse, blotchy.

I mopped my tears and headed to the Sky Tower with repaired makeup and a smile I hoped was warm.

I'd wait-staffed for fancy events like this before.

They wanted hot people, but hot people who also knew how to balance plates or, in my case, check off names on a spreadsheet and smile as guests arrived.

My now ex-agent had gotten me this job and I'd initially demurred, hoping that my days of model-hyphen-waiter work were over and I could do just model jobs while I built my own business.

But Liz had wheedled, assuring me I would be placed on the door, and I felt bad saying no—which turned out to be a good thing, because I needed the money now that I didn't have representation.

When I arrived at the event casting for the Purkiss Media party, the assembled model-hyphenates were a mix of many ethnicities and all very beautiful. All were under thirty, like me, but I was the only plus size person in the room. (A fat person always notices this).

The head of the event company, Momentum Events, was a thin woman with vivid orange lipstick which stood in stark contrast to her pale face and hair. Very square teeth split a smile that never wavered, even as she stared at me like she was trying to x-ray me.

Her name was Ginger, which was ironic because I'd never seen anyone so devoid of spice in my life.

"We're going to do a bit of a shuffle," Ginger announced once everyone had found chairs in the meeting room. Still wielding that fixed smile, her eyes flicked to me and then back around the room. Dread cracked over me then, cold and sticky, like egg yolk running down the back of my neck.

I knew what was going to happen even before it did.

"Just a few last minute changes," Ginger continued. "Tamatha, I'm going to put you on door as greeter. Peri—uh...how do you say it?"

"Peregrine," I said. "But you can call me Perry."

"Perry, I'm going to put you in as our washroom attendant."

A thin person who I assumed was Tamatha leaned back in their chair, looking first relieved, then guilty. Their eyes found mine and they mouthed, “ Sorry .”

I smiled back to show it was fine. This wasn’t their doing.

“Excellent.” Ginger clapped her hands. “Now, let’s go over the runsheet.”

Ginger had made the decision to remove me as greeter after seeing me in person.

Other people’s hang ups didn’t usually bother me, but I’d been caught off guard with this, and the hollows of my eyes began to ache. I swallowed repeatedly, trying to shake off more tears.

I’d been so careful to show myself accurately in the portfolio of images I’d submitted to Momentum.

My worst nightmare was catfishing someone into thinking I was thin.

It was the same on dating apps, I wanted people to know exactly what I looked like—I uploaded images that clearly showed my double chin and round figure.

Momentum had only asked for head and shoulders pictures, but maybe I should have included some full body shots?

I couldn’t help castigating myself for not doing more to avoid this horrible, sticky feeling. Maybe if I’d prepared better, if I’d anticipated this, I could have spared myself.

My smile, the carbon copy of Ginger's, felt wrong on my face, but I held it there for the duration of the briefing. I kept smiling even as all the other model-waitstaff were given a uniform. When Ginger handed me a medium t-shirt with a Momentum Events

logo on the breast, I pretended to hold it up to see if it fit. I already knew I'd be lucky to get half a boob in there.

Eventually, Ginger figured that out too, and asked if I could bring something of my own from home to wear.

“Anything in particular?” I said politely.

“Just black.” She tossed her pale hair. “Anything that’s black.”

We, the staff-to-be, swapped chatter for a while.

I made sure to keep smiling even when a few of the other staff swapped complaints about their 'unflattering' uniforms right in front of me.

First, flattering was just a socially-acceptable word for skinny, and secondly, what they were really saying was that it would be their worst nightmare to look like me.

I tried not to let stuff like this bother me anymore because it was a fact of my fat life, but sometimes when I was caught off guard, thoughtlessness could still prickle.

I kept my twitchy smile in place until I was back in my little white car.

Driving home, I refused to let myself cry again.

One sob session per day was more than enough—any more would be bad for my skin.

Instead, I blasted emo music from 2005 the whole thirty-minute drive, nodding along with the thrashing beat.

It made me giggle when people in traffic next to me did a double take—my blonde

hair and cherubic cheeks didn't exactly shout goth babe .

Back home, I cooked some salmon and green beans with lemon for an early dinner and Googled what kind of things people needed in washrooms at fancy events. "Jackpot," I muttered when I landed on a wedding planning blog which had a list of useful things to make available for guests in the bathroom.

Ginger had assured me that my job wasn't the same as a cleaner, the venue already had cleaners.

I was supposed to hold open doors and give people wash towels, plus be ready for any of the usual bathroom emergencies that could happen at fancy events: torn stockings, mussed hairdos, smeared lipstick, stained dresses.

.. she'd suggested I might want to bring a few things in preparation and if I brought her the receipts, she would reimburse me.

Bold of her to assume my card wouldn't decline; and I had to wonder why her company, which was being paid a lot to host this event, hadn't done this.

But as my mum would say, 'being annoyed won't pave the path', so I put it out of my mind, sourced what I could from home, and made a quick trip to the supermarket for things I couldn't find.

Across my duvet I spread a small sewing kit, spare nylons, hair clips, aerosols of all kinds (anti-odour, flyaways, static) and bandaids, bobby pins, safety pins, lotion, tissues, stain remover, lint strips, mints and antacids.

I'd also added menstrual products, period pain relief, and a hand sanitiser that smelled vile and felt viscous.

After some consideration, I pulled open my top drawer and studied the rows of navy-blue frosted glass bottles with their pretty PS labels.

I chose my lavender room spritz for atmosphere, my facial spray with rosewater for cooling flushed skin, my all-purpose balm with kawakawa, and my fixing spray that held makeup in place without drying.

And, of course, my star product, the Perry Skin hand cream.

This was the first formula I perfected, and I never left home without it.

Say what you will, but in my personal opinion, dry hands were a fate worse than death.

I tipped out the plastic toolbox I kept all of my branded packaging in and packed everything neatly.

My flatmate Tala was also attending this party, but as a guest. I was optimistic on her account—Tala was about to be made redundant but had tickets to tonight's event included in her severance package. It was an excellent opportunity for her to mingle among her peers in the media industry.

Ginger wanted all staff back at the venue by five, which was too early for Tala to head in, but my shift was due to finish at midnight so I could give her a ride home afterwards to save her the astronomical fare of a rideshare at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Finally, all that was left to do was find an outfit. But studying every black t-shirt and black pants combo I had, I felt uninspired.

‘ Anything that's black ’, Ginger had said.

Reaching deeper into my closet, I felt for the familiar softness of my trusty black body-con dress.

Designed by a celebrity with a shapewear obsession who was no doubt making clothes with thin bodies in mind, but her clothes came in extended sizing and looked divine on my thick body.

The ribbed stretch fabric was soft and buttery, skimming over my curves and emphasising the delectable curve of my belly.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

It didn't matter if I didn't have a glamorous job at the fancy party, I was a glamorous girl and nothing could stop that fact from fact-ing.

Spirits renewed, I was reaching for my keys when I thought of something important.

"Tala?" I leaned in the doorway to our lounge. "Can I use your printer?"

"Go for it." She was on the couch watching Derry Girls, the one with the hot poetry teacher. When she turned to look at me, I saw she'd slathered on one of my facemasks, which made me smile.

"If it jams, hit it on the left side."

It didn't jam, so I was able to print a hasty sign before driving back into the centre of the city.

The Sky Tower was one of Aotearoa, New Zealand's most iconic built landmarks.

I'd only ever visited on school trips before, but I remembered Toby Walker jumping up and down on the glass floor of the viewing deck, trying to scare us that it was going to break.

This was the tallest building in the country—which was not a competitive field, given the whole country was on a faultline and most buildings were under ten stories.

Not that earthquakes were the main problem in T?maki-makau-rau, Auckland, where I lived.

We had other problems. The entire city straddled a volcanic field, so it was more logical to fear getting blown into the sky than sinking into the earth.

My mum was a volcanologist before she retired, so I knew more than was normal about volcanic fields and caldera volcanoes, like the one under the famous lake three hours south of here.

But it wasn't a good idea to think about natural disasters before taking a lift over 200 metres into the sky.

Traffic was bad, but I'd factored in time for that so I was still the first staff member to arrive at the Sky Tower. I strolled around the circular observation deck where the party would be held. It felt like being inside a pool doughnut, but more fun. Windows lined the entire circle, offering 360 degrees views over Auckland. I stood for five minutes and watched the sun sink deeper into the sky. While guests were watching it dip below the skyline, I'd be staring at sinks and toilet doors.

But I shouldn't mope. I was glad to have this job. I needed every penny I could get for Perry Skin.

Ginger found me and made small talk at me as she showed me around.

She and her husband were going to spend January in Rarotonga, which was their summer tradition.

She was flying out tomorrow and had spent all afternoon trying to find a swimsuit, and as she showed me where to stash my bags, she moaned about having trouble finding one she liked.

I didn't say anything about the multitude of options she had as a straight-sized person—because I totally understood that it sucked when there was pressure on and

you couldn't find what you wanted.

But it was a little insensitive of her to complain about this to me.

They barely made swimwear that fit an E cup—I had to order online, and usually my options were black one pieces, or things with weird skirts attached.

Last minute shopping wasn't an option for everyone—fat girls had to plan .

“Remember to clock off at midnight,” Ginger said, switching topics rapidly. “We’re not paying time and a half on the Public Holiday for anyone but essential staff.”

I said I understood. At Tala’s urging, I’d promised to meet her outside at midnight. She said if a company was so stingy as to enforce a midnight clock off, then I wasn’t to give them a single second of free labour.

When I took off my coat and folded it into a locker Ginger gasped loudly.

“What are you wearing ?”

When I turned back, Ginger’s mouth was agape, her heavily mascaraed lashes flared wide.

A nervous kind of exhilaration bloomed in my chest. “A dress? You told me I had to wear my own clothes, remember?”

“Yes!” Ginger looked flustered. “Because we didn't have a uniform shirt that would—” she stumbled for words.

“Fit a fat person.” I smiled. “It’s okay to say fat, it’s not a bad word. It’s a factual word, like short, or tall. I am fat.”

I was also hot and brilliant and hard working, with a face card that never declined, a concerning credit card balance, and a fledgling business that was going to shake up the skincare industry.

I was so much more than just my hot, fat body.

I knew that. I just wished people like Ginger would stop making their issues mine.

“The only requirement you gave me was black,” I reminded her.

“This is completely inappropriate, Pae-regrine.”

Memories of getting dress-coded at school for wearing the exact same tops as thin girls, but being the only one sent home flashed before my eyes. I was tired of being punished for the unavoidable transgression of having amazing boobs.

So instead of apologising, I lifted my chin. “Why?”

Ginger couldn’t answer. She knew as well as I did that her issue wasn’t with what I was wearing. Rather, it was with the body wearing it. But she wasn’t going to say that. She would just neg me and judge me and try to make me feel—and this was ironic—small.

“I’d best go and set up my station,” I said politely but firmly.

I was wearing black, like she had asked. If she wanted to make this into a big problem, my brother was a lawyer and unlike me, loved conflict and sending passive aggressive emails. If Ginger was going to be my problem, I would make my little brother hers .

“I hope everything goes well out on the floor tonight, Ginger.” I said. “You know

where to find me if you need me.”

I left her there, gaping.

Let her look. The view from the back was just as good as from the front.

Tonight’s event was a celebration funded by Purkiss Media conglomerate for the purpose of impressing advertisers.

It was an elegant set up with a modest guest list—which meant most of the people here were extremely rich.

The women’s bathroom had two sections joined by one open archway.

One section had mirrors and a chaise and the other had tall wooden stall doors.

The mirrors all had bevelled glass edges, which cast rainbows when the light hit them right, and a well-polished black and white tiled floor.

I set up my toolbox and as the string instruments struck up, I taped my DIY sign under the Women’s plaque on the door . It read: All genders are safe here .

I didn’t bother asking for permission to do this. I didn’t want to run the risk of being told no. This defiance made me feel giddy, but Ginger could scold me later if she wanted. Some things were worth risking conflict for.

Then I sprayed the lavender room mist and set my rechargeable LED light to ‘Aurora Borealis,’ which sent soothing beams of pink and green streaking across the wall and ceiling.

I also connected my speaker, because the thick door muted the sounds of the string

quartet in the main event space, and cued up my ‘ girls get hype! ’ playlist which I usually played before modelling jobs (no emo music allowed).

From my speaker, Marina rhymed about how patriarchy was a scourge and I hummed along.

Some visitors to my bathroom were surprised to find an attendant, but others took it in their stride. Every guest was dressed beautifully. I complimented outfits earnestly and enthusiastically, and people left my bathroom smiling.

The Michaela Stone came in at one point, her gorgeous velvet burgundy dress having split at the seam. She heaved a sigh of relief when I fished a needle and thread out of my kit and another woman held the sides together so I could tack it closed.

The woman was quite literally a walking fantasy—Tala’s in particular.

My flatmate had met Michaela a few weeks ago and immediately gone doe eyed for her.

I wanted to ask her questions, you know, to do recon for my girl, but I was a little intimidated by Michaela’s cool confidence, so instead I stayed quiet as she and the other lady, Sam, chatted.

As the evening wore on, visitors to my bathroom weren’t coming to primp so much as they were to find a moment of peace.

Some came to sit and let their alcohol sink in, some splashed tap water on their faces.

Some women asked me to take pics of them with their girls, and others held my hands and confessed everything they were thinking.

To my enormous surprise, I was enjoying this job.

I swapped compliments, gave out bandaids and bobbies, hairspray and blotting paper.

I laughed, I hyped people up—a natural role for me.

I loved to make people feel beautiful and confident, it was the whole reason I'd started Perry Skin .

Not to mention, lots of people were making liberal use of the hand cream and other products I'd planted, which made me giddy.

Yet, as the night wore on my triumph sunk a little. Watching people love my products and not being able to talk about it, or even pitch in the hope of catching an investor, hurt my feelings. I didn't want to spend my life only being a hype girl; a side character in someone else's story.

I wanted my own story.

The trickle of guests slowed after 11pm, when the speeches were scheduled to start.

After that, everyone would no doubt gather by the windows to watch New Year's fireworks explode over the city.

Alone in the washroom, I took the opportunity to sink into the chaise lounge and rest my feet.

My shiny silver heels with the dainty ankle straps made my calves look long and elegant, but they were murder to stand in for such long periods.

I was unbuckling a shoe with the intent of massaging the aching balls of my feet,

when the door flew open and a tall figure in a suit burst into my bathroom sanctuary.

My sign said all genders were safe here, and I usually tried not to make assumptions about someone's identity, but some guys just screamed cishet and this was one of them.

Stunned, I stared at the man.

“What the fuck?” he demanded.

“Pardon?”

“I thought this was the men's room,” he said.

After that, everything happened at warp speed.

We argued about his pants and he flirted like a freight train.

He burned his dick with stain remover and I eye banded him six ways from Sunday.

Not to be too crude, but the prominent outline in the front of his black briefs was very hard to ignore, and privately I thought it was a shame it had been subjected to so many abrasive substances this evening.

“If you asked, I'd be on my knees in a heartbeat, burying my face in your pussy and making you scream so loud your boss would know you were slacking off,” he said.

This melted my mind, but he wasn't done.

“What do you say, blondie? Want to let a stranger eat you out while you're supposed to be on the clock? Come on good girl, be bad with me.”

It was the way he was looking at me that pushed me into my decision. His eyes were hungry, laser-focused. I knew as surely as I knew my own name that he wasn't the kind of guy to take a few licks then act like he deserved a medal of valour. That glint in his eyes called me, obsessed me.

Which is why the next words that came out of my mouth were, "We have to hurry."

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

PERRY

He launched at me like a flame leaping from a lighter, hands cupping my face as he pulled my mouth to his.

His lips were hot and hungry and I eagerly met each press.

My tongue ventured out, licking a request as politely as I dared.

He welcomed the intrusion, sliding his tongue against mine.

Our hands weren't idle either; mine learned the contours of strong pectorals before I pulled at the buttons of his shirt—some sprung off and clacked as they hit the floor—but I didn't stop kissing him.

He didn't seem to care and I had a sewing kit; I could fix it later.

The stranger gripped fistfuls of my dress and began tugging it up my thighs as he walked me backwards to the chaise lounge.

My heel, still unbuckled, wobbled and I stumbled, but he wrapped a bracing arm around my waist, pulling me to him in a vice-strong grip as he kissed his way down my neck.

Nosing one dress strap off my shoulder, he hissed as my black lace bra was revealed.

“You're delicious,” he growled into my neck. “These tits are heaven on earth.”

I shouldn't like hearing the word tits as much as I did. It was rough. Coarse.

It should repel me, not make me slippery between the thighs.

The man's eyes were aflame as he cupped me with both hands, marvelling at how his hands overflowed. "I could write poems about these, blondie. Truly. I've never written a poem—" He kissed me again. "But the urge to start is overwhelming."

"We don't—" I gasped, "—have time for poetry. It's nearly midnight."

"Throw my pants on the floor."

I looked down at the fabric I still held, my brain slow to sort through his words. "We just got the wine stain out."

He tugged them out of my hands and threw them down himself. "I don't give a fuck about my pants. I'm happy to get on my knees in a bathroom for you, but these joints aren't thirty-five anymore, I need some cushioning."

"Oh."

He was at least seven years older than me. Which was fine. Maybe I should have asked how old he was before I agreed to let him go down on me. Was that something people established before getting sexual with strangers? There were other things I should check too, like... .

I couldn't think of any, other than, ' how fast can you make a girl come with your tongue? '

"Maybe my pants won't be enough." He took a pillow from the chaise and tossed it on the floor. "There." Then he nodded at the chaise. "You, sit."

I did as directed and leaned back, propping myself up so I could see him over my belly as I gripped the hem of my dress and took over the task of tugging the fabric up my thighs. Emboldened by the hungry glint in his eye, I took my time, loving how powerful I felt.

A tortured groan fell out of his mouth. “For fuck’s sake. You’re the one who said we had to hurry. Let me.”

I gestured for him to help himself and he didn’t need telling twice. Roughly, he shoved the fabric up over my hips. Then the stranger dove, face first, into my pussy.

My rough exhalation made my bangs dance over my forehead.

I couldn’t do much but let my head fall back and try to hold onto my dress as he ran his nose up and down my lacy underwear, nuzzling as he breathed in.

A guttural inhale tumbled out of my mouth—it had been forever since someone had kissed me like this.

My ex-boyfriend was so bad at it I’d pretended it wasn’t something I was into.

But this handsome stranger was pressing wet, hungry kisses over the thin barrier of my underwear, and when his tongue darted out and sampled the wetness that had seeped into the fabric when I’d first caught sight of his erection, I shivered.

He lavished my pussy with attention like we weren’t in a public bathroom, fifteen minutes before midnight at one of the biggest events of the year.

He licked like he had all the time in the world.

I was squirming when he finally ran a finger along the edge of the lace, either testing

or teasing me.

“Yes, please,” I breathed.

“Please what?” he said with a wicked grin, made all the more wicked by the framing of my knees on either side of his head.

“Please give me more.”

He ran one digit up and down my slit over my panties, teasing me.

“Not like that.”

“Like what? You can tell me. I’d love to hear something filthy come out of those prim, pretty lips.”

I hesitated.

In response, he put his finger in his mouth and sucked on it.

“That.” I nodded. “I want that. Inside me.”

“Just this one?”

I bit my lip, and he waited extremely patiently for a man on his knees with a raging erection. His eyes were only a few inches away from my spread legs now, and before I could worry if I was being too brazen—maybe there was no such thing?—I forced myself to speak.

“Maybe two?”

His middle finger joined his index in his mouth and he lasciviously drew them out, letting me see his saliva ease their passage.

“Since you asked so nicely.” His grin revealed a single mischievous dimple.

With his other hand, he gripped the top of my panties under the gentle fold of my belly and tugged them down. I kicked them off and didn’t look where they landed.

Then he got to work.

My stranger ate pussy like he made conversation; bluntly, with little regard for what was polite. His two fingers, wet from his mouth, added yet more lubrication as he ran them up and down my slit before using them to part my folds.

The first pass of his tongue against my very warm centre had me yelping.

He didn’t flinch, didn’t pause. He wrapped his other arm around my thigh and fastened his lips over my clit, sucking intently before releasing me from the exquisite torment and soothing that needy bunch of nerves with the point of his tongue.

No, there was nothing soothing about it, I decided.

There was barely time to breathe before he began circling my opening with the blunt tips of his fingers.

Before I could catch a thought, he was pressing one finger into my hot channel, then the second.

He screwed his fingers with little twists as his tongue flirted with my clit.

Everything below my belly felt hot and needy, and I was so wet the thrusts of his

hand were becoming noisy.

I whimpered and must have been wiggling too much, because abruptly he pulled his fingers out.

Ignoring my protests, he wrapped both arms around my thighs, lifting me up to his mouth so he could devour me completely.

His tongue thrust at my entrance and he licked his way inside me, slurping up the juice from my body like it was the world's most exquisite delicacy.

I threw an arm over my eyes and a moan escaped my throat—long, low and needy.

“What was that?” He looked up to ask.

When my head snapped back down to meet his eyes, my breath caught in my throat. I took in his smooth, perfect features and the dark circles under his eyes, which somehow made him look even more handsome. Right now, his grey gaze was ravenous as his mouth and chin glistened. That was from me.

I felt more alive in this moment than I could remember feeling in years—it was like driving fast with the windows down, or screaming into the wind.

Every feeling was heightened, every sense pinging.

I wanted to run, to scream, but most of all, to come.

Forcing myself to keep breathing, I studied the man's heavy lidded expression and the dent his fingers were pressing into my thighs.

It was indescribably hot watching this moneyed prince on his knees for me, my

arousal all over his face.

He would look handsome doing taxes, I was sure, but he looked especially handsome eating my pussy.

Obviously, I knew I was gorgeous, but sometimes if I wasn't on guard other people's small-brained toxicity could seep into my purview.

Cut to how wonderfully grounding and liberating it was to be intimate with someone like this guy, who saw me accurately as a hot babe and was expressive showing his attraction to me.

No matter how much mental work I did, or what stage of bodily acceptance I or anyone else reached, the experience of being adored and worshipped would always be potent.

"Please," I said, my breathiness making the words staccato. "Please. Make me come."

"What would get you there?"

"I want—" my bravery faltered, but I rallied.

You couldn't half let a man eat you out in the bathroom at an event you were working, you had to whole do it.

My instinct was to tell him I wanted his cock inside me.

But that wasn't the truth—it was just that a conditioned part of my psyche felt that his efforts thus far had been unreciprocated and he should get off too.

But this wasn't a man who said things just because it was polite.

He said what he wanted to; did what he wanted to.

I'd known him for all of five minutes and I already knew that with complete certainty.

If he said he wanted to eat my pussy until I screamed, he meant I want to eat your pussy until you scream.

And I wanted that too.

I took a bracing breath and asked.

"I want you to finger fuck me while you suck on my clit. I want you to pump into me with your fingers, working me so that every step I take tomorrow makes me think of you."

I had all of one heartbeat in the silent room to wonder if I had gone too far.

But he snarled— snarled— and drove his face back into my pussy.

When his fingers pressed back inside me, curling until he found the spot deep inside me, I keened. He bore down on it while he sucked my clit, and I gripped fistfuls of his hair as my feet started to tingle and my legs began trembling, shaking my curves.

Distantly, I heard the crowd outside begin a fervent countdown to midnight.

"Almost—" I panted.

He did what I asked then—pumping his fingers into me, rapidly parting my plush inner walls and making me wail, one long and endless sound that carried through every quivering nerve.

My legs flung out and my loose shoe fell from my foot.

With one final scream, I came. Hard. As cheering split the air and the faint pop of fireworks sounded, I orgasmed over my stranger's face.

He sat back on his haunches and wiped a hand over his grinning, glistening mouth.
“Happy New Year.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

MILES

Dazed, she slumped back on the chaise, resplendent in her pleasure.

I felt like a king.

Licking my lips I told her, “You taste like every fantasy I’ve ever had.”

She mumbled something incoherent and I grinned harder. My dick was verging on a medical emergency it was so stiff, but it was worth it to feel her fall apart under my mouth like that and see her so satisfied now.

Some of my smug satisfaction fled when it occurred to me I was going to have to pull damp pants over this vicious erection to leave the bathroom.

As I was contemplating this, she sat bolt upright. “It’s midnight!”

It was a second before I replied, because I was watching her tits sway. “Either that, or someone fucked up and let the fireworks off early.”

Instead of laughing like she was supposed to, she groaned, scrambling under the chaise for her lost shoe. She jammed it back on her foot and did up the strap as she moaned, “I’m late. I’m never late. Tala is going to kill me.”

“What’s a Tala?”

“In Samoan it means tale. Like, story. It’s also my roommate’s name, she’s waiting

for me.”

“What do you mean she’s waiting for you?” This conversation had taken the kind of turn that was weird to be without pants for. With a cursing under my breath, I scooped the fucked up fabric off the floor and started pulling them on. “I’ll give you a ride home. I can call a car.”

“I have my car.”

“Should I follow you?” I hadn’t driven here tonight because I’d expected to be far deeper in whiskey than I was presently, but someone at my Elysian Wines table would have a car and I’d make them give me their keys.

Pants on, I looked up to blondie’s frown. “You know, to make sure you get home safely.”

And to come in for a little nightcap, after which she could say more filthy shit to me, because that got my dick harder than anything else on this planet.

“No, thank you.” She turned away to fix her dress and hair in the mirror.

I stood in stunned silence.

I was Miles Fucking Lawrence. Rose would have sold her grandma for an offer like this. Plus, I’d just shown this woman that I didn’t rest on the laurels of my family name or earning potential when it came to sex acts. I was good at eating pussy. Hadn’t I just shown her I was good at eating pussy?

But this girl was busy stuffing the bottle of stain remover back in her toolbox. She turned to me with a polite, impersonal smile, the same one she’d given me when I first walked in here.

I hated it.

“I’m sorry, but I really do have to go. This was a lovely—albeit unexpected—encounter, but I don’t have time for men right now.”

“You had time to come on my tongue?—”

The fake smile fell. “That was your idea. I don’t owe you reciprocation.”

She scooped blue bottles off the vanity and packed them into her toolbox, barely sparing me a glance.

It was completely fucking flummoxing.

“I didn’t say you did.” I’d hoped but I didn’t say . “ I just think you should tell me your name and give me your number before you rip out of here like a blonde bat out of hell.”

She smiled her professional smile again. “No, thank you. I’m focused on building my business and you would be a distraction.”

“The fucking balls on you!” I spluttered. “I didn’t say we should get married. I just thought this—” I waved at the chaise, “—was nice, and that we could go another round before parting ways.”

She fastened her toolbox with a firm click. “It was lovely to meet you...” she trailed off in realisation she didn’t know my name.

“Miles,” I said shortly. “Miles Lawrence. And who the fuck are you?”

Instead of answering, she tucked her toolbox under her arm and unlocked the door.

On the other side a line of pissed off women had formed.

She waved. “Bye, Miles.”

PERRY

Pulse still hammering, the drive home was a blur. Usually, Tala would have noticed my preoccupation, but she remained silent the whole trip. I didn’t tell her what I’d done in the bathroom. I wasn’t ready to share and she was absorbed in her phone.

My body was zinging with adrenaline and I felt like I could deadlift stratovolcanoes.

Turns out good sex and exhilarating banter could do that to a person.

When we got home, I took a shower then forced myself to meditate to focus my boundless energy into something useful before pulling out my laptop and making a reverse to-do list.

I was fired up and ready to make moves.

The past 24 hours had contained the lowest lows and the highest highs. As a result, a bulletproof kind of confidence was coursing through me, mixed with a spite-fuelled determination.

If I could trust a stranger with my body, why couldn’t I trust myself with my dreams?

Turns out an orgasm, plus meditation, plus a hot shower was the perfect prep for this kind of work, because the ideas flowed freely and a new business strategy took shape quickly.

I started with where I wanted to be: the owner of an NZ skin empire which helped

everyone have a good skin day .

Then I wrote the step below that: to get my products in department stores and boutique retailers.

And below that: a manufacturer who could do scale .

Then: thriving ecommerce . And at the very bottom of the list, making it the thing I had to start with, I wrote: find an investor .

Getting certification and going through (cruelty-free) lab testing had taken years and cost a mint.

It had cost a second mint to secure my trademarks.

and I'd spent every cent I'd ever made from modelling to get to this point, and quite a few borrowed cents too.

Now, I was stalled because I couldn't afford to manufacture any more product.

The leftover sample stock I had in my room was fast dwindling.

I needed to find someone with money who believed in the product and would stand back and let me do things my way.

Sitting on my bed, chewing on the end of a marker pen, I remembered when I was twenty and had told my dad that I wanted to turn the potions I made for my friends in my bedroom into a real skincare business.

He'd nodded thoughtfully, but his expression had been sombre. ' People who can afford to invest do so in their friends and sure things. If you can't be a friend, be a

sure thing.'

I had a lot of good contacts through modelling; makeup artists who used my products and set designers who would throw a bottle in the background of a shoot.

Currently, Perry Skin was a cult fave for those in-the-know.

It was a good position to be in—exclusive and high-end.

But my goal was to be accessible to everyone, and for that I would need an investor.

I knew I was a sure thing, and if I had access to some moneybags people I could convince them of that too.

People like the guests at tonight's party who'd been networking and making deals while I climaxed in the bathroom.

My eyes fell to the building access card Ginger had given me, sitting on my vanity.

When the clock struck midnight tonight, I'd been so stressed to be late to meet Tala, I'd left without looking for Ginger to return my swipe card.

With the beginnings of a daring plan forming, I pulled up the Sky Tower events calendar, available on their website.

Going forward, I wouldn't be diverted from my dreams.

No matter how talented the tongue.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

MILES

The next hour in my calendar was blocked out to chat with Paul, head of Business Partnerships, who wanted to pitch a new client acquisition strategy—but I told my assistant Sadie to fob him off. What was the point in being the boss if you couldn't take a lazy afternoon kip when the mood struck?

Except, reclined on the couch in my office, I didn't actually sleep.

Obviously. I couldn't sleep at nighttime, let alone midday.

Instead, I spent the reclaimed hour doing the same thing I'd been doing this morning while shovelling cereal into my face, and last night as I lay in bed half-watching a football game I'd already seen.

Attempting to cyber stalk my bathroom goddess.

Unlike Sadie and the majority of the marketing department at Elysian Wine Exports, I wasn't deeply attached to social media.

Sadie liked to call me digitally prehistoric because she thought it would annoy me.

It didn't—what annoyed me was having the woman from New Year's Eve haunting my thoughts like this.

Home alone in the small hours of New Year's Day, I'd thought if I knocked one out reliving the memory of her coming on my face, that would be that and I could put the

memory of her behind me.

It hadn't worked out that way.

For three weeks I'd thought about her constantly. No matter how hard I tried, the mystery of her was a fixation. Which grated.

The only reliable path to happiness was to avoid giving a fuck about anyone but yourself.

And instead of living by my own values, I'd spent multiple nights staring at the ceiling wondering who the woman was, what her story was, and how she went from modelling to removing stains (or not removing, in my case) in a fancy bathroom.

A knock sounded at the door.

"Go away."

The door opened and closed, with Sadie on the wrong side of it.

"You look like shit," my assistant said cheerfully. "Do you want me to cancel the rest of your afternoon and make you a sleepy tea?"

"God no. The last one tasted like pickled beets."

"Not the beets one, I found a new brand. This one tastes like laying in a meadow. You can practically smell the wildflowers as you look up at your lover who's telling you he has the skin of a killer, Bella."

That was the problem with Sadie. She wasn't intimidated by me, which gave her zero qualms about voicing the incomprehensible shit that crowded her mind.

“How do I find someone on social media, Sadie?”

“You search their name and add filters like location or education. Is this a work thing?”

“If I say yes, will you help me with it?”

She shook her head. “If you say no, I’ll help you with it. I’m bored, I’ve done all the fun tasks on my to do list.”

“You’re supposed to do all the tasks,” I muttered, though there was very little point. Sadie would do whatever she wanted, and although I’d never tell her this, she was an excellent assistant. If she thought something could wait, it could.

Adding further fuel to Sadie’s refusal to genuflect was the fact my mother liked her. As far as Sadie was concerned, this gave her immunity to do whatever she wanted. Which, at Elysian, was more or less true.

A few years ago at a company Christmas lunch, my mother got an awful glint in her eye and I knew she was envisioning Sadie and I together romantically.

I vehemently rejected this idea, but my mother was stubborn and had argued the point right up until I took the piece of steak Sadie wanted, and her loud threats to castrate me finally chased the idea out of my mother’s eyes.

It wasn’t an empty threat, either—Sadie had grown up on a sheep station and often bragged of grim skills like this.

After that, my mother recalibrated her assessment of our dynamic to that of siblings, which was closer to the truth but still fell short. I thought of us more as homeowner and poltergeist.

“I don’t have her name,” I told Sadie. “I met her at the New Year’s party.”

“You’re fucked then,” she said cheerfully, shoving my feet until I made room for her on the sofa. “What search terms have you been using?”

Hot blonde, Sky Tower bathroom woman, sexy model, nice tits.

“Descriptions,” I said evasively.

Sadie’s expression was scornful. “You can’t find a missed connection with synonyms for boobs, Miles.”

Instead of telling her she was right, because I would rather die, I shrugged and knocked back a glass of water.

“Do you know the names of any of her family or friends? Often when people lock down their profiles, their friends post photos of them anyway. Parents and grandparents comment the most out the gate shit on photos. If you gave me an hour I could probably crack most people’s security questions this way.

Yours would be so easy. Mother’s maiden name, Hubbard. First pet, a rock named Toby?—”

“I had a dog, too.”

She levelled a look. “We both know you preferred the rock. Less emotional investment.”

The dog had been fucking needy.

Like I said, the secret to happiness was caring only about yourself. I felt so strongly

about this, if it wasn't in direct contradiction with the core principle, I'd give seminars.

"Go away, Sadie."

"No, let's track down your dream girl. I've never seen you so interested in someone. It must have been a very memorable meeting."

Neither memorable nor meeting were the right words for what had happened with the goddess in the bathroom, but I let it slide. Sadie already knew everything about my habits, my childhood, and my family. I didn't need her knowing what made me come like a geyser when I masturbated, too.

"Was she there as part of a company table, or did she buy a solo ticket?"

I hesitated before admitting, "She was working the event."

My assistant groaned. "Miles. Come on, my guy. The bar is on the floor with you. Why can't you be happy with the social climbers and WASPS your mother throws at you?"

Why do you have to hit on staff while they're working?

I should spray you with the spritz bottle like I do Buck when he barks at the courier."

"Trust me, I didn't start it—" I stopped, unsure I could honestly say that. "Maybe I did. But make no mistake, she was an enthusiastic participant."

A fucking delicious one too.

"I'm amazed she didn't get fired for flirting with a guest in the middle of the party."

“We were in the bathroom.”

I let Sadie think that was because I’d politely excused us, instead of wandering into the bathroom and cracking on with the first woman I found there.

Why the hell would someone hide a hottie like her in the bathroom, anyway?

You were supposed to put the sexy people on the door to greet people, or give them champagne so they could parade around the room and be admired.

I knew fuck all about organising events but I’d been to enough of them to know that. Everyone knew that.

Sadie was shaking her head. “I have no idea what women see in you.”

“I’m rich and good-looking.”

She rolled her eyes. “That’s not the slam dunk you think it is. If you were this much of an a-hole and broke and ugly, you’d never get laid. You’d have to actually cultivate a personality. Like me.”

“Sadie, talking to you is like scratching an itch with a cheese grater.”

She snarled and I briefly considered taking it back because I needed her help finding my mystery girl. But an apology was unnecessary, firstly because insults never had any effect on Sadie, they only made her stronger, and secondly because she tugged my phone out of my hands.

“What was the event company called?” she asked.

“How would I know? You bought the table.”

Sadie pursed her lips for a moment, thinking, before snapping her fingers. “Momentum Events.”

She unlocked my phone—she was right, she’d have no trouble stealing my identity and robbing me blind, should the temptation one day overcome her—and was neck deep in my social media before I could protest. Crossing to the bar cart and fridge stocked with some of Aotearoa, New Zealand’s best wines, I fetched her a can of the cold brew coffee she liked.

She accepted this without thanks, huffing at something on the phone.

“What?”

“I didn’t know looking like a Calvin Klein model was a requirement for passing out puff pastry.”

I shrugged. I’d prefer we only hire hotties at Elysian too, but that crypt keeper in Human Resources, Suzanne Callaghan, would have my balls if I suggested it.

Sadie let out a whoop of triumph and spun the phone around to show me the screen. “Is she in this photo?”

I squinted at the group selfie of a bunch of people in company branded t-shirts. Disappointment sunk my shoulders. “No.”

“Damn. Maybe you’re out of luck. Maybe next time you’ll have to get a woman’s name before you suck face with her in the bathroom.”

“I tried .”

“Try harder, slutbag.”

Sadie and I spent another twenty minutes combing the images posted online by the event company, but my girl—rather the girl—wasn't in any of them.

And calling her a girl was probably another thing Sadie would call 'out the gate'.

My mystery woman was older than Sadie, definitely.

Not older than me, although her skin glowed like she was fucking immortal, which was unhelpful in determining her age.

At a guess, I'd say she was in her late twenties, early thirties?

She carried herself like she had known both disappointment and joy, but believed her future held more of the latter.

Wise asses like me knew things only got worse with time, and we wore that knowledge on our faces.

Sadie grumbled and stopped scrolling so she could type something into my phone.

"Sadie," I warned.

"I'm just drafting, cool your jets. I'll show you before I send anything."

I held out my hand.

With a roll of her eyes, she handed it over. On the screen was the chat window she'd opened with the event company, which was a good idea. Into the window I typed:

Who was the woman you had working as a bathroom attendant at the Purkiss Media New Year's Eve party?

As an afterthought, I tapped out a second message.

This is Miles Lawrence.

Like I'd said to Sadie, between my face, name, and bank account, I always got what I wanted.

"They already know who you are, dingus." Sadie had been reading over my shoulder. "It comes up as a message from your name. How did you become the CEO of a million dollar export company?"

"Nepotism."

"Literally," she agreed.

"And because I don't take shit from my employees. Back to work, slacker."

Sadie went back to her desk and I reluctantly called Paul so he could bore me shitless about his acquisition strategy for twenty minutes.

All his ideas had already been had, and better executed too.

Sadie could do a better job than Paul, if she wanted.

I emailed her asking her to work with HR to create a Strategic Business Advisor role reporting directly to me.

Perhaps Paul would improve when faced with a bit of competition.

If not, his future lay outside Elysian. Sadie had the role in the system and the vacancy drafted within the hour—and considering Suzanne in HR usually took a whole day to

reply to one email, this was impressive.

It was deep into the afternoon when my phone dinged with a response from the event company.

It showed as a read message even before I saw it, which confused me until I looked through the glass wall of my office and saw Sadie waving at me from behind her monitor.

She must have been logged into my social media account on her desktop.

I really did need to change my passwords.

If this is in regards to the skincare products that were in the bathroom, these were not sanctioned by Momentum Events or associated with us in any way.

We've received multiple messages about these and I am assuring our valued guests that this matter will be resolved when I return to New Zealand on the 1st of February. Until then: ng? mihi, Ginger.

"Well fuck you too, Ginger," I muttered.

I was going to reply with a push for a better answer, but a message from Sadie dropped over my screen containing further intel on my situation. It wasn't in my best interest to chastise her for spending her workday this way, so I didn't.

I did some research and Momentum is contracted for all the events at the Sky Tower. You should just go to another one and see if your girl is working. Buy yourself a ticket, or buy some tickets for Elysian. I'll come, I'm dying to see this woman for myself.

I had only just started my reply when Sadie's next message came through.

There's a masquerade cocktail party at the Sky Tower this Saturday. It's a fundraiser for a local animal shelter. I've got the purchase window open. General Admission tickets are sold out, but there are VIP packages still available, which are sold in blocks of six tickets.

All the reasons this would be a bad idea were running through my head when Sadie messaged again.

I have your personal credit card details already entered. If you can't find four friends, just invite people from work and I'll send the invoice to accounts. Come on, Miles. Pull the trigger. Live, laugh, love.

After that another message came in, and another and another, all in quick succession.

DO IT.

Do.

It.

Doitdoitdoitdoitdoit.

Fine.

Making this an Elysian outing wasn't an option because then my mother would want to come, but Sadie was right, I didn't have five friends at this late notice. Matthew was my usual wingman, but he was out of town this month and I had a funny feeling that Blondie would hate him.

Invite any of your friends. I'll cover their expenses.

There was no need to give Sadie my card, she had it. She probably had all of them. Remembering the look on Blondie's face as she ran out of that bathroom, I would need a good wingperson. As a woman, Sadie would be a more impactful character endorsement than Matty—I was nothing if not a strategist.

My email dinged and the invoice and tickets arrived in my inbox from Sadie. This was good, this was progress. I only had to get through a few more sleepless nights and I'd see my mystery girl again.

Time couldn't move fast enough.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

PERRY

I got ready for the masquerade party in the same bathroom I'd helped other people with their dresses and miscellaneous personal needs a few weeks ago. It was a satisfying symmetry.

Since it was a masquerade, I'd gone for all the trimmings.

I had a slinky blue dress designed by a friend of mine, which was made from a luxurious satin that skimmed my curves, and I placed an elegant mask over my nose to cover my eyes.

It wouldn't be enough to stop someone like Ginger recognizing me, she wasn't unobservant and my figure was very recognizable—but Ginger was living it up in Rarotonga right now.

If any of tonight's event staff had also worked New Year's, they might recognise me, but they didn't know I didn't have a real ticket and I doubted they'd care if they did.

Still, my guilt over using the misappropriated access card nearly led me to chicken out multiple times. My friends—especially Tala, who saw this as a strike of retaliation on behalf of the working class—psyched me back up.

I arrived before any of the other guests and took my time primping in the bathroom, so the doughnut-shaped event room would be packed with people when I joined their fold.

Once again, the temptation to leave my Perry Skin hand cream on the counter proved too much for me to resist. I told myself this was guerrilla marketing and it was what the professionals did, so I didn't get an ulcer over distributing beauty products without the venue's express consent.

One day, when Perry Skin was on lists of Kiwi brands doing amazing things, the Sky Tower and Momentum Events would be thrilled to be part of our origin story.

As the rising sound of party chatter and clinking glasses drifted through the door, guests began to frequent the bathroom. That was my cue.

The event layout was similar to New Year's Eve.

The main difference was that some people wore masquerade masks, although many had skipped this.

The lights were low and coloured LEDs flicked around the room, bouncing off the glass and spinning silver disco balls.

The music was loud, as chosen by a DJ with comically large headphones.

Per person tickets started in the hundreds, but I knew from working events like this that rich people felt little compunction about buying them and being a no show—they'd already spent their money, what did they care?

—while other people bought blocks of tickets they never filled. There would definitely be space for me.

I assuaged my remaining guilt by donating half of my check from the New Year's Party to the animal shelter tonight's event was in aid of.

It was a tiny donation in the scheme of the evening, but it was literally as much as I could afford and still make rent.

True generosity was measured in proportion not number, and I wanted to do my best.

Once I was mixing and mingling, I expected to have to work hard to find people to talk to, but the moment I swept a glass of champagne from a proffered tray, a white woman with lacquered honey hair pulled me into conversation.

“Look at you, you gorgeous thing, where did you get that dress?”

“Thank you! My friend Georgia made it. She does sizes 8 to 28 and just opened a boutique uptown.”

“How fabulous!” This woman wasn’t lean, but she was still straight-sized, so when she patted her hips, I braced myself for her to incorrectly equate our experiences. Instead, she said, “In my opinion, inclusive designers construct well and use good fabrics. I’ll have to stop by.”

“Absolutely! Georgia is amazing and her store is beautiful.”

We swapped introductions. Her name was Helen. She was friendly and talkative, but unfortunately my confession I was here in the hope of meeting an investor for Perry Skin met a dead end.

“I’m sorry darling, I’m up to my neck with my existing commitments. I couldn’t possibly add another.”

However, I soon discovered Helen was pretty much the human wikipedia of the social scene in Tāmaki-makau-rau, Auckland.

She knew everything about everyone. Looping her arm through mine, she pulled me along on a guided tour of the cocktail masquerade, whispering names and stopping to make introductions when she thought someone might be open to hearing more about my skincare business.

“Not him,” she said, when I asked about a wiry, grey-haired white man with large ears, wearing jaunty striped pants and a bow tie. He looked how I’d imagined the BFG when my teacher had read it to us in primary school—except rich.

“Why?” I asked.

“I wouldn’t trust him further than I could throw him.”

“Noted. Who’s that?” I nodded towards a glamorous brunette with glowing brown skin, laughing at something her companion had said.

“Lara Savea? She’s the head of Beauty at Phillys and Roller.”

One of the biggest beauty and home product distributors in the world.

My eyes lit up.

Helen shook her head. “She’ll be an excellent connection for you in due course, but you can’t start with Lara.

You need an investor first—someone loaded enough that they’ll write you a big cheque and leave you to your own devices, but not so loaded that you have to worry it’s blood money.

You have to be strategic, darling. Business is not about the moves you make but the order in which you make them. ”

For Helen to so completely get my vision, and be so generous with her expertise, made me want to fall at her feet. For her to tuck me under her wing and walk me around a party making introductions felt like she was a gift from heaven.

Belatedly, I began to question this.

“I don’t mean to monopolise your time, Helen. You must have other people to talk to.”

“Nonsense, darling. I already know all these people, and my son’s forbidden me from setting him up with any women tonight, which was the whole reason I came.

He’s heterosexual—which is unfortunate, because I could’ve easily found him the right man by now.

Women are proving harder, I think because he has too many options.

They’ve thrown themselves at him his entire life.

” Helen sighed, the universal sound of put-upon mothers everywhere.

“Is it too much to ask for my only son to stop playing the field, marry someone with good teeth, and give me grandbabies? Of course not. But he’s stubborn.

Yes, I’ll admit, Rose was a poor decision on my part, but how was I to know she was a fonder?

He’s very pissed at me over that. Still.

He wasn’t even going to tell me he had tickets for tonight’s event, can you believe that?

I had to hear about it from his assistant.

Thank goodness she called and invited me herself.

” Helen motioned to the nearest member of the waitstaff to bring her another champagne.

My eyes landed on the back of a tall man in a suit with mussed brown hair. “What about?—?”

Right then, Helen said, “Ah, there he is now!”

Immediately, I realised I’d made a horrible mistake. I couldn’t suggest Helen’s son as a possible investor—she’d think I was a mercenary wench.

Then he turned around and my problems multiplied by a thousand.

That handsome face with his perfectly tousled hair and cool grey eyes was intimately familiar.

He sighed heavily when he saw his mother towing a woman towards him, which made the dark circles under his eyes look even more pronounced. Then his gaze landed on me and my breath caught in my throat.

The last time we’d locked eyes, his face was framed by my knees.

I turned on my heel, thinking of the safety of my bathroom. But Helen was stronger than she looked with excellent reflexes. She yanked me back like I was a yoyo on the end of her string.

When I stumbled, a warm hand cupped the soft flesh of my arm and steadied me.

“Hello,” he said.

“Miles, this is Perry.” Finally, Helen released me, placing a proud hand upon her son’s chest instead. “Perry, this is my son, Miles. Perry’s a skincare entrepreneur, Miles. And a model. Her parents are scientists. Her genes are smart and beautiful.”

The pieces clicked into place.

Helen hadn’t tucked me under her wing for no reason.

She’d admitted her agenda readily: marriage, good teeth, grandbabies.

Foreboding twisted down my spine. Helen would probably murder me if she learned what her son and I had done in the bathroom on New Year’s Eve.

She’d either write me off as an easy trollop, or she’d insist I immediately redeem her son’s honour by marrying him and producing grandbabies.

I hadn’t known Helen very long, but I suspected the latter.

I pushed my tiny mask higher up my nose and thrust a hand towards him. “Nice to meet you Miles. I’m Perry.”

His eyes ran over me. “Hello Perry. I see my mother has found herself a new candidate.” He raised an eyebrow at his mother over my head. “Despite warnings.”

Helen pretended not to hear him. She looked around the room and mouthed hello at someone across the room.

“Oh, it’s not like that.” I felt awkward. “We met tonight. I’m just...” His eyes were so grey and I was flustered by memories of coming on his face. “...Perry.”

The orchestra struck up a waltz and Helen clapped her hands. “How wonderful, they’re playing the song I requested! Miles, why don’t you ask Perry to dance?”

I declined politely, keen to return to the safety of my bathroom.

There was no way he would want to dance with me here, at this fancy party.

Sex deeds in the bathroom because I was there and willing was one thing, but waltzing was entirely another.

The thought of his impending rejection was crushing—I had an itching urge to shed this glamorous dress and retreat to safety.

I belonged in my sweats, watching Derry Girls, not draped in satin while the mother of the man I’d trysted with tried to matchmake.

This is what you got for being brave and having lofty ideas: embarrassment and chaos.

To my enormous surprise, Miles offered his arm. “Shall we?”

Helen literally pushed me into her son’s arms and he swept me onto the dance floor. Escape wasn’t an option. At this point, I wouldn’t have put it past Helen to have bribed everyone in the building to stop me from leaving.

If I could avoid eye contact and remain aloof behind my mask, maybe he would stay in blissful ignorance about who I was.

Miles was the spoiled prince of this social set, clearly used to people throwing themselves at him, so there was no way he would remember me—a random girl he’d talked out of her clothes in the bathroom.

No, not even random. An employee in the most miserable, demeaning role imaginable.

All I had to do was survive the next three (ish) minutes of one dance, then I could run. He'd never know who I was, so while our shared memories were, in some lights, embarrassing, they weren't lingering.

Everything would be okay. I had the protection of anonymity.

MILES

The woman I'd gone down on at New Year's was avoiding my eyes.

Her hands were rigid on my shoulders, and her baby blues darted around the room, wide and wary, like she thought I was about to whip a jar of seasoning out of my pocket and begin devouring her—not in the fun way.

I should calmly and patiently reassure her, but she was acting like she was thinking about running out on me again, which wasn't an option. Instead, I settled my hands over the full hips I'd been thinking about since the clock struck twelve three weeks ago, and tugged her close.

Maybe that was a dick move, maybe I should have asked first, but if she'd liked me enough to let me lick her pussy, she could fucking well like me enough to dance with me.

At first she was stiff. But after a quick look at my mother, she began to sway.

It was an excellent twist of fate that Perry had found me.

All evening, my efforts to track her down had yielded nothing.

I'd been taking repeated trips to the bathroom hoping she would be there—I did this enough that Sadie and her friends started making incontinence jokes—and the whole time she'd been at the party, getting baited and trapped by my meddling mother.

But I had her now.

Through the tiny mask that did exactly nothing to conceal her identity, she blinked up at me, and in that moment something in my chest gave way with a sharp crack.

She had been dynamite in her black dress, reclining on that couch in the bathroom.

None of the other horny fuckboys who frequented these kinds of things knew what a feast of a woman was hidden away in the bathroom, so I'd had her all to myself.

Here, dressed like a princess, all she had to do was fucking blink those baby blues a couple times and anyone with any sense would get on their knees for her.

I tightened my hold on her, indenting her flesh with my fingers.

She inhaled sharply and the skin on her chest flushed red.

I made a noise of satisfaction when I saw it, which made the red spread further over her substantial cleavage and up her neck. Her nipples pebbled and she swallowed.

"Stop looking at me like that," I muttered.

"Like what?"

"Like you've just seen my dick and are picturing where you want to put it."

Her pillowy lips parted as her jaw dropped. Immediately, my situation went from a semi to a full on problem.

"I wasn't. And you shouldn't speak to someone like that—you don't even know me."
"

“ Yes, I do. You’re Perry,” I relished the feel of her name in my mouth, just like I’d relished the taste of her before knowing this important detail. “Perry with the pretty pussy.”

Her mouth opened and shut a few times.

While I waited for her to stop gaping, I fantasised about pulling her closer, using her lush curves to cushion my raging erection.

“ You remember me ?” She hissed.

“Ouch, Perry. You hurt my feeling.”

A small laugh huffed out of her before she could stop it. I grinned.

“You have just the one feeling?”

“Yes,” I nodded. “I used to have more but they were inconvenient, so I downsized. Technically, I think I have two, but the second is the equivalent of a tyre in the trunk. I keep it tucked away and use it only in the event of an emergency.”

“Let me guess, your one feeling is?—”

“Social responsibility,” I supplied as she said, “horniness.”

She laughed again, and I resisted the urge to preen.

Now I knew her name, I knew I could shock her, I knew I could pleasure her, and I knew I could make her laugh.

Tick, tick, tick. She would definitely come home with me tonight, and I could fuck

her out of my system. Maybe then I could get some damn sleep.

“Just kidding,” I said, as she tried to pull her aloof expression back on. Her lips were twitching though. “I don’t give a fuck about anyone else. I’m a selfish prick. But you can bet your ass I remember you, Perry. You’re the reason I now hear fireworks when I come.”

“Miles!” She pushed my chest. “My goodness, you’re a rascal, aren’t you?”

A rascal . I hadn’t heard a woman under the age of seventy five say that word...

ever. I’d certainly never heard someone who wanted to fuck me say it.

And she did want to fuck me. It was lurking in the way she looked at me, and twisted across the flush of her smooth, glowing skin.

She shone like a fucking angel, even in the hazy purple party lights, and I wanted her in my bed, glowing like that, as I made her come so hard she was hoarse from screaming my name.

She had to know what I was thinking, because she clutched my shoulders a little tighter.

I didn’t often see a woman more than once, but maybe I’d been missing a trick with my one-and-done approach, because it was delicious to watch her remember our intimacies and see them turn her on.

She was fighting it now, trying not to get carried away while we were in public.

I could have pushed, but for once in my life I decided to take my time; to savour her.

“Categorically,” I concurred with her assessment. “But my mother is hoping you’ll turn that around.”

She nodded. “Marriage, perfect teeth, grandbabies. She confided her plan.”

“Deeply disappointing in its mediocrity, isn’t it?”

“Do you think?”

“Don’t you?”

She shook her head, and I found myself holding my breath as I waited for her answer.

I’d never given a shit about anyone’s answer to this.

I didn’t care about hers either, it had nothing to do with me, I was simply curious .

In an academic way. Because my mother was right; it would be a crying shame for humanity not to pass on such a winning genetic combination.

And Mum didn’t even know, like I did, that Perry was a natural blonde.

Perry-with-the-pretty-pussy.

I had to stop thinking about her pussy or there was no way I’d be able to stand up straight when we stopped dancing.

Luckily, she wasn’t showing signs of stopping. Despite her initial reluctance we’d been dancing for two songs now. Her hands on my shoulders had relaxed a little.

“I would love to get married and have kids,” she replied softly.

“One day, if I find a man I want to do that with.” One day.

Interesting. “ I think if you’re a mediocre person, you’ll have a mediocre life no matter what the details of it are.

But I don’t want to be mediocre.” Before I could say something charming that would reassure her she repelled that word like oil repelled water, she continued, “I want to run a global brand, I want Perry Skin to be number one in the market, I want to make high-performance skincare accessible and inclusive. Although I wouldn’t want my kids to feel like they came second to my work.

That’s not a nice way for a kid to grow up. ”

“Is that how you grew up?”

Her eyes fell from my face to my chest. “Sort of. My mum was a volcanologist—she’s retired now—and my Dad is a pharmacist. He’s still working. Once I was old enough to stay at home by myself, I hardly saw them. That’s not how it’s going to be for my kids. They’ll know how important they are to me.”

“You say that,” I said lightly, nudging her chin up. “But take it from me, it’s a lot of pressure being cherished and adored by your parents.”

We were onto our third song now.

“Your mum doesn’t like your siblings more than you?” She straightened her silly mask. I wanted to throw it from the top of the Sky Tower so nothing hid her lovely face from me. I fought the urge. Barely.

“No, I’m an only child. Her little prince, et cetera, et cetera.”

“Ah. So, I should pity the woman she finally tricks into marrying you. She’ll never be good enough.”

“Incorrect. I could marry a bridge troll and my mother would be delighted.”

“As long as she produced half-troll grandbabies?” Perry wrinkled her nose. “Women are more than walking wombs for rich men, Miles. Troll women included.”

“No, you misunderstand. My mother would enthusiastically love her troll-in-law. She’d love anyone I brought home.

Mum collects people. Didn’t you notice her collecting you?

She and my dad always wanted a big family, which they couldn’t have.

I quite literally broke the mould. Helen has basically adopted Sadie, my Executive Assistant, and you’ll probably have to move and change your name to avoid the same fate. ”

“You have an assistant? What do you do for work?”

“I run our family business. Into the ground, Sadie says, but she’s a liar. Our numbers are excellent. Sadie is here tonight. I let her come. Actually, I paid for all her friends to come too.” I needed Perry to know I wasn’t stingy, and had women friends.

Sadie always said she didn’t trust men who didn’t have female friends—though I technically only had her, and she was more foe than friend.

But I wasn’t above misrepresenting things to make me look better in Perry’s eyes to get what I wanted.

Right now—the way she looked in that dress, the horny as fuck way she swallowed when she stared at me—there wasn't much I wouldn't do to elevate myself in Perry's eyes.

God, I wanted to take her home.

“Sadie's over there.” I nodded to the side of the room where my mother, Sadie, and her tallest friend sat at a table, watching us.

My mother looked thrilled, Sadie was sizing Perry up, and the tall friend was...

I don't know, tall? I didn't care. “You could make your business a family business too, then all your kids would be involved,” I continued. “Take it from me, nepotism is great.”

Perry looked over her shoulder. “Is Sadie the thin, white woman with brown bangs who won't stop staring at me? Or the thin, white woman who is very tall who won't stop staring at me?”

“Bangs.” Over Perry's head, I glared at Sadie, silently urging her to be cool. She waited until Perry had turned away, then used one hand to mime winding up the middle finger of the other.

“I see.” Perry stretched up and put her arms around my neck, which pushed her tits into my chest and very effectively brought my attention back to her—I could have kicked myself for letting it wander.

We were onto our fifth song now. It was a fast one, but we stayed clasped together, moving slowly.

I gave in to the urge to wrap my arms around her to pull her up against me and she

didn't protest.

Her breath danced on my neck and my shoulders loosened, but the tension collecting elsewhere was becoming distracting.

Fuck, she was a delicious armful.

"Are you close with your assistant?" Perry murmured below my ear. "It sounds like you are.."

"Like black mould on a wall," I replied. "I'm the wall—structural, important. Sadie is the fungus—unpleasant, deadly."

Perry leant back to study my face and I tightened my grip in case she got any ideas about deserting me and my erection. Again.

"I think you might be unhinged," she said, shaking her head. "I can't believe I let an unhinged man go down on me."

"Possibly. But I'll never be mediocre."

She rolled her eyes but leant into my arms again, and we swayed for another song.

"I can still feel their eyes burning holes in me," she said.

I looked over at the table. "My mother has been distracted by Otis Blake, thank God. Probably trying to get us to buy his wines, even though they taste like vinegar. Sadie and her friend are still watching. Is that why you haven't tried to make out with me yet?"

"I prefer to do that sort of thing in private."

When I grinned, she blushed—realising what she'd confessed.

“Excellent.” I stopped dancing and put an arm over her shoulders. “Let's get out of here.”

She planted her feet. “If I leave with you, your mother will get her hopes up.”

“But you do want to leave with me, don't you?”

Her gaze dropped to my collar. I'd undone my bowtie an hour ago because it was fucking me off. God help me, she licked her lips.

When she nodded, I wanted to leap for joy and punch the air. I restrained myself. Barely.

“Why don't you slap me and storm off, then meet me outside?” I suggested. “Mum would never think we'd left together then.”

“I can't tell if you're joking or not.”

“I never joke.”

“I'm not going to slap you, Miles. Let's just keep dancing.

” She shrugged my arm off her shoulders, then picked both up and placed them back on her lush hips where they belonged.

When she stepped back into my embrace, we were much closer than we had been before.

Torso to torso, groin to groin. If she moved one little inch to the left, she'd feel

exactly how ready I was to ditch this fucking party.

“You don’t have to slap me hard ,” I continued. “I’m not saying rearrange my face, Perry. Just a little tap, so people think you’re off somewhere despising me, not tying me to my bed and riding me until we’re both boneless.”

Her cheeks flushed an interesting shade of pink and she said, “Don’t be silly, Miles. You haven’t done anything deserving of a slap.”

“Should I grab your ass?” I couldn’t help myself, I slid my hands lower down her hips, over her backside. “How about now? Do I deserve a slap now?”

She definitely did, right over these delicious cheeks. When I thought about how they’d quiver under my hand, my cock gave a painful leap.

She looked at me from under heavy lids. “No,” she whispered. “Still no slap.”

“Give a man a chance, Perry. I’m harder than a block of ice right now.”

“Are you?”

“Feel free to verify.”

I was teasing, I didn’t actually think she would. But fuck me, because she angled her hips to use her thighs as cover, then pressed a palm over my thick erection. I just about exploded in my pants.

“Oh, wow,” she breathed. “You are.”

I was looking at the ceiling, trying to keep it together, trying to do basically anything except for thrust into her hand like an animal.

My voice was hoarse. “I told you. I’ll never lie to you.”

She slid her hand over the front of my pants, exploring the size and thickness.

I’d never been so turned on from so little.

I should have known this would be the case if I did finally find her, because I’d jacked off to the memory of her spreading her legs so many times already.

Our sexual chemistry was off the charts, which was as intimidating as it was amazing.

Perry was insanely hot, sharp as hell, and sweet—and even though I didn’t usually go for sweet women, it worked for her, somehow.

I could only cope with another thirty seconds of her fondling hand before I threw her over my shoulder and made her come home with me.

I didn’t give a shit who saw. No stranger's opinion mattered to me.

I cared about my immediate family, my company, and re-experiencing what Perry tasted like. That was it.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

PERRY

Again, I stopped him as he tried to shepherd me out of the room. “Are you a chubby chaser, Miles?”

He stopped tugging and frowned at me. “What’s that?”

“Someone who is only attracted to fat people and fetishises their bodies.”

“I’m attracted to women who are hot. Is that—” he was a confident man, but his expression grew wary, like he was trying to navigate a field full of tripwires he’d been told were there, but he couldn’t see them for himself. “—Is that bad?”

“No. Some fat women like dating chubby chasers, but I don’t. I don’t want to be fetishised.”

His wariness evaporated. “I promise not to fetishise your body, but I will admire it, how’s that?”

A grin spread across my face. “Good.”

“Good,” he repeated, confirming. “Now, let’s get the fuck out of here before I become a medical emergency?—”

“Wait!”

“Perry,” he groaned to the disco balls above. “Are you trying to kill me?”

“I came here tonight to find an investor. I need to do that. I can’t just abandon my mission. I don’t want to wake up tomorrow being no better off than I am today.”

“Ouch, blondie. Mind my feeling. You’d wake up tomorrow significantly better off. Maybe you’ll be sore in a few places, but it’ll add to the experience.”

I couldn’t help laughing. Miles was outrageous, if kind of dark-sided; a complete player and far too ready with flirty lines.

I wasn’t born yesterday, so I knew better than to lose my head for a player like him.

But I did like him . He was interesting and charming, with a knife-like intellect under all the levity and outrageous statements.

He was easily the least mediocre man I had ever met.

And, as I already knew, in possession of an excellent tongue.

He observed my laughter with a calculating sort of expression, then leaned down and cupped my face gently. I sucked in a breath, bracing myself—I barely knew him, but I knew when he made a gesture like he was about to say something lovely, it would be filth.

Directly above the shell of my ear, he whispered, “If I fuck you into the mattress tonight, and stretching to take this dick makes you sore tomorrow, I promise I will personally kiss it better.”

A whimper slipped from my mouth and I had to use his shoulders to steady myself. He didn’t ease up at this sign of success. He doubled down.

“I will lick up inside your pussy and stroke your swollen walls with my tongue. I’ll

take my time getting you nice and wet, and as I do, I'll remind you that you did so good taking me, that it was an honour to watch your body claim my cock, inch by fucking inch.

I'll pay you back in spades, blondie, and even when you think you couldn't possibly come again, you will.

You'll soak my face just like you soaked my cock, and you'll wonder why you ever wasted so much time arguing about coming home with me. Now let's go .”

...I went home with him.

The trip home was a blur. I was so impatient and horny, my lower belly was aching and it was all I could think about. When I shifted awkwardly in my seat in the back of the rideshare, Miles' nostrils flared and his hand fisted where it rested on his thigh.

Still, he didn't reach for me, or I for him. We both knew if we did, it would be over. We would go up in flames in the back of this car, traumatise the driver, and I'd get banned from rideshares for life—which was not a situation I could afford.

We were halfway to the fancy suburb he lived in when he asked, “can I have your mask?”

“Why?”

“I want it.”

Confused, I handed it over.

“Thank you.” He depressed the window button and threw my mask out the window . Jerking around to look out the back window, I saw it bounce once on the motorway

and flip off the road into the darkness.

“Why did you do that?” I gasped.

“It was an awful fucking mask, Perry. I don’t know who you thought you were kidding.”

I huffed. “It was on theme.”

“The only real theme for these things is to look rich.”

“Or hot.”

His gaze poured over me. “You sure do.”

I couldn’t help it, I wiggled again, the horny and impatient little wiggle that made his eyes darken.

For the rest of the trip we rode in thick silence, each staring out our window. City lights rushed past and I mentally ran through my single-girl safety checklist:

Were there any bad vibes I was ignoring? No.

Did I have protection? Yes. I was on birth control and I had condoms to protect against STIs too.

Did someone know where I was? Yes. I’d told Tala, and I’d sent her a picture of Miles and his address, because you had to these days.

I couldn’t believe I was going home with him, but I absolutely was.

When I made up my mind my course was set.

Yes, the stare of the women Miles had brought to this event had definitely unnerved me, but feeling hostility from a thin woman when a man was showing me attention wasn't unique, and it wasn't why I was in the car right now. Or at least it wasn't the main why.

The reason I was going home with Miles was the same reason I'd let him eat me out on New Year's Eve.

I wanted to.

When we slammed the car doors shut and he keyed in the access code on his gate, I wished desperately that he would hurry up, go faster, and get me into bed immediately.

He must have felt the same way, because he hit the wrong button in haste and had to start again.

The second time, he hit each button with a surgeon's precision.

His home was lovely, but I barely noticed it. I waved off Miles' offer of a drink, but he grabbed a large bottle of water from the fridge anyway and saluted me with it in a knowing way before tucking it under his arm.

He was thoughtful.

Or maybe he wasn't, maybe he just did this so often that he had his routine down.

Maybe that was why Sadie had been staring at me so intently.

I forced myself to stop thinking about that.

I'd danced most of the night with Miles and time and context had lost all meaning.

I wasn't abandoning my mission with Perry Skin, but I was going to veer briefly from my business road map because I wanted to have hot, sweaty sex with this man.

And why not? I deserved to, just like I deserved to be hyped up and to take a night off and chase pleasure.

I wanted the man, he wanted me, we were going to do it all over his apartment.

Except not quite, because as he reached for me in his shiny marble kitchen I shook my head.

"I don't want to fuck for the first time on this counter." He blinked a little when I said fuck . "I want to be in a bed. I feel like my body is about to be pushed to its limits, so I might as well start in comfort."

He barked a laugh and took my hand to lead me up the stairs to his bedroom.

Like the rest of his house, his room was nice; rich, and clearly professionally decorated and cleaned.

I didn't register anything else about it after that, because Miles launched at me in that hungry way of his, then I was in his arms and he was kissing me.

In quick succession he peeled off my dress and I stripped him of his shirt.

Our hands moved with clumsy urgency, and something—hopefully something of his, he could afford replacements—gave way with a ripping sound.

Every time a new part of my body was revealed, Miles caressed or kissed it.

He'd used the word adore earlier tonight and now was intent on showing me he took that oath seriously.

In a tangle of limbs we fell onto his mattress, then his fingers were between my legs and he was teasing, playing, pressing and probing.

The pressure in my belly was getting worse, not better.

I threw a leg over his hip and leaned back so I had room to reach for his cock and conduct an exploration of my own.

What I had felt on my hip was thick and hot, and I was eager for a more tactile introduction.

But when I reached out, he hissed and grabbed my wrist.

“No, fuck no, Perry. You can't be doing that, I'm about to burst. Just let me get you wet enough I can sink into you like I've been imagining all year. After that, you can play.”

A slow, wicked grin stole over my face.

From the second Miles stumbled into my bathroom, he'd been full of praise and horny rhapsodies for my body.

It took me to my sexiest, most confident state.

This was how I felt in front of the camera, or even when I was masturbating.

I was no stranger to this feeling, I was more than capable of finding it for myself, but it was so very correct that Miles had brought it on now, because he saw me like this too.

I rolled over onto my back and parted my legs for him.

“I’m definitely wet enough for you.” I used my fingers to spread some of my wetness from my slit, where it had been gathering, and took it up to my clit.

I couldn’t see myself there, not over my belly, but he could, and his eyes turned ravenous.

“I want you to slide into me and do as you promised.”

“You’re giving me permission to fuck you into the mattress?”

When I shook my head, his frame stilled.

My hand shot out and I grabbed his wrist. “No, Miles. I’m begging you to fuck me into the mattress. Please.”

He grunted, and then when I passed him the condom I’d fished out of my bag while he was getting water, he rolled it down his impressive, thick erection. He really was going to stretch me, his cock was significant, and it had been a while since I’d had penetrative sex.

Miles was bigger than any of the toys I used myself, and I usually focused on clit things anyway. My vagina throbbed a bit, anticipating this intrusion—how good it would feel and how deeply he would fill me.

Condom on, Miles was done waiting. He took my thighs in his hands and pulled them

wide, making space for his hips to settle over mine. He used his hand to line himself up, then as his hips slid forward, the tip of his cock pressed inside of me.

I was trembling already.

“Perry, are you good?”

I nodded. “Yes. More. Please, more.”

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

“God, you’re perfect. I’m not going to last long, but I promise I’m not done when I come.”

I really liked this man.

Throwing my head back I arched, pulling him further on top of me.

Miles slid fully inside me with a hoarse groan, which matched my own as my body stretched for him.

It was the perfect kind of strain; I felt him everywhere, deep and present.

I loved that he was large enough for me—not just his dick, but his whole personality.

There was no way I would ever overpower Miles. He was a bullet train of a man.

His eyes dragged over me, lingering on the place where we were joined, and his jaw went slack. “Holy hell, Perry. I was built for you.”

I wiggled my hips a little. “Move. Please, Miles.”

“You sure?”

I tucked my heels up and pushed my hips into the air. Miles let out a growl then gripped my hips, thrusting in earnest. He said he never lied, so I wasn’t surprised when he grunted a warning that he was about to come.

I felt like I could too, I just needed a little more?—

Miles knocked my fumbling hand out of the way and I was glad he did, because I really didn't have much motor coordination. I was too busy thinking about how deep his dick was inside me. He put his thumb over my clit and worked me in fast circles.

“Fuck me, Perry. You're incredible. Is it good like this?”

“It's good, it's so good,” I gabbled. I liked that he was a talker, but right now I needed him to shut up and concentrate all his efforts on his thumb and his dick.

He got the message.

Under his fixated eyes and furiously working hand, I quickly climbed to my peak.

I'd never been so wet and I'd never come so fast. With a throaty scream I barely recognised as my own, I detonated, shaking all over his dick as I came.

All of me trembled, my thighs, my belly, my pussy, my breasts.

Miles gripped my hips like he couldn't get enough and followed me over the edge with a hoarse shout.

I lay there panting for five whole minutes, trying to summon the will to get up and use the bathroom. It was amazing.

“Holy fuck,” Miles spoke the words in my mind. “That was amazing. You're amazing. Give me an hour and I'll give you a longer rendition.”

I giggled. “If you were any longer, you'd split me.”

He barked a laugh.

We lay there reassembling our thoughts and catching our breath. Eventually, he peeled himself off me and cleaned up in his adjoining bathroom. I went next, taking my time to splash water on my face, pee, and clean myself up a bit. That had been messy , in the best possible way.

When I came back out, I hovered awkwardly by the bed, suddenly unsure of what his usual protocol was with one-night stands, and what the most dignified way to excuse myself would be. To my surprise, Miles grabbed my hand and pulled me back into the bed.

“How do you sleep?” he asked. “Do you need anything? Can I get you anything?”

Part of me wanted to ask if he was this attentive with all his overnight guests, or just the ones who inadvertently edged him for nearly a month, but I caught myself.

There was no space in post-orgasmic bliss states for insecurity.

I’d put in a lot of work to be able to override these kinds of intrusive thoughts, so that’s what I did.

I worked my way through my affirmations and shut the negative thoughts down.

“Just water, thank you. I hope you don’t mind, I helped myself to one of the new toothbrushes in your bathroom.”

“Of course.”

I drank the water he gave me and lay back in the pillows.

He dropped a kiss on my shoulder. “Damn, Perry. That was like a fever dream.”

“I know.”

“You’ll stay the night?” He looked surprised at himself for asking.

Seeming to process his shock, he repeated it.

“I really want you to stay the night. With me. Would you like anything to wear to sleep in? Should I play...um, I don’t know.

Ocean sounds or whale noises or something like that? What sick shit are you into?”

“Right now, you’re the sick shit I’m into.”

He laughed, like I’d wanted.

“Tell me if there’s anything I can provide.

I want you to be comfortable. I hate not being at my own house, with my own things.

If I was you, even if I really wanted to stay the night, there would be about six changes minimum to ensure that even if I couldn’t sleep, I wouldn’t get angry about it and be a complete fucking demon the next day. ”

I studied him. Everyone looked different in the moonlight, but Miles especially did.

His hair, usually pushed back off his head and perfectly tousled, was sticking up in a funny direction.

This was my doing, I’d put my hands all through it, and his forehead was lined with

concern, which I felt certain wasn't an expression he'd ever worn in the cold light of day.

I wanted a shirt, preferably a soft cotton t-shirt, but there was no way I would just be able to put on something of his and have it fall sexily to my thighs like thin women in movies.

I had my sweats, I'd worn them to the Sky Tower and changed in the bathroom.

But I didn't want to put them on now. I still wanted this man to be wowed by me, and sweats weren't my wow clothes.

I would never wear sweats in front of a romantic partner.

They didn't say sex queen, you know? Not on me, anyway.

Then I remembered the satin slip I'd worn under my dress.

"Can you grab that white slip for me? I think you threw it over there..." I pointed, praying my slip wasn't the thing I'd heard rip.

"This one?" he held it up. He'd pulled on his underwear, and of course he looked like a tousled sex god.

Shrugging the slip on over my head, I immediately felt a thousand times better about sleeping over. He was right, a few comforts made a big difference. "I don't like sleeping naked," I confessed. "I know that's not sexy, but I've never liked it."

I waited for him to complain about being deprived of my fabulous body, but he didn't. He climbed back into bed, nodding thoughtfully, seeming to catalogue the information.

“I’m the opposite. I don’t like to wear too much when I sleep. I get tangled, and sometimes I get night sweats too. Usually, I just wear underwear.”

“You’re a bad sleeper?” I asked.

Leaning back on his pillows, he threw one arm over his eyes and admitted, “Honey, I’m the worst. I’ve got no hope of sleeping until after I come, and even then, it’s difficult.”

The dark shadows under his eyes made a lot of sense now.

I curled up on my side, tucking a pillow under my arm. “So you jack off every night to help you sleep. Or...?” I felt weird voicing the question and trailed off.

“Yes.”

“Or you or .”

“Yes.”

He brought girls home and he fucked them into his mattress, then they left and he tried to fall asleep.

“What else helps?” I asked.

“Mostly sex.”

“There’s more, I know there’s more.”

“Sex helps the most .” He sighed. “But I also have blackout curtains. And an eye mask that’s pressurised. I keep the eye pads in the freezer.” He sat up and fumbled for

something on his nightstand. “And I have this stuff that Sadie got for me. I spray it on my pillow.”

Immediately, I wanted to smash it.

“Can I see?”

He passed it over and I (barely) resisted the intrusive impulses. “A lavender sleep spray. That’s a good idea. I have one which has a lavender base, but I cut it with vetiver and chamomile, both are calming.”

It was silly to think I could win with Miles based on how much I knew about smells. I needed to get a grip.

“What do you mean you have one?” he asked.

“My company, Perry Skin. You may be thinking that a sleep spray doesn’t fit into the skincare family?—”

“I wasn’t thinking that.”

“It’s okay if you were. At first thought, it doesn’t?—”

“I was thinking that you’re very impressive. But carry on, tell me why this is a third cousin in the family of skincare or whatever you were going to say.”

I giggled and his white teeth split the darkness in return.

“Well, the truth is, the best thing you can do for your skin is to hydrate from the inside out and get a good amount of sleep. Don’t get me wrong—I’m not an alternative medicine girl.

Oils aren't a substitute for medication.

I'm the daughter of scientists." It was important he know this about me.

"I'm very pro-science. I've spent years lab-testing my products and working out the perfect combination of high-performance actives and natural ingredients.

With that said, the biggest change indicators for skin texture, porosity and luminosity, is water and sleep.

After that, you have to hydrate from the outside, and that's where Perry Skin comes in. "

"My—what did you say? Luminosity? Is fucked if it depends on sleep."

I turned over the plastic bottle in my hands so I could feel the label.

It was too dark to read, but I recognised the jagged circle of the label.

"Ah, that's who I thought it was by. This is a good product.

It retails more cheaply than mine, but it's readily available in major retailers.

Like my company, this brand avoids synthetics, but my bottles are slightly bigger.

You'll pay more upfront for Perry Skin , but it's a better purchase.

And I package with glass, so you can buy refills and at end-of-life, recycle the vessels, either with us—we'll sanitise and reuse them—or at any local recycling centre. "

So go fuck yourself, Sadie.

Clearly, I wasn't as evolved as I liked to think I was, because even as I lay in this man's bed in my slip, my body pleasantly aching from our sex, I couldn't stop a vulnerable question tumbling out of my mouth.

"Why is your EA buying you pillow spray?"

"Huh? Oh, because she's the one who has to deal with me if I'm a sleep-deprived demon. Sadie has a vested interest in my sleep cycle." He looked sideways at me. "Are you... Perry, do you have an issue with Sadie?"

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

After raising the topic impulsively, I forced myself to think carefully about how to proceed. The directions this conversation could go in had my stomach in knots.

If things between Miles and Sadie were platonic, I didn't want him to brush off a long time friendship or diminish her role in his life just to appease me—it wasn't respecting women if you only respected the ones you wanted to fuck. I would think less of him for that.

But on the other hand, if he disregarded how I felt to prioritise another woman that would hurt.

And if there was something between Miles and Sadie—either a history or a will-they-won't-they vibe—I didn't want to be in his bed, feeling like a consolation prize.

Most of all, I didn't want him to act like I was having a weirdly disproportionate response, and it was all in my head.

The most sensible thing to do would have been to stay quiet. Be demure.

But it was too late now.

“Perry?” he prompted.

I sighed. “I felt weird about how Sadie was staring at me when we were dancing. It's clear the two of you are close, and the degree of scrutiny I got from her felt hostile and made me feel uncomfortable.”

He opened his mouth. Then he closed it, and stayed silent for nearly as long as I had.

“Okay. Hear me out,” he said eventually.

“Sadie is the biggest pain in my ass that could possibly exist. I hate her, and I love her—like a sister. The thought of our relationship being anything but that makes me feel physically ill. There’s nothing like that between us.

Mum had hoped, once upon a time, but both Sadie and I were clear that the idea was violently repulsive. Violently .”

“Violently. Gotcha.”

“But Sadie is important to me. I’d never tell her this, but she’s my best friend. Can you be okay with that?”

“Why does it matter if I am? This is just a one night thing.”

Even in the dark, Miles visibly blanched.

“...Isn’t it?” I whispered.

“I don’t know, is it?”

Neither of us answered. We were silent for a two minute eternity, in which hell froze, the sky wept, and I screamed internally.

He recovered first. “I guess...it matters because being observed by Sadie and her friend bothered you, and even though I’m a rascal with a single feeling to my name, I’m compelled in my role as your recent sex partner to do whatever is reasonable within my power to assuage any uncomfortable feelings that you may or may not

have.”

This man liked to say he was unfeeling, but he wasn't.

Not at all. His emotional awareness was quite lovely. Helen had shown similar ability, although it was overshadowed by her meddling. I wondered what his father was like. I pictured a silver fox with Miles' grey eyes, a wicked wit and a big booming laugh.

“You and Sadie are friends, right?”

“Basically siblings,” he answered quickly.

“Right. So she could have just been glaring because she was looking out for you. You know, like ‘hurt my brother and I'll break your legs.’ Something like that.”

“That's exactly what it would have been. Sadie is quite violently inclined, I'm sorry to say, and also ruthlessly mean to me. But she'll go to war if anyone else says something bad about me. Even when it's correct. Actually, especially then.”

“That makes sense.”

I didn't tell him about the additional layer on my mind, because that would be invisible unless you'd experienced it, but it was embedded in the scar tissue of every emotional wound I'd ever sustained.

Every time a romantic couple with a fat woman and a conventionally attractive man went viral on the internet, people would pile on her.

Comments would be like, why are you with her and she's pitching and so on, always with the undertone that a fat woman had stolen something that was the natural

birthright of thin, white, pretty girls.

Which is why having two thin women glare daggers at me while I danced with a man who was, to their mind, a peak specimen, made my skin prickle in the worst ways.

But Miles wouldn't get that, and maybe Sadie didn't either.

People perpetuated all kinds of crap without even being conscious of it, and I didn't always have the energy to explain it.

Besides, now wasn't the right time to get bogged down in that.

I'd just had mind blowing sex with a mind blowing man who'd made good on his promise to worship me, and hopefully would on his other promises to kiss the sore parts better too.

I wiggled closer to him. "Miles?"

"Yeah?"

"Put your sleep mask on if you want to. Don't hold off on my account. I don't think they're just for women, or anything silly like that."

"Don't worry about me, blondie. I was waiting to see if you'd sleep. Or if you wanted to..." he trailed off. It wasn't like he was too embarrassed to say a dirty word. He wanted me to fill it in, he wanted my affirmation.

My heart skipped a beat. "To or ," I said.

"Yes."

I patted his chest. “I would like to sleep, but only for an hour or so. Then we can or .”

Miles pulled his mask out of a drawer by his bed and slipped it on. It was massive, covering his eyes and half his forehead. I rolled onto my other side and when his strong arms tugged me into his embrace, I nestled my ass into his lap.

“This is nice.”

I wiggled. “It’s perfect.”

“Keep wiggling like that and neither of us will get any sleep.”

“I want an hour. Then you can show me the sequel.”

“Sequel? Blondie, I’ll show you an epic.”

In the end, we both fell asleep. For the whole night .

I woke first. I had no idea what the time was as his curtains took light blocking to a whole new level, but judging from the vibrant birdsong outside, it was morning.

Miles and I were twisted in each other's arms like pretzels that had been baked together. His mouth was open and he was snoring, dead to the world. I wasn’t going to wake him—I didn’t know much about insomnia, but I knew not to take something off someone if they’d just been telling you how hard won it was.

But when I tried to sneakily wiggle out of his arms with plans of finding my clothes and calling a car—he woke.

“Come back here,” he grumbled, sleepily.

His embrace was too nice to resist.

We cuddled some more, and when his morning erection made itself known, he made good on his promise to personally soothe my aches and pains from last night. And it was true he never lied, because I did come again. And again.

There would be plenty of time later to worry about what this was between us.

For now? Orgasms.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

MILES

After her third orgasm of the morning, Perry fell back asleep.

I slipped out of bed carefully, so as not to wake her, and fetched a new bottle of water. With a smug grin, I put it within her reach on the bedside table.

It was six-thirty, which was later than I usually got out of bed, but I felt fucking great. Hottie in my bed, good sex, mystery of who she was solved, and some fucking sleep. Everything was excellent.

After a quick shower—I used the guest bathroom down the hall to avoid waking Perry—I stared into the depths of the fridge.

On weekends I usually had brunch with Matty, and on weekdays I stole a piece of fruit off Sadie's desk.

Luckily, Mum had threatened to come by tomorrow after some shopping, so I'd preemptively added some bagels to my usual supermarket order.

I pulled out the bagels and a bunch of stuff that could go on them, and scrolled bullshit on my phone while I waited for the espresso machine to heat up.

It made a noise like a screaming cat, so I'd wait until Perry was up to start grinding the beans.

I thought waiting for a sleeping person to wake would irk me—I'd imagined it would

be like being on a red eye flight and everyone on the plane was asleep except me.

I would fidget in my seat, silently getting more and more resentful until it took all my willpower not to turn on all my overhead lights and shout and bang things.

But I hadn't given into these urges since I was a teenager. Ah, fond memories.

Today I felt great. It should have occurred to me earlier that having a sex partner stay all night would be triple the good effect of someone who left after the first round.

Or maybe it was Perry.

“What's all this?”

Perry-with-the-pretty-pussy was standing in my kitchen, barefoot in her slinky white dress.

She looked good in my house. My dick thought so too, interest stirring like I was twenty again.

That was the Perry effect. It still surprised me that I hadn't wanted to let her go last night, but I felt even more strongly about it this morning than I had then.

When she'd made to leave, everything within me had shouted no fucking way .

That, and the way she'd nestled into my arms; her air of calm so potent it extended out over me.

I really couldn't remember laughing with someone like I had last night.

Perry was sweet, but she had enough edge to think I was funny, which sweet girls

usually didn't.

Sweet girls (correctly) pegged me as a prick, so maybe instead of finding Perry charming, I should be worrying about her lack of self-preservation.

That wouldn't be in my best interest though.

I'd already scrapped my original plan to fuck her out of my system last night, and had gone as far as asking her to stay. I watched her push a bagel down in the toaster, shooting a furtive look at me from under her lashes as she did so.

With that one look, the plan that had been dancing at the edges of my mind all morning locked into place.

If there was one thing I was good at, it was charting a course that was bold, and steering us through it despite seemingly impossible odds. Bravery and sheer bloody mindedness always yielded success in business, and I could apply those same skills to guarantee success here too.

Sweet Perry. She had no idea when she took that silly bathroom job that I was going to rock her world.

I tilted my neck from side to side, easing the cricks, like I always did before I laid out an audacious plan in the boardroom.

"Your shower pressure is excellent," she said.

"It is, isn't it?"

"And you have proper big towels. I hate when hotels don't have towels big enough for me. Like I have an hour to spend dabbing myself dry with a square washcloth."

I murmured agreement and said, “Let’s get you caffeinated. I have some things I want to sound out. How do you take your coffee?”

She cocked her head. “Bagels and coffee. Wow. I thought you were going to be a ‘your ride share is outside’ kind of guy.”

I put a hand on my chest like this wasn’t the absolute truth. “Perry, don’t wound me.”

“Ah, yes, your one feeling.”

“Two, now.” I reminded her.

“Espresso with milk, no sugar, please.”

“Coming up.”

“Shall I fix the bagels?”

The only thing that got me hotter than Perry, was Perry being efficiency-minded. I loved it. I pointed at the plates and food I’d laid out. “Please. I like cream cheese on my bagel. And red onion. And capers. Not too many.”

She pulled the plates towards her and started assembling the bagels while I ground beans and frothed milk.

It was very domestic. It could have made me feel trapped, but instead I felt hyper aware of each minute detail.

It felt almost joyous to have company during such a mundane exercise, and to be sharing a routine like this.

When I slid Perry a steaming mug, she swapped it for a bagel.

She took a few bites of hers before asking, “So, what’s your new feeling?”

“It’s actually two new feelings. Horniness has, temporarily, been assuaged.” Sitting across from her at my kitchen island, I gave her an exaggerated leer. “But it’ll return once we’ve refuelled.” I bit into my bagel and chewed. “This is good, blondie. Perfect caper to red onion ratio.”

We finished the bagels. She was tapping something out on her phone and I was mentally aligning the last pieces of my plan.

“I’m just telling Tala you didn’t murder me.”

“Much obliged.”

Her thumbs flew rapidly across the screen and then she put her phone facedown on the counter, raising her palms like she was surrendering.

“There, done now. You’ll be pleased to know I told Tala your BDE swagger was justified.

I thought you’d appreciate the endorsement. Word-of-mouth marketing, so to speak.”

“Unnecessary, but thanks.”

Her shoulders sank. “Okay, then.” She pushed her empty plate away. “Are you going to tell me what those new feelings are?”

This was complex. I didn’t want her to think I was a whole new man after one—great—night together. She shouldn’t get any wild ideas. I was still a look-out-

for-number-one kind of guy, it was just that looking out for me now involved sleeping with her more.

I decided to go for tactical honesty.

“Feeling number one: satisfaction. We had an excellent night of orgasms and I slept more than I have in a long time.”

Her mouth curled down slightly, an expression I hadn’t seen from her before. “Good.”

“Yes, very. Feeling number two: determination. I have a plan to help you with Perry Skin . It’s clearly important to you, and I want to preempt you not having time to repeatedly bone me, because you’re busy trying to get your fledgling business off the ground.

I can solve all of your business problems very easily, then we can bang as much as we want. ”

“Right.”

“It’s flawless logic.”

“Yes, it’s clear you think so.”

“Ready to hear my plan?”

She waved a hand for me to proceed. She wasn’t saying much, but I figured she was excited to hear my thoughts. I ploughed on.

“When I was thinking about Perry Skin this morning, I remembered you saying you

were at the masquerade to find an investor. Mum would have had some suggestions—” I paused to allow Perry to confirm the discovery phase of this plan.

After a beat, she nodded. “—although she wouldn’t have wanted to invest herself, she’s got too much on her plate as it is.

” Another nod. This was going wonderfully.

“I thought you might turn down my money since we’ve slept together, or even consider the offer offensive. ”

“Correct,” she said stiffly.

“Absolutely, that’s what I thought. Just to check, though...why?”

If you needed money and had none, and someone with a lot of it offered you some, it seemed like a no brainer to take it. But, as Sadie often reminded me, not everyone thought like me. She meant it as an insult, but it was actually a testament to my rare genius.

Perry’s nostrils flared. “Because while I’m very supportive of sex workers’ right to work, and to be safe while working, you can’t just assume that’s what I’ll do if you throw enough money at me.

It’s actually quite vile for a wealthy man to assume everyone is for sale if he asks.

If a sex worker is what you want, great, let me give you the name of a great brothel. ”

“No, no, I get it,” I said quickly. “We’re on the same page.”

Only because this morning when I was in the shower, I ran this scenario in my mind a

few times and calculated the high odds of her being more morally rigid than me when it came to accepting money from sex partners.

I was a hardened businessman, as pragmatic as I was wealthy.

Perry, on the other hand, had plural feelings to contend with.

What a ball ache.

When she didn't attempt to reply, I jumped back in.

"I'll confess, Perry, I don't agree it should feel like money for sex.

I think it's an unrelated instance of one person having no money but a good idea, and another person having lots of money and a willingness to spend it on good ideas.

This is the whole premise of the free market.

But, at the risk of you never wanting to sleep with me again, I'll shut my mouth.

Offer stands if you change your mind. But cards on the table now: I want to date you.

Exclusively. That's my primary objective."

Her eyebrows flew up. "Date . Repeatedly. Like...for a fixed term?"

"For as long as we want, until one of us decides we don't anymore."

"There's a word for that, Miles. Exclusive, repeated dating is called having a girlfriend. You want to be my boyfriend, that's what you're saying?"

I took a deep breath. “I guess I am.”

“Do you know that if being my boyfriend goes well, it might lead to becoming a husband and father too?”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

I narrowed my eyes. “Don’t try and frighten me, blondie.

I’m not a child. Yes, I know there’s the chance it will escalate.

I heard what you said about mediocrity being driven by person, not circumstance, and I’ve thought about it.

I’m not saying I want to get married tomorrow, but...

uh...” I had to clear my throat, it had gotten all thick.

“But what, Miles?”

“The idea isn’t repulsive.”

“Wow,” she said, sounding decidedly un-wowed.

Somehow, somewhere, this had all taken a turn for the worse.

I wasn’t sure when exactly, but my palms were sweating and I felt nauseous—which took me up to three feelings.

Plus, I was starting to feel desperate, because she wasn’t jumping up and down with excitement like I’d envisioned when I’d come up with this plan this morning in the shower.

Bringing me to a grand total of three too many fucking feelings.

Trying to buy some time to think, I carefully rinsed the plates and stacked them in the sink. When I turned back to face Perry, I still couldn't read her expression.

“Let's get back to talking about scaling up Perry Skin,” I said. Back to safe territory.

“I assume you have some kind of business plan?”

She nodded.

“And a marketing plan? And you're where you need to be with product testing?”

“Yes.”

“I know some people who do mentoring for startups.” I was one of them, but she wasn't going to accept my mentorship if she wouldn't even accept my money.

“They take on new projects all the time—all I would be doing would be adding you into the mix. Sleeping with me won't help or hinder you in any way.

Once you've synthesised the feedback, I think you'll emerge with valid investor leads, but I also believe you should crowd-fund in tandem.

You've probably already thought of crowdfunding—” she gave another a stiff nod.

“—I knew it. But you probably disregarded it because it would be more efficient to find a singular investor, right?”

Yet another nod. She wasn't giving me a fucking thing . I began to feel like I was standing in a town square, flaying myself.

“I have to say, I think you're underestimating how much people will like you.

People will invest in your product but they'll also invest in your journey.

For a business like yours with a core value of trustworthiness, you'll get more mileage if your target audience feel like you've come from the ground up and they've been part of that.

Sure, a one-off five bucks from a mum in Kirikiriroa, Hamilton doesn't mean much.

But if she's a loyal customer for years because she feels like part of the Perry Skin origin story, that's, 100 or 200 a year.

It doesn't need to be either/or, as long as you manage the optics carefully—you can crowdfund and hook a big fish investor.

You'll need to vet investors carefully, but someone like my mother—it doesn't have to be Helen—" I said quickly when Perry shook her head in one quick, jerky motion, "if you don't want any Lawrences involved. But someone like her."

"This is a lot to process." Perry rubbed her face tiredly, making her skin pinken. "First you emotionally blindside me, then you dismantle my business plan. In your head. In the shower."

"It's what I do," I said, matter of fact. "This might come as a surprise to you Perry, because I'm such a fun-loving rascal , but I'm good at it. Pure nepotism wouldn't have kept an export business afloat through a pandemic."

She studied me.

It made me a bit uncomfortable to stand still as she mentally stripped me of my blithe exterior, all my carefully affected rascality .

“Trust me, blondie. People think money is the only thing a business needs, but brand equity is just as valuable, and it’s the change-marker in terms of longevity.

I’ll get Sadie to email you tomorrow with some valuable contacts who can help you implement this plan, and advise you on the necessary disclosures.

Again, all I’m doing is giving advice and contacts, so you’re not beholden to me in any way.

You’ll owe me nothing.” Finally, I ran out of steam. “How does that sound?”

She rolled her lips. “It sounds like very .. sound advice.”

“ Sound ?” I was offended. That was the fine of compliments.

“Good advice,” she amended. “Expensive advice. People charge a lot of money for strategic direction from an expert like this.”

I wiggled my eyebrows at her. “That’s why my father pays me the big bucks.”

“You said it was a family business, and you mentioned exporting. But what exactly do you do?”

“I’m the CEO of Elysian Wine Exports. My dad founded it and when he retired, I took the reins.”

Her expression still didn’t give much away.

I was an expert at reading people’s faces, it was one of the ways I was able to stay a few steps ahead in negotiation.

But with Perry, it was harder. Either because emotion was clouding my judgement, or because I just didn't have the right frame of reference.

Either way, it was hell.

"But what does a CEO do?"

"I make sure the good ideas work, and stop the bad ones from fucking us."

"I see." After a minute she said, "Excuse me, I'll be right back."

She disappeared down the hall and I waited an age for her to return. When she did, her bag was slung over her shoulder and she was wearing sweats. I could see a scrap of her blue dress dangling out of where she'd stuffed it in her bag.

"Perry?"

"I appreciate your business advice, Miles."

"Yeah, I'm a fucking genius. I know. Why are you dressed like you're about to take off?"

She tilted her head then, and it was like a floodgate burst when I could identify this new expression.

It was remorse.

Fuck.

"Perry, hang on?—"

“We’re at totally different places in our lives, Miles. I had a nice time with you. But I have so much I want to achieve now, and I need to do it by myself. Because it’s for myself, you know?”

Every muscle in my body was locked, I was so tense.

“I understand that. But for God’s sake, Perry, be smarter than you are proud.

Accept whatever help you can get. That’s how shit gets done.

Any opportunity? Seize it. Good advice? Take it.

You have to choose if you want to cling to some imagined moral high ground, or you want to actually build this thing.

I’m not saying don’t have ethics—don’t use child labour or avoid taxes or whatever.

But you can be upstanding and ethical without fucking yourself over. ”

She looked at me properly then, her heart in her eyes, her hands trembling as she clasped them in front of her. Perry was scared , I realised. Scared of this thing vibrating between us—potential, possibility, happiness .

That made two of us

“Miles, this is all too much.”

“I know.” I came out around the kitchen counter and put a hand on her arm. “Perry, sweetheart, I know. But?—”

She held up a hand, and I saw the square card she’d been clasping. “Please give Sadie

this. I'd be glad of any contacts she sends through."

I took it, studying the swirling Perry Skin logo with her name and contact on the back.

"This is just for Sadie's use, not mine. Is that what you're saying?"

Her eyebrows, a rich earth colour, bunched over her face.

She had a light spread of freckles on her nose which I hadn't been able to see in the lights at the party.

I hadn't even known they were there when I kissed her nose this morning, after she collapsed, boneless over my chest. There were so many things about her I was hungry to learn, and now I wouldn't have the chance.

This was my first attempt at getting a girl to date me, and it was an even bigger failure than I could have imagined.

"I don't think we would be a good idea, Miles."

"Why?"

Damn, my chest was hurting. Probably another fucking feeling.

What did violent devastation feel like? A heart attack?

I had a sudden vivid recall of a scene in one of Sadie's favourite shows, with a blonde person knee deep in a wishing well, scooping coins from the bottom of it and throwing them out, shouting, 'unwish, unwish!'

Too late, I realised that my search for bathroom girl hadn't been unfairly hard, it had been correctly hard. I wasn't supposed to have found her, I wasn't supposed to feel like this.

And I couldn't unwish it.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

PERRY

Miles' expression when I left his house was horrible.

I felt awful to be responsible for it, and even worse because it had taken the place of the fervent excitement that he'd had as he'd made coffee.

Whether his high had been on my account or the effects of a good night's sleep, I didn't know.

But it didn't matter which. I made my body walk out the door because my head couldn't find a reason to stay.

Meanwhile, my heart was going: eeeeeeeEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEIIIIIII. Unhelpful.

My heart was the reason I threw myself into things—like modelling, like business—and showed up with vulnerability, which achieved very little other than reveal my soft underbelly to all and sundry, so people like Ginger could attack.

I'd told myself if I was going to get Perry Skin off the ground and be my own hype girl, I needed to let my head take charge, not my heart. But I hadn't expected it to feel this miserable.

I don't know who had told me that I had to be successful in my own right in order to fall in love with a man who was as successful as Miles.

Maybe no one had. Maybe it was an opinion that grew without help, like ivy on an

old building.

Either way, the thought of sinking into an identity as Miles' date, or his girlfriend—and always being introduced as the girl he'd met when she was working in a bathroom—and never being awesome in my own right was too powerful.

That was what drove me out of his house.

Well, and fear.

It was a terrifying idea to fall in love with someone who liked me purely for novelty value, because for some unknown reason he slept well while I was there. Someone who considered an attachment with me 'not repulsive'.

Miles would get tired of me when the novelty wore off and the idea was unbearable.

When I walked down Miles' driveway and got into the rideshare car, I could feel his eyes burning holes in the back of my head.

But he didn't try to stop me. Which was good.

Definitely good, and not at all like a toddler had my heart in their plump little hands and was squeezing it between their fingers like it was made of play-dough.

Over the course of the following week, I worked myself to the bone.

When a polite and super professional email from Sadie arrived in my inbox, I wasted no time reaching out to the people she suggested, setting up meetings, and booking myself into the suggested seminars and talks.

I stacked meetings back to back, outsourced someone to batch-create content, and

hired a designer to start working on Perry Skin's visual identity.

I put all of this on my credit card without letting myself think about the lecture I would get from my parents if they knew.

The very hour my new brand files came in, I launched the public crowdfunding campaign.

My friends showed up for me in force and promoted Perry Skin, hyping for me like I always had for them.

That took all the hurt that had sunk into my bones from a rollercoaster of a month and soothed it.

Things weren't nearly as bleak as the most hurt little corner of my heart would have me believe.

I hadn't lost my one chance at the happily ever after I'd always dreamed of—I was just experimenting with the route.

I stretched my waking hours to the max and threw myself into every single task with fervent energy and focus. I ate a lot of toast, and other things that already existed in the kitchen and took ten minutes to make—fruit, ramen, frozen macaroni cheese. Basically, the food of my adolescence.

I didn't have time to cook, I was too busy working my luscious ass off to make all my dreams come true. Or at least, the professional ones.

MILES

Matty had chosen a terrible time to go off grid. He did this every now and then, he

got all in his head and disappeared for a while, only to reemerge like no time had passed. Usually, I understood. But it was bloody rude of him to do this when I was in a crisis.

My only option was to call my mother. She said soothing and encouraging things, as she always did, and all I had to do for access to this unending and unwarranted sympathy was go on a date with a woman she met at tennis.

Lisa. After that, with Elizabeth, the receptionist at the spa she liked, and then she tried really hard to set me up with her neighbour's son Kyle—Mum was working overtime to ensure I wasn't feigning heterosexuality on her account.

Kyle was great, but definitely too much man for me, and eventually Mum ceded defeat.

Deep down, I suspected she was disappointed things hadn't worked out with Perry.

My mother really liked her. Everyone who met her liked her.

I even liked her. Enough to be excited about the idea of recurrent, deliberate encounters.

Dates, or whatnot. Being a 'boyfriend,' she'd called it... But she didn't like me enough for that.

Which was completely fine, and not a total evisceration of my worth as a human being.

There was no way I should read into the fact that the minute Perry had gotten a glimpse of the person underneath the jokes and the good times, she'd disengaged; like Sadie had told me women would.

She was wrong, of course. And Perry was wrong. I was great .

I could have had plenty of repeat dates over the years if I'd wanted them. This whole time it had been my choice not to. My free will.

This was the patter in my head as I ignored the sick feeling in my gut and called the last woman I went out with, Elizabeth, and asked her on a second date.

It sucked even more than the first one.

Perry

On Tuesday, three weeks after the masquerade, my nose started burning. A few hours later my throat began to scratch. In quick succession, swollen glands, blocked everything, and a general feeling of misery arrived.

It wasn't Covid, I tested for this multiple times; I'd just pushed my body too far without adequate rest or nourishment.

I had to postpone a meeting with an investor that Sadie had connected me to, which had me weeping into my sickbed pillow, but his office was very kind about resetting it for the following week.

The next day, I got an unexpected call.

“Hello, Perry? This is Sadie, Miles’ assistant at Elysian Wines.”

I sat up in bed and greeted her with my very best ‘ I’m not sick ’ voice.

“Woah, why do you sound drunk?” she asked.

“I’m not,” I protested unconvincingly.

“Hey, no judgement,” Sadie said. “I would rather be downing mojitos right now than fulfilling Princess Miles’ every wish. But a girl’s gotta eat.”

“I’ve got a cold,” I admitted. “How can I help, Sadie? Is anything wrong?”

“I heard the meeting with Bradford Lewish moved and I was wondering what was up, but I think you’ve just answered my question.”

“Mucus,” I replied, trying to sound droll. “Mucus is what’s up. I feel terrible that I had to postpone, but Bradford’s assistant kindly agreed to move our sit down until next week.”

“So he didn’t cancel it?”

“No.”

She covered her phone so her next words were muffled, but I heard them anyway. “You better get on the phone and apologise.”

A deep, familiar voice grumbled something in the background.

“What happened?” I asked.

Sadie heaved a sigh. “Miles thought Bradford was fobbing you off, so he rang him and delivered a colourful scolding, despite someone —me, obviously—telling him it was a bad idea. But it’s fine. He can fix this.” She covered the mouthpiece and repeated sternly, “You can fix this.”

“Why did he do that?”

“Take pity on him, Perry. He’s never had a crush before. He doesn’t know how to act.”

“Shut up, Sadie,” Miles barked in the background.

I dragged a hand down my face, trying to think, trying to process, and feeling like I was wading through treacle.

I didn’t know what to do with this information.

Yes, Miles had laid out breakfast, before he’d finished designing a business plan for me.

But from everything I knew about him, he was a player.

No ‘ pretty pussy ’ could ever change that.

Unless ... a tiny voice in my brain whispered. Unless you’re meant to be.

My whole life I’d been made to feel like meant to be wasn’t for me.

I didn’t see myself in fairytales, and somewhere along the line I’d internalised thinking those stories weren’t meant for me.

It was hard to recalibrate to allow for a possibility like this.

Every nerve in my body was screaming, ‘ that way lies danger, girl’ .

But maybe I could at least feel out the edges, see where the sharp bits were.

“Give me one sec,” I murmured, then put the phone on mute to hack up a lung and

blow my nose. Back on the call, I asked Sadie, “Do you have time to talk properly? Somewhere Miles can’t hear us?”

I could leave it alone. Maybe I should.

But I wanted to be wrong about Sadie more than I wanted that.

“Sure.” There were rustling sounds and a sliding glass door. “What’s up, buttercup?”

“This is a bit uncomfortable, but I got the sense you weren’t pleased I was with Miles at the masquerade. But you’ve been so helpful sending me all these contacts and things and I guess... I guess I just wanted to clear the air.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“At the masquerade. You glared holes in me.”

Sadie sucked in a breath. “Oh, no , Perry. No! I have a resting bitch face. I was just trying to figure out what Miles was up to. He’s never taken any notice of a woman Helen pushed on him, and I thought he’d come to the party to try and find the bathroom girl he made out with—turns out this was you the whole time.

I was just trying to figure out what the fuck he was up to. ”

“Is there something between you and Miles?” I asked, point blank.

“Unadulterated loathing,” she replied cheerfully. “As for anything romantic? No way. Miles is a brother to me.”

“Right.”

I should feel better, but the memory of her stare raking over me, decidedly unimpressed, was still prickling over my skin, like I'd tried to exfoliate with stinging nettle.

Sadie picked up on the tension. "Do you have a problem with me, Perry? Because that would suck."

"I just—" I had to break off to blow my nose again. "Sorry. I'm really sorry, Sadie. I don't mean to be difficult or make you feel uncomfortable."

"Why don't you just spit out exactly what you want to say—" she said, and there was a definite guarded quality to her voice now, "—and let me decide how I feel about it."

This was a horrible situation. The chances she would take this badly were high, and even if she didn't, she probably still wouldn't get it, and would always be fake and too-careful around me.

But I couldn't let it go. Not if I wanted to see what the future could hold for Miles and I.

If he wanted that. It seemed like he might—I hadn't known him long, but he didn't seem like a man who went around cussing out business contacts on the daily.

"It made me uncomfortable to have two thin women glaring daggers at me while I danced with Miles, someone who is so conventionally attractive, and welcome in that kind of social environment. I'm not saying it was hostile in intent, but that's how I received it."

Silence echoed through the phone.

I castigated myself for bringing this up. For being a cheerless shrew pointing out this

problem and making it everyone else's. If I'd just let it go and prioritised comfort—not mine, but comfort in general—it could have stayed exclusively my problem.

“It's fine,” I said, trying to sound breezy. “I can tell it wasn't malicious?—”

“No wait,” Sadie said. Then she surprised me by saying, “I hadn't thought of it like that. I'm not apologising for my resting bitch face because I can't help that?—”

“Totally!” I agreed quickly. “I get that.”

“—But I didn't think about the layers. Sorry, cowgirl.

That's an angle I hadn't considered. To be really clear, Miles thinks you're fine and so he should, it's an objective fact.

I know he acts like a fuckboy sometimes, and I talk a lot of shit about him, but underneath all that he's half-decent.

I think you could be a good match. He likes you Perry, and he doesn't like many people.”

“He's lucky to have a friend like you.”

“I know.”

“I would love it if we could be friends too.”

“Definitely. Hard launch it?” she asked.

“Hard launch,” I agreed with a laugh, which was snotty, but heartfelt. “It's nice to be

your friend, Sadie.”

When we hung up, I felt a million times lighter.

Unfortunately, my cold wasn't on the same upward path and I got steadily grosser over the week. Tala was staying at her girlfriend's house a lot at the moment, so at least I could keep my germs to myself.

Guilt over not using every waking hour to work on Perry Skin peeped at the edges of my conscience, but instead of letting it take over, I stayed in bed and watched Derry Girls and ordered delivery soups that didn't travel well.

Everything would be fine. I'd eat soup now and work next week.

MILES

I wasn't a patient man, but I tried. Perry had walked out of my home, and I had to respect that. Other than the small detail of helping her career as much as I could and chewing out my oldest business contact when I thought he'd cancelled a meeting with her—other than that, I was giving her space.

But when her voice was nearly unrecognisable on the phone with Sadie, then she stopped taking calls altogether and no one heard from her for a couple of days, I started to get a little agitated.

It was Friday morning, and Sadie was going to courier some boilerplate contracts to Perry so she could build hers off of them.

Of course, we couldn't actually give her any of our boilerplates, it was all proprietary and unrelated to her field—so I'd engaged one of my personal lawyers to draw up some things I could pass off as templates.

I was sick of hearing nothing from her, sick of sitting on my fucking thumbs in my office, so I took the envelopes and the post-it with her address off Sadie's desk and made for the door with them.

Sadie didn't try to stop me. She'd been subtly (or as subtly as she knew how) pushing me to do this all week.

Perry lived across town and traffic was a bitch.

When I finally walked up her drive and rapped at the door, there was no answer.

I rang the bell. Still nothing. Eventually, I leaned off the porch and knocked on a window.

There was a shuffling sound from inside as a shadowy figure behind the frosted panes of the door shuffled down the hallway.

The door swung open and there she was.

Her nose was red, her eyes were watery, and her mouth hung open as she sucked air through it. Objectively, she'd never looked worse. Yet to my eyes, starved for the sight of her, consoled by only memories, she'd never looked better.

That's how I knew I was in way over my head.

Retaining a lawyer to draw up contracts and driving them across the city to her house was the absolute least of what I would do to insert myself in this woman's life and stay there.

"Miles?"

"Contracts." I pushed them into her arms and stepped over the threshold. "Why didn't you tell me you were on death's door?"

"I'm not on death's door."

Her protest wouldn't have impressed me even without the snot.

"Have you eaten?" I looked around for the kitchen and went through the door I guessed led there. The house was small but tidy, although the unmistakable 70s decor

that didn't fit Perry marked it as a rental.

"I have soup." She trailed into her kitchen behind me. "Miles, I don't know what you think you're doing?—"

"Looking after you," I announced, and it didn't matter that I'd never done anything like this before and wasn't much of a caregiver. I knew I could at least improve upon her current situation.

I took off my jacket and laid it over the back of an armchair, then flinched when I turned back to the kitchen and saw the sad little takeout container, sitting on the bench with a spoon next to it. "Don't tell me that's your lunch."

"I like chicken soup."

"That's not soup, that's congealed slop."

"I was going to heat it."

"Hot slop, then. Go to bed, Perry. I'll see if I can salvage your slop." If I couldn't, I'd throw it out and order a replacement, taking my chances that she'd be too jacked on cold medicine to notice.

She looked at me like she was going to argue some more, but then her shoulders sank. "Okay. My room's the third door on the left. Thank you. Just the soup and then I'll be totally fine. Thank you, Miles."

"Bed, blondie."

When I took the salvaged hot soup to Perry's room, she was propped up on a mountain of pillows, watching something on her laptop.

She barely resembled the bombshell on the chaise I'd first met, yet that stupid muscle—Nerve?

Tumour?—in my chest throbbed at the sight of her sitting there, looking all trusting and vulnerable.

Her hair was held back with a thick grey band, and she was wrapped in a fluffy dressing gown that might have once been blue, but it had been washed so many times the colour could only be described as pallid.

Like her. She wiggled further up the bed, making room for the tray I placed on her lap.

Soup procured, contracts delivered, the job was done. I could go. Instead, I lingered.

“What are you watching?”

“Derry Girls.”

“Girls who work in a dairy? Like, a corner store?”

“No, girls from Londonderry. In Ireland. It's a comedy set in the 90s. Have you never seen it?”

I shook my head.

She gasped. “That's a travesty! It's really funny, you'll like it.”

“Move over then.”

“Miles!” She looked at me like I was a three-headed dog. “I'm sick . I've got chills.

And sweats. And snot. So much snot.”

“So? Your bed’s huge and I’m warm. Like a human hot water bottle.”

“You’ll get sick. I’ll give you my bugs.”

I snorted. “You can try. I’ve got the constitution of an ox. I never get sick.”

She rolled her eyes but shuffled over and made space for me next to her. I sat on the covers and leaned back against the headboard, and we watched an episode together. When that finished and the next one autplayed, I didn’t move. Eventually, she put her laptop on me and curled into my side.

We watched her show all afternoon, and eventually I heated the rest of her soup for her dinner, even stealing a bit for myself.

She was too zonked to notice. I didn’t say anything about leaving, and she didn’t ask.

Eventually, she fell asleep half on my chest, my arm around her shoulder.

She woke once, too hot in her gown and pressed against me as a human-heater, and went to take a shower.

When she came back, she still didn’t say anything about being here, just flopped back into bed and threw an arm around me like she’d never left.

After a few cryptic messages, my mum agreed to go to my house and put together an overnight bag for me, which she dropped off without saying anything too smug about my current situation—her shit-eating expression did that for her.

I changed as quickly as I could, disliking being away from Perry for the few minutes

it took to do that, and to scarf down some of her leftover soup.

We spent the whole night together.

Perry slept in fits and starts. I went back and started watching Derry Girls from the very beginning.

I didn't sleep, which wasn't unusual, but tonight it was because I was too obsessed with monitoring her for any signs that she was getting worse, or there was something I could do for her.

At about one in the morning, when she grumbled something and started rubbing her feet together like a fucking cricket, I realised she was annoyed by her socks and peeled them off for her.

Just past three, when she fumbled in the air over her nightstand for an empty glass, I went and refilled it.

At some point I caught a few minutes of sleep myself, perhaps even an hour. That was fine for me—I'd often done more with less. But I was wide-awake at four when Perry woke and reached for me, pressing her body to mine.

"Thanks for staying," she whispered into the darkness.

"My pleasure."

"You're very thoughtful for a fuckboy."

I told her the truth. "I like thinking about you."

And truth was a lovely thing, because she nuzzled in closer.

In the morning, her cold seemed marginally better, although she still wasn't quite fighting fit. So it made sense for me to stay the next night, too.

Then when I caught her bug and got taken out by the worst cold I'd had in years, she came to my place and stayed there with me.

It just made sense. We made sense.

MILES

It was late February when we went back to the Sky Tower on a proper date.

Ever since the common cold had brought us together, Perry had spent most nights at my place, or I'd stayed at hers.

I'd mentioned at dinner over my kitchen bench that it was unclear to me if this constituted 'dating.' Perry was of the opinion it didn't count, as we'd skipped over that and spent more time together than apart.

I didn't see the point of anything that meant less time with her, but Perry got a dreamy sort of look in her eye when she gave me examples of date activities.

So, tonight, in an effort to retrofit, I picked her up from her house clutching flowers and made her wait for me to open doors for her, all the while draping her in compliments.

I even refrained from leering at the way her leg split the thigh-high slit of her dress when she stepped out of my car. And if that wasn't romantic, what was?

"Why are we here?" She frowned up at the Sky Tower.

"I'm being romantic," I announced, romantically. "This is where we met the night I walked into the wrong bathroom and you rode my face and changed my life."

"Miles!" she scolded, but her eyes sparkled. "Don't make it sound like it happened

the moment you said hello.”

“At least two moments after I said hello.” I held the elevator door and together we shot up into the sky. “And I was working hard, blondie. I was throwing out all of my best lines, flexing, trying not to pant like a dog...”

“...Chemically burning your dick...”

“Nearly chemically burning my dick,” I corrected. “You know damn well my dick is in perfect working order.”

“Yes, yes,” she kissed my cheek, and I wrapped an arm around her. “It’s a marvel.”

“Feel free to keep doubting me, blondie. I’ll take you back to the bathroom and prove it.”

She laughed, but the pleasure of her response was ripped from me as the doors opened to the party.

I didn’t actually know the cause this one was fundraising for, I’d just told Sadie to get me tickets for the next thing here and make a big donation.

I wanted to bring Perry back here and dance all night with her in my arms, and maybe see if I could entice her into the bathroom for a quickie.

It was our two-month anniversary of the former and our three-month anniversary of the latter, and I couldn’t think of a better way to celebrate than a repeat.

Unfortunately, the minute I took my gorgeous girl into the room, she got swept into conversation. People liked Perry and wanted to talk to her. Speaking to Lara Savea, she had an excited flush in her cheeks.

I hovered at her elbow and nodded whenever she said something impressive. So I was a bobblehead on a dash.

I was absorbed listening to my lovely girl... My date? My girlfriend? My whatever she wanted. The key bit was my— so I didn't notice the short woman with pale hair and a pissy expression pushing through the crowd towards us until she was right in front of us.

“Peregrine Anders?” the woman demanded, her tone immediately pissing me off.

Lara looked sideways at her, but didn't otherwise acknowledge the interruption. “Like I was saying, Perry, call my office and ask for Tyler. I'll let them know to expect your call.”

“I'd love to!” Perry said, her face shining. “Thank you so much Lara, this is an incredible opportunity.”

“What opportunity?” demanded the short woman.

I opened my mouth to tell her to fuck off, but Perry put her hand on my arm. “Hello, Ginger,” she said politely, but her smile was tight. “It's nice to see you.”

“What's this opportunity?” Ginger repeated, looking from Lara to Perry.

The correct response was to tell her to mind her own fucking business, but Perry wasn't me, so she answered.

“Ginger, this is Lara Savea. Lara, this is Ginger.”

“From Phillys and Roller.” Ginger nodded. “I know. Hello again, Lara.” She leaned towards Perry and hissed, “Why are you talking to guests?”

My jaw fell. I wasn't the only one fixated by this. Ginger's pushiness had quietened all the conversations nearby and avid eyes were on us.

"I'm interested in Philly's and Roller becoming a distributor for Perry Skin," Lara answered for herself, her voice brisk. "I tried her hand cream in the bathroom here once, and liked it. I was telling Perry she'll need to scale up her production just to meet my personal requirements."

Perry and Lara shared a laugh.

Ginger's eyes flicked from Perry, to the door to the bathroom, and then back to Lara. I could see the wheels turning, but even I didn't expect what she said next.

"Those creams were supplied by Momentum Events. They're ours."

My jaw dropped. I knew who this bitch was now, she'd texted me from Raro, distancing herself from the products I knew were Perry's.

"That's bullshit," I said. "Perry Skin is my girlfriend's brand, and you hired her then hid her in the fucking bathroom."

Perry made the most of a bad situation, and freely made her products available to better your guests' experience, just like she betters everyone's experience all the fucking time, and now you're trying to say that was you ? Go and fu?—"

"Miles. " Perry put a hand on my chest. "Please. It's fine."

It was not fine, but I swallowed my fury.

Perry had made steady progress with her fledgling company over the last month and I was incredibly proud of her.

Every day she found new ways to show people she worked with—and anyone unwise enough to doubt her—there wasn't anything she couldn't achieve if she put her mind to it.

Now this woman was going to rock up here, be incredibly rude to Perry, and make demonstrably false claims?

I could have spit, I was so fucking angry.

But I bit my tongue because Perry had asked me to, and I knew she was right.

I made do with glaring my thoughts through my eyes.

Fuck you, you fucking vulture.

Perry raised her chin. “Perry Skin is my brand. I hold all of the paperwork, all of the pending patents. I also hold all of the records of lab testing, all of the development work. It took me years to get to the point where I could place my own products somewhere for public use, and I can prove all of that. But I'm sorry I didn't ask you if I could place my products in the bathroom here.”

“I'm not,” said Lara, after a raking look at Ginger. “I'm pleased you did.”

“Thank you Lara,” Perry acknowledged. “But I still shouldn't have done it. I'm sorry, Ginger.”

Ginger shifted her weight from foot to foot. She was disarmed by Perry's apology and her calm, matter-of-factness. She didn't know what to do next.

I had some suggestions.

“Hold up, I know you!” A woman behind Ginger reached out, wrapping long, shiny nails around Perry’s wrist. “I remember you from the bathroom on New Year’s Eve.

You told me about the spinach in my teeth that had been there since the hors d'oeuvres, and you gave me that pretty face spray. You were such a lifesaver. I immediately followed Perry Skin on Picstagram, I’m obsessed with your sprays. ”

Perry smiled. “Yes, I remember you, Cate-with-a-C. Hi.”

“Hi, babe,” the woman replied, hugging Perry.

Then she turned to Ginger. “I’ve seen all of the Perry Skin stuff on Perry’s Instagram.

It’s Perry Skin, you troll. Not you skin.

” Ginger flinched when the woman poked a long nail in her direction.

“Why would you try and take credit for her business? It’s giving bitter, babe. ”

“I...” Ginger faltered. Looking around the room she found no leeway, no support. Only disdain from Lara and I, outright hostility from the woman with the nails, and censure from the watching crowd.

Devoid of other options, she offered my girl a wide, very insincere smile. “Sorry, Perry. I must have been thinking of the—” she paused for a heartbeat, “— other skin products we had in the bathroom. The coconut ones. Our ones. Not yours.”

“Bullshit,” I said under my breath.

But Perry said, “An easy mistake to make.”

“I’m going to carry on with my rounds,” Ginger said. “I’m running this whole event. As you know, it’s a lot of responsibility.”

Perry wished her well, and the odious woman melted back into hell, or wherever she’d come from. The woman with the nails hugged Perry again, and Lara shook her hand and reminded her to call her office next week.

Then it was just us.

“Want to dance?” I asked. “Or shall we go see if we can find Ginger’s car in the parking lot?”

“Why would we do that?”

“To key it.”

Perry barked a laugh. “Dance. Definitely dance.”

“Dance then key?”

“Let’s just dance.”

She pulled me onto the dance floor and I wrapped my arms around her.

She melted into my embrace and we swayed for a few songs.

I thought about how courageous she was, how loyal, how kind, how funny, and good.

I also thought about how hot she was and how much I wanted to get her home to bed, but that was just one of the things I wanted to do with Perry.

I also wanted to get two spoons and eat ice cream out of the same container as it melted in the tub on my counter.

I wanted to lie in bed with her on Sunday mornings as she scratched my scalp and told me about her business plans.

I wanted everything she would give me, and more besides.

“Hey, blondie?”

“Mmm?”

“You’re it for me.”

She pulled back in my arms to look at me. “What does that mean?”

“Anything you want. Everything you want. Be my girl, my girlfriend, my life partner, my significant other. Call it whatever the fuck you want. I’m ride or die for you, baby.”

A slow grin spread across her face. “Really?”

“Yeah. I want to fuck you to sleep and lick you awake. And I want to make you laugh and kiss you when you cry, and call bullshit when people try and wrong you. I want to be with you.”

A dazzling smile covered her face. “I want to be with you, too. You’re one in a million, Miles. Everyone who meets you knows that. I just want you to be my one.”

I kissed her then. I didn’t give a fuck who saw, or if we were making a scene in the middle of the dancefloor.

I'd found her by chance but I was keeping her on purpose.

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:21 am

PERRY

Our wedding was vibrant, extravagant, and perfect in every way. Much like my husband.

We got married at a large estate up North. Helen openly sobbed when my parents walked me down the aisle, and even my dad was misty-eyed as Miles and I exchanged vows.

My dress was a custom design by my friend Georgia, who was enthusiastic about putting a plus size bride in a sleek, figure-hugging dress. Other bridal places tried to stuff me into large ball gowns, telling me they were the most ‘flattering’ for curvy brides.

The look on Miles’ face when he saw me for the first time was flattering enough.

Best of all, I wasn’t going to need Tala and three other bridesmaids to help me hold the thing when I needed to go to the bathroom.

After our ceremony, when Miles and I had taken what felt like thousands of photos down by the lake, we stopped off at the main house to freshen up before sitting down for an al fresco dinner with a hundred of our nearest and dearest.

We’d just walked into the door when he grabbed my hand and pulled me into a receiving room.

“Miles!”

He leaned against the doorframe and looked me up and down. “Have I told you how beautiful you look, wife?”

Wife.

It wasn't the first time he'd called me this. The night I proposed to him, he'd said it during sex and I came so hard I worried that I was going to burst a blood vessel.

“Yes, you have, husband .”

He leaned his head back and groaned. “Hearing you say that does things to me.”

The things were mutual, because then we were on each other, kissing like we'd never kissed before and worried someone was going to tear us apart. Like that could ever happen.

“Be careful of my dress,” I gasped as he kissed his way down my neck.

Without breaking a kiss, he began guiding me backwards until the backs of my knees hit resistance. I looked and saw a chaise lounge. Of course.

“Lie down there and pull your skirts up for me. Let me lick that pretty pussy.”

“Miles, I don't know if we have time?—”

“It's our wedding.” He threw a cushion on the floor and knelt on top of it. “I don't give a fuck if our guests have to wait until my wife comes on my face before they can have their entrees. I want my entree.”

Such a charmer, my husband.

I gathered my hem in my hands and pulled it up to my hips, propping my knees up

and spreading them so Miles could feast the way he liked.

He wasted no time, tonguing up the wetness my body had made in anticipation, and sliding his fingers into my body to thrust and curl, driving me out of my mind.

I leaned back and focused on breathing as he pushed his face into my pussy and worshipped me.

I was already trembling when he sat up. Between my legs, his mouth and chin glistened and his eyes were laser focused on his hand as he worked in and out of me.

I whimpered.

“You can’t see this darling, but trust me, it’s an incredible sight. I’ll never forget the time I finger-fucked my bride before her reception.”

“Miles .”

“Come on, blondie, let go for me. Do it now, while I’m watching. I want to see my wife come on my hand.”

With a guttural groan my body tightened over his fingers, and I fell apart in a series of world-tilting revelations.

When I could think again, I insisted my husband unbuckle his pants for me so I could taste his climax. And he was right, because the taste of his completion—always one of my favourite things—was especially satisfying on the day of our wedding.

We’d just righted our wedding clothes, minus one pocket square which had been sacrificed to the clean up efforts, when there was a knock at the door.

“Sorry to be the bearer of bad news,” Sadie called, “but it’s my duty as best person to

tell you to stop fucking and come and celebrate with your guests.”

“We’re not!” I called, just as Miles said, “We just finished!”

Sadie snorted and her footsteps retreated.

Miles waited while I tried to fix my hair, which he’d gripped as he climaxed, and arm in arm, we went and joined our party.

Happy, satisfied, and ready for our ever after.

THE END