



Selfish Suit (Steamy Latte Reads Collection #1)

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Category: Romance

Description: Message from UberEats App (A\$\$h*le Customer):

You're now officially 15 minutes late, so I'm docking your tip for every second my dinner isn't in my hands.

By the way, this was my first—and likely last—time using this app...

The moment I received that message, I should've opened the guy's \$300 pasta and wine order and thrown it out the window.

If I wasn't in desperate need of the money, trust me, I would've.

By the time I deliver the order to a hotel suite in Manhattan, I'm soaked from the rain, exhausted, and shocked as hell at who the customer is.

Dominic Sutton.

As in billionaire Dominic Sutton—and the selfish a\$\$hole who runs the other place I work.

I really should've kept my mouth shut...

When he has the audacity to tip me 3%—three freaking percent—I snap. I tell him exactly what I think of his revolving door of interns, his policy that staff can't even look him in the eyes, and let him know he's the worst CEO in the world.

The sexy smirk on his face makes it clear that my rant doesn't faze him in the slightest.

That's when I take his pricey food and storm back downstairs to my car.

(Yes, it tasted amazing...)

I honestly thought he'd forget all about me—he has far bigger things to worry about.

Until I get to work the following Friday.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE CEO

DOMINIC

The worst part about running a billion-dollar marketing empire is the fact that you have to sit through an endless session of stupid ideas before reaching an average one.

The “brilliant” kind are one in a million, and most of the time, you’re left wondering why the hell you ever got into marketing in the first place.

I’ve always prided myself on being able to market anything, and after seeing so much success, I decided to give back. But sitting through days of terrible presentations makes me want to never do anything charitable in my life again.

“Now that I’ve introduced myself,” the man standing at the front of my boardroom says, “allow me to show you a product that’s about to revolutionize the car industry...”

He pulls a white sheet from a box, revealing... a tire wrapped in bright blue fabric.

“Behold, ladies and gentlemen,” he says. “Tire Toes ! I.e., ways to make the tires on your luxury cars feel safe, secure, and cared for.”

Jesus Christ...

“Before you say it, we know that ‘tire socks’ already exist, but those are for cars in inclement weather, and they serve an entirely different purpose. These are for style,

for class, for showing the world that you take your luxury car seriously.”

I glance at my partner—Braxton. I’m waiting for him to meet my eyes so I can give him the “Get them the hell out of here” signal, but he has the audacity to look intrigued about this bullshit.

“How do they hold up in rain?” he asks.

“Very well so far,” the guy responds. “The ten customers we’ve had so far haven’t had any complaints.”

“You only have ten customers?” I sit up. “How the hell did you get this meeting?”

“Ten very happy customers,” he counters. “They paid two thousand dollars each for these, so I’d say that’s quite impressive.”

“What exactly do the Tire Toes do?” I ask. “What is their actual purpose?”

“They’re for style and making the tire—which is always left out in the car bragging process—feel good.”

“So, the tires on our cars have feelings?”

“Shhh.” Braxton finally looks over at me. “Let them finish, Dominic. I’m really enjoying this.”

I’m sure.

I mentally check out as the guy drones on. I have six more of these to sit through, and I’m already over it.

Sliding my phone from my pocket, I scroll through my email under the table.

At this rate, there's no way I'll have time to step out for dinner between the final pitch and a late-night Zoom with a London client.

As I'm debating where I can possibly go for food, Braxton claps his hands—making me look up.

We're now alone in the boardroom.

All the Tire Toes have rolled out.

"You know," he says, "the next time you have the audacity to ask why everyone calls you a selfish asshole, look no further than this meeting."

"We need to fire whoever let them onto our schedule," I say. "Did you let them down nicely?"

"I offered ten thousand for their enthusiasm but said we wouldn't be able to invest."

"I'm sorry, how much?"

"You spend that on a tie." He shrugs. "Look at it as a fine for being rude as hell. You didn't even get up to shake their hands, not even after they left us with a complimentary set of tire socks."

"Tire Toes," I correct him. "I'll send them an apology email. Happy?"

"No." He smiles. "But I will be if you promise to pay full attention to who's coming next."

“What’s the product?”

“Promise me first.”

Hell no. “What’s the product?”

“Straw protectors.”

I give him a blank stare.

I wait for him to tell me he’s joking—that this is just him dishing out sarcasm—but he walks to the door to usher in the next group.

Their oversized pink and green straws tell me all I need to know.

“Tell you what,” he says, “I’ll treat you to dinner to make up for this.”

“My chef’s out of town, and I don’t feel like making a reservation anywhere.”

“That’s not a problem.” He shrugs, pulling out his wallet. He takes out four hundred-dollar bills and hands them to me. “Just use UberEats.”

“Uber what ?”

“Eats.” He blinks. “UberEats. You know, food delivery for places that don’t have their own delivery drivers...”

“Is this you leading up to another marketing pitch I’m about to sit through?”

“Oh, wow.” He laughs. “Becoming a billionaire has truly left you out of touch with the real world these past few years, hasn’t it?”

“I’m still stuck on this company’s name,” I say. “Uber and then Eats? As one word?”

He rolls his eyes and takes my phone, downloading the app without my permission. He doesn’t need to ask for my email or ideal password—it’s always Ifuckingrunthiscity with my birth year.

I watch as he refines my preferences, and then my favorite restaurant appears, with their complete menu.

“There,” he says. “Select everything you want, pick a delivery time, and voilà. Oh, and I put your address as the secondary office since that’s where we’ll be working tonight.”

I blink. “Is this company for sale?”

“No.” He looks amused. “Focus on the food, and try to be nice.”

Impressed, I scroll the menu. I select the squid ink tagliatelle with black truffle cream and lobster, a warm bread basket with rosemary sea salt butter, and a burrata and fig appetizer drizzled with aged balsamic. I add two glasses of whiskey for good measure.

“Prepare to be amazed by the best straws on the planet!” one of the presenters shouts. “Your mouth will never want to touch anything except our brand again!”

I hold back a groan and add two more glasses of whiskey to the order.

“Your lips will never be the same!”

Okay, fine. One bottle of wine, too.

I tap “Complete Order,” and a bright pop-up appears on the screen:

Success! Your driver IVY will deliver your order at exactly 7:00!

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE INTERN

IVY

This is exactly what I get for dropping out of college...

I can literally envision some screenwriter in Los Angeles penning a character sheet that mirrors my life at this very moment.

Fade In—New York City traffic jam: Foolish girl sits in banged-up Honda Civic with UberEats order in passenger seat. She's dropped out of college to start her own business, but it was far too early; now she can't afford to return to take the final courses.

Then again, the writer would probably scratch most of that out once he realized that no character deserves to be that dumb...

I'm not even sure the money I'm making from UberEats is worth it anymore, since a huge chunk of it goes to the maintenance on my poor excuse of a car.

"Come on!" I bang on the steering wheel. "What the hell is causing the delay now?"

I look over at the perfectly wrapped bag from Olivier's Trattoria and hope the customer will give me a tip despite my lateness.

The food inside smells absolutely amazing...

I mean, if he can afford to order from a place that lets the customer keep an insulation bag, there has to be light at the end of the tunnel for me.

As I inch forward, my phone buzzes in my lap.

Customer (D.S.)

This order was scheduled for 7:00.

Is there a reason why you're fifteen minutes late?

Seriously? I ignore it.

All he has to do is look at my location and see that I'm in traffic.

He could also look out his window and see that the entire city is suffering under a sudden rainstorm.

Rain is pounding against the windshield in sheets, and the wipers are squeaking across the glass with weariness.

Traffic continues to crawl, and I turn on the radio, but the app buzzes again.

Customer (D.S.)

Now you're twenty minutes late.

Thank you so much for this obvious information.

I'm adjusting your tip for every minute you're late.

I hold back a scream.

If I didn't need the eighteen dollars from this drive, I would eat his food and go home.

By the time I make it to the light that's around the corner from the destination address, there are more messages from the impatient bastard.

Customer (D.S.)

What's the point of you agreeing to deliver on time when you know it won't happen?

Should I assume you've eaten my food at this point?

Ignoring him, I double-park behind a tinted Escalade, grab the tote, and sprint the block and a half to the building entrance—hood up, shoes slipping, wine bag threatening to split down the middle.

I stop under the overhang, shaking rain off my sleeves as I mash out a reply:

Walking in now. Thank you for your PATIENCE.

This building is directly across from my job, and if I'd known that, I would've never accepted this order. I learned long ago not to accept any orders from the men on Wall Street.

They're stingy with their tips, and they actually flirt with me as if I should be honored to deliver their food.

I push through the revolving doors, dripping all over the marble floor as I flash a weak smile at the security guard.

“Delivery for a D.S?” I’m just noticing there are only initials on the order. “Does that stand for Double Asshole?”

He gives a blank stare.

“Can you tell him to come downstairs and get his order, please?”

“You can take it to him yourself.” He waves me through the entrance. “Floor 61. The boardroom on the right.”

“Thanks.” I head to the elevator and catch a glance of myself in the glass doors.

Not one of my best days...

The ride up is deathly quiet, just me, the soft hum of the elevator, and the faint scent of pasta wafting through the bag.

The doors slide open to reveal a hallway of silence and black marble, and I head to my right where a matte black door waits.

I knock.

Nothing.

I knock again, even louder.

Still nothing.

Screw it.

I push the door open and step into a space that looks more like an art gallery than an

office. Clean lines and glass walls peek out beneath huge silver-framed portraits on the far wall. Through the windows ahead, the Manhattan skyline stretches endlessly in the distance.

At the center of it all—behind a desk the size of my first dorm room—sits the man responsible for all the chaos in my phone.

Dressed in a dark suit and white shirt with no tie, he's sporting a diamond watch and a clenched jaw I can see from his side profile.

I can also see that he's too damn good to turn around in his chair.

"Sorry about the delay," I say. "I had a lot of orders and traffic was brutal."

He doesn't move.

"Um, is it okay if I place your food on this table, or..." I usually like to give it to the person in hand so they can't claim they never received it, but I'm about to make him my first exception.

"Hello to you too, asshole," I mutter. "You're welcome."

"Excuse me?" He turns in his chair, and my stomach pitches.

"What did you just say?"

"I..." My breath catches. I've seen this man up close two times before—once in our company magazine, and once on a brochure when I was being written up.

Dominic Sutton.

He's a man who can literally take your breath away with one glance from his deep blue eyes. A man who can bring your entire world to a halt if you ever catch a smile on his perfectly molded lips—or catch a rare glimpse of him, unfocused, running a hand through his ink-black hair.

He's also the man whose name is literally on the building. But he has other names, too...

CEO. Marketing god. Unofficial destroyer of employees. And “Mr. Fucking Selfish” in soft whispers through the hallways.

“I uh...” I clear my throat, nervously tightening my fingers around the wet handles of the bag. “I was saying that I’m sorry I’m late.”

“I heard you.” He points to the bag. “You can set the food down on the table.”

I oblige and tear off the fancy card from the restaurant.

“Squid ink tagliatelle with lobster and truffle cream, rosemary bread basket, and burrata with fig and balsamic,” I say, setting out all the perfectly wrapped dishes. “It’s still hot.”

“I doubt that.” His gaze drags over me, and I regret changing out of my business suit into this old pink hoodie and jeans. Pulling out his wallet, he walks over to me and takes out a hundred-dollar bill.

I bite my lip, trying not to look too excited, trying not to mentally calculate just how much that amount would help me this week.

He slides it back into his wallet and pulls out a ten-dollar bill instead.

“I always knew a few small bills would come in handy.” He hands it to me. “Here’s your tip.”

I stare at it.

“Technically, this is an extra tip.” He looks dead-ass serious. “I already left you an additional three percent in the app.”

“ Three percent ?”

“Technically six once you take this.” He moves closer with that ten. “Considering how late you are and how much you’ve inconvenienced me, I think that’s more than fair.”

“ Fair ?”

“Should I speak louder?” he asks. “Do you have hearing issues?”

“No, I do not...” I grit my teeth.

Walk away, Ivy. Just walk away.

“You can take the money and leave now, Miss UberEats,” he says. “I’m sure you have another customer to disappoint this evening. The door is?—”

“Fuck you.” I smack the ten out of his hands, glaring at him. “You’re a freakin’ billionaire who just spent three hundred dollars on a couple of entrées and you think I should be grateful for getting a three percent tip from you?”

“Pick my money up from the floor.” He narrows his eyes. “Now.”

“I thought that was my money?” I scoff, folding my arms. “But it can stay right there, and you can pick it up—maybe that’ll be the first time you actually do some manual labor.”

“Miss UberEats...”

“I bet you think people wake up hoping, wishing, and praying that they’ll get the chance to serve you. Newsflash—we freakin’ don’t. Second newsflash: you’re worse than any of the rumors I’ve ever heard about you in any department here.”

“How the hell can you be a billionaire with unpaid interns?” I can’t stop talking. “It’s ridiculous that we have to prove ourselves to you before we get paid on certain projects. And on top of that, you demand so effin’ much for so effin’ little.”

He arches a brow. “You work for me?”

“You deserve your ‘selfish as hell’ reputation, and I promise you there’s a reason you’re never in the top 100 of decent places to work for,” I say. “You’re the worst CEO in Manhattan, and you don’t deserve any more of my time.”

I pick up all the dishes from his order and return them to the bag.

Then I storm out of his office.

I press the down button on the elevator, and as the numbers above the doors light up, I realize I forgot something.

Shit.

I return to the office and see Mr. Sutton standing exactly where I left him, frozen in time and looking at the door.

That ten-dollar bill is still on the floor, and he'd probably leave it for someone else to pick up anyway.

Without saying a word, I pick it up, shoot him one last glare, and storm out again.

The elevator doors are opening as I arrive, and I immediately step inside and hit the door close button.

I'm looking forward to seeing what food at this price tastes like for dinner...

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THE CEO

DOMINIC

No one has ever dared to talk to me that way.

I'm still staring at the door, knowing—just knowing—that as quickly as Miss UberEats returned to retrieve my generous tip, she'll return and apologize.

And give me my food back.

The only reason I didn't chase her down the hall was because I was too taken aback by her words, too taken aback by how stunningly beautiful she was.

Even in a simple pink hoodie and jeans, her hazel eyes (with all their judgment) and her long, wavy auburn hair caught my attention.

Not to mention her plump pink lips.

I'm not sure how long I stand there, but the only person who walks through the door is my janitorial manager.

"Should I call 9-1-1 for you, Mr. Sutton?" He waves a hand in front of my face. "Your face is really red, and it looks like a vein is about to pop out of your neck."

"I'm fine." I shake my head. "I was just... Can I ask you a question?"

“Of course, sir.”

“Do you think I’m the worst CEO in Manhattan?”

“Um, no, but ... I’ve only ever worked for you, so I wouldn’t know.”

“Am I selfish?”

He blinks.

“It’s a yes or no question, Charles.”

“My name is Clarkson,” he says. “But uh...” He looks at his phone and then steps backward to the door.

“Answer my question,” I demand.

“Oh nooo! There’s an emergency situation in the boiler room.” He doesn’t sound convincing at all. “Gotta go.”

He leaves the room even faster than Miss UberEats did.

There’s no way that woman actually works for me...

Livid, I walk over to the conference table and open my laptop. I log into the employee listing and search for “Ivy.”

35 employees.

I click through them one by one, expanding their profiles that show their picture, and stop when I reach her profile. Her employee badge photo doesn’t do her any justice,

but sexy as hell or not, she deserves to be dealt with.

I click on her record, not expecting to see any reason to fire her, but... there are hundreds.

What the...

According to her file, she's chronically late, problematic, and in the words of her supervisor, "so defiant in meetings I wonder why we still let her stay here..."

She's missed the opportunity to move to the paid level three times, which is far longer than my intern program typically allows.

There must be something I'm missing.

Before I dive too deeply, I reopen the UberEats app and am faced with a pop-up message.

How was your driver? Rate Ivy on a scale of 1 to 5!

Negative fifty...

I hit "Rate Later" and look at another restaurant. This time it lets me pick thirty minutes from now as the delivery time, and I give it another try.

While I wait, I email my top two Human Resources advisors and demand that they call me the moment they see my messages.

In the middle of reaching out to other staff members, a guy walks into my boardroom.

"Uber Delivery for a D.S.?" he says. "Is that you?"

“Yes,” I say, standing.

He’s two minutes early.

Okay. I’m definitely getting Miss UberEats back...

Later that evening, after doing a lot more research, I call the Director of Interns, Alicia Fierro.

It rings once.

It rings twice.

“Who the hell is this?” she answers. “And why are you calling me so late?”

“Dominic Sutton.”

“Oh, okay.” She snorts. “Who are you really, before I hang up?”

“Miss Fierro, I’ve been looking at one intern’s personnel file, and I’m quite confused about what I’m seeing.”

She sucks in a deep breath. “I... uh—which intern, sir?”

“Ivy Locke.”

The line goes so quiet that I check to see if she’s gone through with her threat to hang up on me.

“Hello?” I say.

“Um, yes, sir?”

“Can you explain to me why Miss Locke hasn’t been fired?”

“I probably could...”

“Could you start now?”

“She’s saved our ass on six campaigns, one of them as recent as last month’s, so—we figure that putting up with a few bad behaviors isn’t that bad.”

“I could’ve sworn my policy was zero tolerance.”

“We would’ve lost the Ferrari deal if we’d let her go...”

I blink. This is the first I’m hearing of this. “How so?”

“Uhm—eh...”

“I don’t need to hear any more strange sounds from your mouth,” I say. “I’d prefer to hear words, or I’ll be discussing your employment status next.”

“She comes up with the best marketing ideas, and even though she messed up our presentation to Ferrari by jumping onstage and interrupting, they wanted to hear what she had to say. And then they agreed to sign only if we used her ideas.”

“Why is this the first I’m hearing about any of this?”

“We’re not allowed to talk to you directly, sir.”

“It’s not mentioned in any of the email notes,” I say. “You could’ve mentioned it

there, correct?”

“Maybe, but the last time I deviated from your template, you sent me a mean email.”

“I’ve never sent a mean email.”

“It said, ‘Stop fucking with my shit or I’ll fire you.’”

“I stand corrected,” I say, making a mental note to apologize for that later. “Did Miss Locke receive the percentage bonus for making an impression on the Ferrari account?”

Her weird sounds come over the line again, and I start to hang up.

“She’s still on the unpaid level,” she says.

“How is that possible?”

“Company policy.” She pauses. “No one who is late more than three times in thirty days gets paid. No one who looks like they’ve had a good night’s sleep instead of staying up working gets paid. No one who?—”

“I’ll be in touch.” I end the call and pull up the Ferrari campaign on my big screen.

As I fast-forward through the presentation, Braxton strolls into the room with part of my first order in hand. The bread basket...

“Where did you get that?” I ask.

“A delivery girl gave it to me hours ago when I came in downstairs.” He takes a bite. “Said she was allergic to garlic, but they cost twenty bucks, and she didn’t want them

to go to waste because of a jerk customer... Where are your bread rolls?"

"You're eating them."

He laughs and tosses me the basket.

As I'm taking one out, I spot a mass of auburn curls rushing past the screen, so I hit pause, rewind a few seconds, and hit play.

"No, no, no," the woman—Miss Ivy Locke—says. "I can't let my team gaslight you into thinking this is a good campaign."

She turns around to face the camera, flipping through cards.

"You'll have to excuse our intern," a guy says. "She's not used to being allowed to sit in on campaign presentations."

"No, I don't usually come since they're decent. But this is terrible, and the client deserves better."

Braxton crosses his arms, looking as confused as I am.

Onscreen, Ivy hands out a different folder and gives a short presentation, outlining the changes she suggests for the campaign. She guarantees that this firm is the only firm that should handle their business because "we'll always be honest with you... even when it's inconvenient."

The room is silent for several moments, until the CEO of Ferrari stands up and smiles.

"You're hired. Tell us where to sign."

I hit pause and look over at Braxton. “Did you know about this?”

“Does it look like I knew?” He scoffs. “I think we promoted the wrong executive to chair.”

“She’s an intern.”

“Well, is she still here or has she quit already?”

“The turnover rate here isn’t that bad.”

“It’s eighty percent.”

“It could still be worse.” I set down the remote. “She still works here, but she’s not loyal. She has other job prospects.”

“Well, we need to figure out what they’re offering and get her to stay here with us. Who is it? Someone at Pandora? Goldman Sachs?”

“UberEats.” I cut him off. “She’s cheating on us with UberEats.”

He blinks. “Please tell me you’re going to make this right and talk to her about being employed full time here?”

“Of course.” I lean back in my seat. “I have something far better than that in mind actually...”

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THE INTERN

IVY

“O kay, here’s the rent for this week.” I hand a few twenties to my landlord’s son. “I’ll have next week’s fee to your dad when I get paid.”

“This isn’t how you pay rent, Ivy.” He groans. “It’s monthly, and I’m only thirteen years old...”

“And?” I shrug. “This is teaching you important adulting skills.”

“Are you really this afraid of my dad?”

Ever since he started cutting off my lights at six o’clock every day, yes. “No, I’m just—This is just easier. I’ll see you later.”

I bolt from the top floor and downstairs, groaning when I see that the front door that was promised months ago still isn’t there.

I make sure my unit’s door is double-locked, and that the fake dog-yell alarm still works when I jiggle the handle.

When I make it out to my car, I slide my key into the ignition, but it won’t give.

Someone stuck a paperclip inside while trying to steal it.

Ugh!

Pulling out my phone, I call my supervisor.

“Heya, heya, Miss Locke!” she answers in the middle of the first ring as usual. “Isn’t today a beautiful day to paint new campaigns?”

“Sure, Miss Fierro.” I slide a pen into the ignition, trying to free the clip. “I’m going to be late today.”

“Again?” She lets out a sigh. “What’s your excuse this time?”

“I’m just going to be late,” I say. I’ve finally learned that the excuse doesn’t really matter. “Late” is late, and she’s going to leave a note in my personnel file about it no matter what.

“You know, I’ve been very nice about not docking pay for all your infractions.”

How can you possibly deduct anything from ZERO? I keep finagling the pen.

“I truly believe that there is a deep lack of not only personal responsibility, but positivity in your life,” she says. “If you thought more positive thoughts and started listening to more motivational things, I think you’ll be promoted to paid status in no time.”

I bite my tongue; it’s too early for me to show any emotion, and the moment I do get promoted to paid status, I’m using it as leverage to get a job far away from Sutton International.

“Are you there, Miss Locke?” she asks. “Miss Locke?”

“Yeah, I’m here... I was just scrolling through YouTube to find a motivational playlist for my drive to work.”

“Excellent to hear!” She squeals. “I’ll let this lateness slide this time, but it’s pre-pitch season, so try to get here as fast as possible.”

“Will do.”

An hour they’re coated in tan brown plastic, and the manager claims it’s “so we won’t get distracted. ”

Personally, I think it’s because our Selfish Suit CEO doesn’t want to renovate our workspace to match the rest of headquarters.

Slipping into my cubicle, I plug in my laptop and flip through today’s pitch decks.

The second my laptop wakes up, my inbox pings.

I scroll past the usual calendar junk and corporate spam until one subject line makes my throat tighten:

Subject: Report to the executive floor to see me. Now.

The sender is Dominic Sutton.

Him.

I stare at it, reread it, then check the timestamp twice like maybe it’s a glitch.

There’s no way he remembered me...

I send the email straight to the trash without opening it; the ignore route works on bill collectors, so it should work on a billionaire CEO, too.

I return to my screen, click open a spreadsheet, and start typing numbers.

“Miss Locke?” Miss Fierro calls from across the room ten minutes later. “Miss Locke?”

Pretend she’s a bill collector. Pretend she’s a bill collector.

I pull a set of AirPods from my bag, but she manages to walk over before I can turn them on.

“Miss Locke.” She stands next to me. “Did you not hear me calling you?”

I say nothing.

“Mr. Sutton wants to see you in his office for a meeting on the executive floor. Now.”

The room falls silent for several seconds, then a sea of whispers follows.

“Is it okay if I finish my spreadsheet first?” I ask.

The look on her face answers my question.

There’s no use pretending this is a “meeting,” and there’s no use leaving anything behind.

Standing to my feet, I grab a cardboard box from the Nice Knowing You stack parked near the printers—a cheerful little tower reserved for interns who vanish midweek—and start clearing my desk.

I feel every set of eyes burning into my back as I cross the floor, one click of my heels at a time.

Please at least give me a severance check.

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THE INTERN

IVY

The elevator opens with a soft chime, revealing a floor that feels like an entirely different universe. Marble stretches out in every direction, and the skyline view is so stunning it's hard to believe this is still the same building as my fluorescent-lit workspace.

"May I help you, Miss?" A blonde receptionist glances up from the desk. "This floor is by appointment only."

"I'm Ivy Locke," I say. "I received an email from?—"

"Mr. Sutton has been waiting for you," she interrupts me, pointing to the massive glass double doors to the right. "You may see him now."

"Can you um..." I lower my voice. "Like, maybe give me a heads-up about what he wants? Is this how he typically fires people this far down the chain?"

She stares at me.

"Come on," I say. "Help a fellow employee out."

She picks up her desk phone and holds it to her ear. "Miss Locke is here, Mr. Sutton. She may need assistance getting into your office."

I suck in a gasp. Traitor...

Turning away from her, I head to the office doors, and they're already opening.

"Hello, Miss Locke." Mr. Sutton greets me with a slow smile that catches me off guard. Walking perfection, he's wearing a black button-down shirt and slacks today, and the diamond watch I last saw is replaced with a golden one.

"It's good to see you again," he says, looking me up and down. Then he eyes my box. "My birthday isn't for another month and a half."

"You honestly think I would get you a present?"

"You did already." He narrows his eyes at me. "I received a one-star rating with a 'hostile customer' review from you via UberEats. And now I can't use the app for two weeks."

My cheeks flush red.

I forgot I did that.

"I thought you said you didn't plan to use it again anyway," I say. "You rated me two stars for my delivery."

"One more than you deserved."

"Is that why you sent for me?" I ask. "To get me to revise my rating?"

"Quite the contrary." He lifts the box from my hands, his fingers gently brushing against mine. "Come. Have a seat."

“I’d rather be fired while standing up.”

“Okay.” He smiles, and my stomach betrays me with a bout of butterflies. My heart joins enemy lines by thumping loudly and skipping beats.

For several moments, Mr. Sutton simply stares at me, and I’m certain he can hear the beating in my chest.

“What if you’re not getting fired?” he asks.

“I’d want it in writing before taking a seat.”

A slow smirk crosses his lips, and he slides a hand inside my box, pulling out a pen, then a Post-it.

In neat handwriting, he writes, I am not firing you...yet. He signs his name, and then he presses the sticky paper to my blouse.

“Is that good enough?”

Without waiting for my answer, he turns away and heads to the desk.

I warily follow, slowly plopping down into a plush grey seat across from him.

He leans back in his chair, staring at me, daring me to utter the true first word.

I know better than to try.

“I summoned you because something unfortunate has come to my attention regarding your employment.” He finally speaks. “You’re the longest-serving intern in the department, and it isn’t due to any pettiness on behalf of the supervisors.”

“You’re late twice a week, you speak out in official pitch meetings when you don’t have permission, and you pick and choose which rules of my employee protocol you wish to follow...”

I swallow, unsure of where he’s going with this. If he blatantly lied about not firing me.

“Yet, despite a record number of red flags in your file, and the fact that your supervisors have an entire private forum where they talk about you all day—” He pauses at that surprise reveal, as if he’s amused—“they know better than to let you go...”

What?

“Now, while I don’t appreciate them giving you so many chances or letting you stay on so long without moving you to the paid level after the trial period, I can see why both things were done.”

“And now that?—”

“Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Sutton.” A guy in a dark grey suit rushes into his office. “It’s a stage five emergency.”

Dominic waves him over, and the guy brings a notebook to his desk.

“The clients from Waldorf are here a week early,” he says. “Can you sign off on this latest campaign so we can present it?”

“No .” His rejection is instant. “Hold them off by giving them a tour of headquarters for the next two hours.”

“But sir?—”

“They need us more than we need them,” he says. “Make my office the last stop so I can explain how the dates on contracts work.”

“Uh, I—” He stammers. “Yes, sir.”

“Lock my door on your way out and tell Tracey not to let anyone else inside without calling me first.”

The guy rushes out as quickly as he came in, and Mr. Sutton picks up where he left off without missing a beat.

“Now that I’ve gone through everything thoroughly, I’ve decided to offer you a reassignment, Miss Locke,” he says. “It’s a position where I think your talent will be best put to use.”

My fingers curl into my palms.

I’m itching to ask questions, but I hold back.

“You’re my executive marketing advisor now—well, technically,” he says. “I’ve emailed you the new job description, and you start tomorrow.”

I blink in disbelief.

That position is several levels above my current supervisors.

“Are there any questions?” He finally opens the floodgates.

“Yes.” I nod, but my brain short-circuits.

“I’m listening, Miss Locke...”

“The pay,” I say. “Can you tell me the salary?”

“It’s in the email I sent you,” he says. “Whenever you look over the contract, you’ll see that the percentage rise is very impressive.”

I shake my head; I’ve been led into fake promise-lands by my supervisors far too many times.

“With all due respect, Mr. Sutton,” I say, “multiplying my current salary by any percentage would still be zero...”

“That’s why you’re going to read the contract .”

“Or, you could just tell me now and save me the time.”

“I’m sorry?” He leans forward. “Which one of us is the boss?”

“If I quit your company today, neither of us...”

“I see.” He looks torn between smiling and railing on me. “When you go home and read the contract, you’ll see that you’ll be making a little over a quarter million dollars a year, and that amount doesn’t include bonuses or milestone increases.”

I blink.

I am utterly speechless.

“You can leave my office now, Miss Locke,” he says, smirking. “Unless there’s something else you’d like to say—other than ‘thank you,’ that is...”

“Thank you.” I barely manage as I stand to my feet. “I appreciate this promotion.”

“You’re very welcome.” He extends his hand, and I shake it.

Every nerve in my body goes wild, and his fingers linger against mine far longer than necessary.

Suddenly, I’m envisioning how his hands would feel elsewhere on my body, if they would have this same effect, and from the look in his eyes, I can sense that he’s thinking the same thing.

“Miss Locke?” he says, his hand still shaking mine.

“Yes?”

Silence.

After several more minutes, he finally lets go of my hand, leaving me bereft.

“Get the hell out of my office. Now.”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE CEO

DOMINIC

Braxton

When I said ‘consider’ giving Miss Locke a promotion, I was thinking of making her a temp supervisor or a junior lead...Not our FUCKING EXECUTIVE MARKETING ADVISOR.

You should’ve been more specific.

She doesn’t even have an undergraduate degree. Every person we’ve ever hired at this level has had at least a master’s, Dominic...

Education isn’t everything.

Just admit you hired her because you’re attracted to her.

I hired her months ago without even knowing who she was.

Are you still upset about her eating your Uber order?

Furious. But I assure you that I put my emotions to the side for this decision.

She probably won’t last a week.

Make sure she has a good severance package and a VERY tight NDA.

Ten steps ahead of you.

Did you update the job description or keep it the same?

I added quite a few tweaks.

Legal ones?

Petty ones. :-)

Jesus...

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE INTERN

IVY

On the negative side, I'm already three cups of coffee in, and my body is begging me to go back to sleep.

As I pull into the parking garage, I take advantage of my first perk of the new position: a designated parking spot.

Coasting into the "Executive Marketing Advisor" spot, I let out a breath.

No more getting drenched on the way to work. No more racing back and forth to feed greedy parking meters, and no more?—

Tap! Tap! Tap!

A blonde is tapping on my window, motioning for me to roll it down.

It doesn't work, so I gesture for her to step back so I can open the door.

"Am I in the wrong parking spot?" I ask.

"Not at all, Miss Locke," she says. "But you are wearing the wrong thing, so for future notice, stick to neutral or jewel-tone colors. I'm sure Mr. Sutton will let it pass since it's your first day in the department."

“Um, okay. Who are?—”

“Follow me, so I can walk you through your new job.” She cuts me off. “Less talking, more walking, and try not to ask too many questions.”

I sling my purse over my shoulder and follow her into the building.

“I’m Tracey, but everyone calls me Mr. Sutton’s right hand because everything goes through me. But you’re now his left hand, so we’ll work together.”

“I thought I was a marketing executive...”

“You are, but you have this additional work to do as well.” She thrusts a phone into my hand. “This is your work phone. It rings, you answer. Do not pass go. Do not wait.”

“It’s preloaded with all of Mr. Sutton’s contacts and preferences, and you have a week to learn them all.”

She leads me onto the elevator, still talking a mile a minute.

“I’m responsible for getting his morning coffee and lunch, but since we’ve reassigned our lead intern, you’re responsible for presenting it to him with the day’s updates.

” She hands me a notebook. “This is his notebook. You will carry it around whenever you’re with him, and if he says things like, ‘Remind me to...’ or ‘I need to...’ you’ll write it down, and you’ll also record a note via the phone. ”

Where the hell was this in the job description? I bite my tongue.

“Look alive, Miss Locke!” She snaps her fingers when we reach the designated floor.

“We’ve got a lot to go over today, and you look like a deer in headlights.”

“I kind of am.”

“Well, let’s get you some coffee on our way to prepare Mr. Sutton’s, and hopefully you’ll snap out of it.”

I stand still on the elevator, tempted to ride it back down and ask for my former job back, but she grabs my elbow and tugs me off.

“Let’s go...”

Only two hours have passed since my tour, and I swear it feels like an eternity. It also feels like this man gave me a promotion out of pettiness and spite, so... after I cash my first few checks, I’m moving on to someplace else.

While Tracey juggles three different cell phones, someone hands me a lanyard with my new badge attached.

It’s a lot heavier and thicker than my old one, and it bears a second job title under the one on my contract:

Left Hand to Mr. Sutton.

Ugh.

“Let me show you to your new office, Miss Locke.” Tracey finally takes a breath, walking me past a hallway of glass doors and beautiful rooms.

She stops at a desk.

A glass desk right outside the double doors of Mr. Sutton's office.

Before I can ask her a question, the elevator pings behind me, and Mr. Sutton's energy hits the room first—sharp, clean, cold like a new suit fresh from tailoring. He says nothing to us as he enters his office.

The doors shut behind him.

“He'll call for us after he enjoys his breakfast,” Tracey says. “In the meantime...”

I've had enough. I rush toward Mr. Sutton's doors and open them, slipping inside.

Mr. Sutton looks up from his coffee as I approach his desk.

“I don't believe I've called for you yet, Miss Locke,” he says. “I'll let you know when I want to see you.”

“This is an emergency,” I say. “A stage five one,” I repeat what I previously heard the other guy say.

“In that case.” He leans forward. “I'm listening.”

“I don't believe my job description in the contract is matching what Tracey is asking me to do.”

“You said this was an ‘emergency’...”

“I didn't agree to become your personal assistant,” I say. “That's—not something I'm interested in at all.”

“So, you'd like me to demote you back to the intern level?”

“If I could keep the pay, yes...”

He lets out a low laugh that sends shivers up and down my spine. Then he slowly rises from his chair and walks toward me, moving closer and closer until his custom Italian leather shoes brush against my Target-branded pumps.

“Since you clearly have always struggled with following directions here,” he says, “allow me to make a few things clear. You’re now being paid to do what I need you to do, and you don’t get a say in that...”

I grit my teeth, trying not to inhale his intoxicating cologne.

“In addition to being a marketing advisor, you’ll learn how to assist me in numerous ways because Tracey is getting promoted at the end of the year, and I might need you to stand in for her.”

“But—”

He presses his fingers against my lips, daring me to say another word, turning me on against my will.

“I’ll summon for you when I need to see you, and I’ll summon for you when I’m ready for my lunch, which better be on time,” he says, slowly moving his finger away. “And as sexy as your brand of sarcasm is, I would like to hold off on hearing it for the rest of the morning.”

“That’s the end of this discussion.” He steps back and nods to the door. “You’re dismissed now.”

He returns to his desk and his breakfast, pulling out files and reading them as if I’m not there.

Swallowing everything I want to say, I turn on my heels and walk through the doors, right into a red-faced Tracey.

“Next time you do that, I’m writing you up.” She points to the seat at my new desk.

“Now, get comfortable and write down what you need to do between now and lunch.”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE CEO

DOMINIC

At exactly twelve forty-five, Ivy walks into my office with a covered silver tray. As she crosses the floor in the dark purple dress that clings to her curves in all the right places, I'm mentally drafting another message to Human Resources.

I've made a mistake in adding the additional element to Miss Locke's job description. Place her someplace where she'll be out of my sight whenever we're not in marketing meetings...

She hasn't even been here a full day, and I've already had five fantasies of what I'd like to do to her smart-ass mouth.

"Thank you for this lunch, Miss Locke." I smile at her as she sets it down. "I really appreciate it."

"You're so very welcome, Mr. Sutton." She lays out the silverware—just like Tracey taught her to—and then she serves me a smile that looks like it could be a prologue for my murder.

"Is there anything else I can do to make you happy, sir?"

Bend over my desk...

"No, but here..." I pull out my wallet and take out a hundred-dollar bill. "I know how

you feel about getting a decent tip for your work. I believe I owe you this anyway, correct?”

“If you promoted me just to make me see how terrible you are, I’m sorry to say you’ve wasted your time,” she says. “I already knew that.”

“That’s not why I promoted you,” I say. “I could’ve sworn I already discussed this...”

“Is there going to be any actual ‘marketing’ work involved on my first day, then? Or should I start waiting in anxious anticipation of your dinner order?”

“I don’t take too kindly to being assaulted with words, Miss Locke.”

“Then I hope you never hear what everyone else in this building really thinks of you...”

“Now I see exactly why you got written up so many times,” I say, rescinding the tip. “It’s like you’re desperate to have the last word.”

“Only when the other person is so obviously wrong.”

“Get out of my office and don’t say a goddamn thing on your way out.”

Thankfully, she obliges.

“What were you saying about her being a great hire again?” Braxton is standing by the door, smirking. “Rewind that back for me, please.”

“You can get the hell out, too...”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE INTERN

IVY

Somehow, I manage to survive my first day without catching a felony charge for assaulting Mr. Sutton.

I even smiled when I brought him two cups of coffee and didn't utter an "I hate you" when he complained that I didn't bring him a spoon to stir it with.

However, fifteen minutes into this morning, and I'm considering calling in a bomb threat.

"I told you that at this level, 'on time' is late, and 'early' means 'on time.'" Tracey hasn't stopped critiquing me since I stepped off the elevator. "Today is a pre-pitch day, and everything runs twenty minutes earlier than usual."

There's no use in asking her why.

I stuff my cell phone into the desk drawer.

"The catering team is serving breakfast and lunch at the meeting today, so we don't have to worry about Mr. Sutton's coffee—but!

" She wags a finger in the air before pointing to a golden bull-shaped vase in the hallway.

“That’s where I stuff extra packets of the custom honey and mint that he prefers, just in case the catering team doesn’t bring enough. ”

“Um, okay…”

“That’s your cue to go over there and get them.” She snaps her fingers. “Get six of each and get used to carrying them in your purse at all times. At. All. Times.”

I walk over to the vase and lift it, expecting to see “packets,” but they’re mini glass jars.

The moment I’ve stuffed them into my purse, Tracey is looping her arm in mine and pulling me into the elevator.

We ride down to a place with a gold-plated sign that announces “Executive Wing” when the doors open.

The floor reveals another personality disorder in this building. It’s a warehouse space with exposed brick walls and concrete floors.

Boxes marked with “decor” and “client dress-up materials” line the walls, and banners from previous successful campaigns hang from the steel-beamed ceiling.

In the center of it all sits a conference room enclosed in sleek black glass.

Mr. Sutton appears out of nowhere, so I trail behind—clutching his blue notebook against my own.

The moment we enter the room, the creative staff stands to their feet.

“Good afternoon, sir.” “Hello, Mr. Sutton.” “It’s a pleasure to see you today, sir.”

The greetings come in quick succession, but Mr. Sutton only nods and takes his seat at the head of the table.

I wait for everyone to retake their seats and realize there's no chair for me.

Perfect...

Mr. Sutton nods once, and Tracey gestures for me to open his notebook.

"Take notes for him," she says. "Very detailed notes."

"You were serious about him not taking his own?"

"Ivy..." She glares at me, and I click my pen as someone dims the lights.

A tall guy in a navy button-down shirt takes the lead, flipping through slides on the wall-sized screen to reveal today's client.

Skittles: Taste the rainbow. Bring back a sweet era.

"Ah." He picks up a huge vase of Skittles candies from the floor and passes them around. "Our client wants us to design a campaign to make people fall in love with this candy again, and when I'm done showing you what we've done, I think you'll be confident in us sharing this with them."

I steal a few bags from the jar and watch.

He and his assistant break out six-foot glittery mood boards and early concept visuals.

There's a lot of talk about summer pop-up shops and high-level immersion, but every few moments, he mentions an expense that makes me nearly choke.

“Two hundred and fifty thousand for the initial digital campaign...”

“Eighty-six thousand for the research and development for Gen-Z...”

“One hundred fifty thousand to capture millennials with our standard streamlining approach.”

“Enough bloated words.” Mr. Sutton suddenly interrupts him. “What are we doing with tone?”

The room stiffens, and the lead guy straightens. “Confident. Elevated. With a hint of edge.”

Mr. Sutton raises a brow. “Define ‘edge.’”

“Slightly less polished than the Chrysler campaign,” the guy replies. “More modern. But still aspirational.”

“Hmmm.” Mr. Sutton nods. “Continue.”

The room exhales, and the presentation rolls on for another forty minutes.

“Okay.” Mr. Sutton waves his hand. “Take lunch. All of you. Except Ivy. You stay. You too, Marcus.”

The room scatters without protest. Marcus—the lead pitch guy—stays seated, clearly irritated.

I stay too, heart hammering in my throat.

Mr. Sutton speaks before the door even clicks shut.

“What do you think, Miss Locke?”

I blink. “Excuse me?”

“You were quiet and didn’t attempt to interrupt Marcus’s presentation at all,” he says. “I assume that means you’ve got thoughts.”

“Isn’t she an intern?” Marcus asks, looking unimpressed with my presence. “Like, the super problematic one?”

“Not anymore.” Mr. Sutton looks at me. “Do you have any thoughts?”

“I think everything looked good,” I say carefully. “But... it feels a bit hollow. Like a luxury brand wrapped in a fast-food wrapper.”

Marcus laughs.

“Oh, great,” he says, leaning back. “Let’s take branding advice from the girl who cost us the Costco campaign.”

“I didn’t cost you that campaign.”

“You showed up late, spoke out of turn, and then you embarrassed our team in front of a mid-tier client and got flagged three times before we even locked the second round of ad testing.” He rolls his eyes.

I glance at Mr. Sutton, hoping he’ll intervene, but he doesn’t.

“But hey, maybe you’re right.” Marcus is still going. “Maybe we should burn down months of hard work because you feel like it’s hollow. Maybe Skittles would much rather hear about that than things we’ve actually worked on.”

Heat burns behind my eyes, and I stand to my feet.

“Thanks for the feedback, Marcus,” I say. “My opinion still stands.”

“That’s all it is.” He glares at me. “A useless opinion .”

I storm out of the room, heels hitting the concrete floor harder than I mean to. I make a straight line for the elevator bank, every step fueled by humiliation and fury. I jab the button and keep my eyes on the numbers.

No one follows.

Good.

The doors open and I step inside.

I press L for lobby and lean against the back wall, breathing hard.

Just before the doors seal shut—Mr. Sutton steps in.

“What the hell are you doing?” he asks, voice low but sharp.

“Going home,” I snap. “You dismissed everyone else, so I assume that now includes me.”

“I dismissed you for lunch,” he says, stepping closer. “Not the day.”

“Well,” I say, matching his tone, “you failed to mention my new position came with a side of dealing with another selfish suit, so I’ll go ahead and cut my losses now.”

I press the ‘lobby’ button again as if that’ll make the elevator move faster.

“I still expect a check for my ill-wanted contribution today,” I add, lifting my chin.
“That’s enough money to cover a few bills.”

“Cut the shit.” He hits the emergency stop button, and the elevator jerks to a halt between floors.

I suck in a breath as he turns toward me and places his hands on the panels above my head.

“You don’t strike me as the sensitive type,” he says. “And yet here you are—ready to throw away an opportunity because someone talked to you the way you recently talked to me.”

“I’m not the sensitive type...” I pause. “But I can tell when I’m not wanted.”

“By him or by me?”

“What?”

“I don’t understand why you’re letting Marcus get to you so easily.” He ignores my previous question. “Did he bruise your ego?”

“No.” I glare at him. “And for what it’s worth, that wasn’t a bruise. That was a full-blown hit job.”

“And?” he says evenly. “I have a feeling that you would’ve cut him off a lot sooner if it had been me.”

“I would never disrespect you in front of other staff members.”

“So that’s just something you’ll keep doing in private ?

” he says, stepping even closer. “I actually expect you to contribute in marketing meetings when you’re not doing the assistant tasks.

I didn’t give the promotion for you to stand there like wallpaper, and I would’ve really appreciated you stopping that catastrophe long before they got halfway through the slides. ”

“Oh...” My pulse hammers.

The silence between us feels too loud, the elevator too small.

“I want you back upstairs in twenty minutes,” he says, quiet and lethal. “Clear your head, grow thicker skin, and if all else fails, just pretend like you’re talking to me... in private.”

He reaches past me and presses the button to restart the elevator.

“Oh, and,” he adds, glancing sideways as the doors begin to open. “No—I won’t be giving you a check for your work today.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll need to earn it first.”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE CEO

DOMINIC

I have a feeling I'm going to regret taking on Skittles as a client. Maybe not now, but somewhere down the line.

The last time we worked with a candy company—Mars, Inc., via their M&M's line—their sales skyrocketed for three straight quarters. Then they hired a new CEO who credited all their success to “vibes” and fired us.

Their numbers tanked six months later, and they're still trying to rebuild the bridge they torched—without paying my new “fuck around and find out” fee.

That issue aside, there's one thing I already regret:

Hiring Ivy.

After yesterday, I should've relegated her to the twenty-fifth floor with the rest of the marketing execs. Somewhere far away from my gaze. And my dick.

Needing a distraction, I scan the notes she left in my book. I'm halfway through reviewing the budget breakdowns when she reenters the room—ten minutes early.

Our eyes meet, and her cheeks flush pink.

We stare at each other a beat too long, and just when I open my mouth to say

something like “You’re being reassigned, effective immediately,” the team filters back in with loud conversations.

The meeting resumes with Marcus firing off things we’ve done before, but this time, Ivy interrupts a few times.

Her questions stun the room into silence, and they’re followed by flustered shuffling and frantic typing.

Impressed, I let the meeting run without my own intrusions until eight in the evening.

“Anything to add at this point, Miss Locke?” I look straight at her. “Do you think the team is on the right track?”

“For now, yes.”

“Good,” I say. “That’s enough for today. Go.”

Ivy gathers her things without looking at me. She turns around and walks away, giving me a perfect view of her ass via her tightly fitted pencil skirt.

I don’t move or stand up from the table just yet.

I can’t.

My cock is hard in my suit pants, and I refuse to allow anyone in this building to see how easily Ivy affects me.

Around midnight, my entire building is silent—giving me the perfect chance to think, as always.

I roam the floors one at a time, walking through the empty offices and in-progress projects. No buzzing interns. No fake laughter. No Marcus monologuing into his phone like he's pitching the sequel to his own ego.

I'm headed to the garage, scrolling through the Ferrera deck on my tablet, when a godawful metal-on-metal screech cuts through the silence like a chainsaw on steel.

I stop walking.

The sound comes again—something between a grinding cough and a guttural scream.

I look down the row that holds part of my car collection, and then I spot something gray swaying.

Ivy's skirt...

Bent over the hood of a rusted Honda, she has one knee on the bumper, a wire hanger clenched in her fingers, and a don't-mess-with-me glare aimed straight at the engine block.

The air in here is thick—humid from trapped heat, with the tang of engine oil and burnt rubber. Her perfume floats faintly above it, sweet and stubborn.

Amused, I take my time walking over.

She doesn't notice me—until the engine turns over with an angry wheeze and she slams the hood shut like she just slayed a beast.

Then she circles to the back and peels off her blazer. Then she crouches to wrap it around the tailpipe like a makeshift bandage.

Her blouse stretches across her ass. Her legs flex.

I quietly adjust my belt before she can see me.

“You know,” I say, stepping into view, “you’d make a decent mechanic. Assuming the hanger doesn’t electrocute you first.”

She jumps up. “Thank you for the compliment... I think.”

“Would you like some help?”

“No, I’m fine.” She waves me away. “I do this all the time.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” I glance at her hands. “That wire’s too hot for you to not have gloves on with it.”

“Like I said, I do this all the time, Mr. Sutton.” She pronounces my name like I have the plague, like we’re back to square one. “I’ll see you here tomorrow.”

She dismisses me with another flick of her hand and slides into the driver’s seat.

I step back as she revs the engine, but it lets out its loudest groan of the night... and then heavy plumes of smoke unfurl from under the hood, spewing all over my garage.

She doesn’t get out, though.

She keeps her hands gripped on the steering wheel. Then she tries to start the piece of junk again.

Jesus...

I walk to the passenger side and pull the door open.

“Get out of this death trap, Miss Locke,” I say. “I’ll take you home.”

“This has happened plenty of times before.” She’s in denial. “If you want to watch it come to life within the next twenty minutes, stand right there and be my guest.”

“If you don’t get out within twenty seconds, I’ll be pulling you out.”

She doesn’t move.

But then her eyes flick up to mine, wide and unreadable. Even in denial (and distress), she looks sexy as hell.

“I’m not interested in being your charity case,” she mutters. “I’ll call a cab.”

“That’s not an option.” I lean in and pull the keys out of the ignition, keeping my eyes on hers. Then I slide my hand under her thighs—slowly, deliberately—and lift her out of the seat.

Her skin is warm, impossibly soft. She sucks in a breath as my fingers graze just high enough to make her pulse stutter.

I take my time setting her down on the concrete.

“You’re going to step away from this car,” I say, my voice firm, “and then you’re going to follow me to my car, where I’ll take you home. But since you clearly need to feel like you have a choice—you can walk, or I can carry you.”

I pause. Let my voice drop lower.

“If you pick the latter, Miss Locke... I won’t be putting you down anytime soon.”

Her cheeks flush red. “I’ll walk.”

“Thank you.”

THE INTERN

IVY

The interior of Mr. Sutton's car looks as if it's never been touched. The wood grain wraps around his digital dashboard, thinning out to the side panels and dissolving into custom dark blue carpet that covers his floors.

It's so clean that I'm scared to leave a fingerprint.

Keeping my gaze forward, I try to focus on the road ahead and not the way the seat hugs my back. The faint scent of cedar and spice coming off his skin. The slow, effortless way he weaves through traffic like Manhattan bends for him.

"You're not going to ask me where I live?" I say eventually.

"Why would I?" He glances over at me with a smirk. "I have your employee file. Remember?"

Right. My cheeks warm as I turn back to the window.

"Are you still delivering for Uber on the side?" he asks as we approach a red light.

"No, but it's not by choice."

"What do you mean?"

“Some customer personally called the CEO and said that I had a non-compete in my employment contract.”

“That customer was simply looking out for everyone else who expects good food delivery service.”

I roll my eyes, but I can’t help biting back a smile.

We fall into silence, but it’s not as awkward.

For now.

He makes a brief stop at a cafe and buys me a to-go dinner, and I devour every morsel in appreciation.

When we cross into my part of Brooklyn, my stomach begins to knot. The view of my neighborhood from his custom-tinted windows looks completely different than it does from my car.

“You know what?” I spot one of my neighbors who I owe twenty bucks to. “Instead of dropping me off at home, just pull over at the bodega at the corner. I’ll walk the rest of the way.”

“What?” He glances over at me. “Why would I do that?”

“Because I need to get some food for dinner.”

“We just ate dinner...”

“Yeah, well, this is for while I work on my projects alone tonight,” I say. “I need to buy a few things and there’s no parking outside my place anyway. This is way

easier.”

He doesn’t respond, and he doesn’t slow down either.

As if he can tell I’m tempted to jump out of the car, he locks the doors as we ride past the bodega.

And then, as if fate is playing some type of cruel joke, he pulls into one of the surprisingly empty spots in front of my building.

“This is where you really live?” he asks, looking offended.

I nod.

I can’t even blame him.

The front door is half off the hinges. The foyer’s entry light is flickering, beckoning anyone to come and see if it’s haunted. An old mattress—with a lovely orange pee stain—is leaning against the side of the steps.

“Okay, Miss Locke.” He puts the car in park and steps out to open my door. He doesn’t return to the driver’s side, though.

He steps with me onto the sidewalk.

“Whoa,” I say. “What are you doing?”

“Walking with you inside.”

“I don’t need you to do that.” I shake my head. “I’ll be fine. I promise.”

“This isn’t a debate.” He presses his key fob lock. “Lead the way.”

“It’s really not that serious.” There’s no way I can let him inside to see anything else.

“It’s not like this is a hotbed for crime.”

“Ay, finance bro!” The universe betrays me again as someone calls out to him.

Clay, the guy from Apartment 4B, jogs over to us and pulls out a knife.

“Hand over your wallet and your keys and I’ll let you live,” he says. “Move.”

Mr. Sutton blinks at him, looking completely unfazed.

“Now, motherfucker.”

“Clay, please stop.” I sigh. “This is my boss...”

“Oh, shit. Sorry, man.” Clay grins, putting the knife away. “Pleasure to meet you, sir.”

“You just threatened to kill me.”

“It was an empty threat.” He shrugs. “You’d be surprised how often that works on business dudes, though. I can’t help but try it every time.”

I shoot him a pointed look. “Go home.”

He salutes me and slips into the alley.

I head up the steps, key in hand, and glance back.

“You don’t need to come inside,” I say. “You’ve come far enough.”

“Open the door, Ivy.”

“We’re on a first-name basis now?” I narrow my eyes. “You think the promotion and the raise were just pretext to seduce me in my kitchen?”

“No,” he says. “And for the record, I doubt I’d have to force you to sleep with me. You’d do it willingly.”

My jaw drops. “Excuse me?”

“And if I wanted to pay you for sex,” he adds, voice low and hard, “I would’ve paid a lot more.”

My pulse stutters.

He steps in. Close.

One hand braces on the doorframe beside my head, the other ghosting just behind my hip. Not touching—not quite—but close enough to make my breath catch. His scent—cedar and clean spice—wraps around me, thick and dizzying.

“Open,” he says again, his voice lower now, more dangerous. “The door.”

I oblige, pushing it open and letting him follow behind me.

The lights are off, so I walk over to the battery-powered surge and step on the switch, waiting for it to power on.

As the LED lamps begin to flicker, the truth I’ve been hiding from family and friends

is on full display.

My air mattress lays on the floor—fully made up in the Four Seasons sheets I brag home about.

Instead of a fridge, I have a stack of brightly labeled coolers, and on a whiteboard that props up my makeshift wardrobe rack, all my debts are listed in order—right next to the former Uber Eats tips I calculate for savings.

Everything else in the apartment is just... there.

When the lights are fully illuminated, I see Dominic looking around with his jaw clenched.

“Would you like a tour?” I try to lighten the sudden dip in mood. “Well, I mean, you’ll need to take your shoes off and then try not to step too hard on the floorboards by the window because?—”

“Pack up your shit,” he interrupts.

“What?” I cross my arms. “Why?”

“Pack. Up. Your. Shit,” he repeats himself. “You don’t live here anymore.”

“You could just say ‘no’ to the tour.” I laugh. “I appreciate the ride home. I’ll see you tomorrow, and you can leave the same way you came.”

“Exactly,” he says. “With you.”

“Come again?”

“I’m not letting you stay another night here, and I’m not leaving without you,” he says, glancing at his watch. “So either start packing, or I’ll call someone to pack everything for you.”

“You think you can just make me move out of my apartment?”

“Can you ask your ridiculous questions and pack your things at the same time?” he asks. “It would prevent me from taking more drastic measures...”

My mouth opens, but nothing comes out.

“What part of what I’m saying is unclear, Ivy?” The way my name falls from his lips is dangerous.

“You’re serious.”

“Dead-ass serious.”

“Well, I need time to go through things and?—”

“Tracey?” His phone is against his ear, and he’s dismissed me like we’re at work. “I’m going to send you an address and I need you to get me—” He looks around my room. “Six full sets of luggage within the hour. Thank you.”

He ends the call and leans against a door.

“There,” he says. “You have an hour’s time.”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE INTERN

IVY

I probably only need twenty minutes to pack everything I own, but I take my time under Dominic's gaze, wanting to hold on to some sense of control. Some bit of agency.

As we ride back to his side of town, I try to stir up conversation, but he doesn't look bothered by the silence.

He keeps his gaze straight ahead, one hand steady on the wheel, the other resting casually on the center console.

Every few minutes, a call comes through his dashboard, and he answers and ends each one in under a minute.

They're all about work.

As we pass the Manhattan Bridge, my phone vibrates in my purse.

Nolan (BF... I think?)

Hey babe. Hope you've been doing well. I know our six-month break has been hard on you, and it's been hard on me, too...

I heard you got a promotion?

Going back to work, just wanted to reach out 3

Oh my god.

I silence my phone and drop it deeper into my bag.

When I look up again, we're pulling in front of a sleek black building on Billionaire's Row. I bite my lip to stop myself from gasping.

The underground garage greets us with bright white lights, high ceilings, and polished marble floors that reflect the car's headlights.

A man in a suit approaches the moment Dominic parks.

"Good evening, Mr. Sutton," he says, tipping his hat before walking over to open my door.

"Good evening, Mitchell. This is Ivy Locke." Dominic steps beside me. "Ivy, this is Mitchell. He manages all my affairs in this building."

"Nice to meet you." I offer my hand, but Mitchell lifts it to his lips for a swift kiss.

"There are two other cars on the way with her things," Dominic says. "I'd like everything delivered into her temporary new space—the guest suite—by midnight."

"No, that's okay." I shake my head. "I won't be living here that long. I can give you a storage address instead."

"I'll handle it exactly as you want, sir." Mitchell doesn't acknowledge me. After another tip of his hat, he's gone.

Dominic presses a key fob, and the elevator ahead opens with a soft chime.

“Tracey will show you some apartment options this week,” he says.

“Just so we’re clear,” I say, following him inside, “I won’t be sleeping in your bed or your room during my stay here.”

“Okay, Miss Locke.”

“I’m being serious,” I add. “And it would make me more comfortable with this situation if I had a couch far away from your bedroom.”

“You’ll have an entire guest suite to yourself.” He glances over at me, a slight smile tugging at his lips. “Do you just enjoy arguing and making your life more difficult, or do you really mean the shit you say?”

I don’t answer. I just wait until the elevator reaches his floor.

The doors open directly into the penthouse, and I try not to gasp.

Floor-to-ceiling windows cast Manhattan in soft sundown hues of gold. Sleek grey furniture guards matching marble floors that look untouched, like no footsteps have ever dared cross them.

I walk in slowly, drawn toward the main window. The city stretches beneath us in every direction—rooftops, bridges, water, light. I can see everything I’ve never had access to. And none of where I came from.

“Would you like a tour?” he asks behind me.

I nod, my eyes still on the skyline.

He walks ahead, and I follow. The all-white kitchen is spotless, lit to perfection, and finished in polished marble and chrome. Industrial-grade appliances line the back wall.

“This summons the chef.” He taps a small brass button near the pantry. “He’s usually here by four on weekdays. Six on weekends.”

Why did you ever need to use Uber Eats if you have a personal chef?

“He was out of town that day.” He narrows his eyes at me, and I realize I said it aloud. I blush.

“Anyway...” He continues the tour, showing me a private library, a state-of-the-art spa room, and finally, a suite decorated in light blue and rustic silver tones.

My jaw drops before I can stop myself.

Inside, there’s a separate sitting area, a private reading nook, and a spa-level bathroom with heated floors, a rainfall shower, and a deep soaking tub that looks like it was designed to seduce.

“Do you typically do this for new hires?” I ask, my voice even as he shows off the remote-controlled drapes.

“Do what?”

“Generously move them out of their lives and into luxury.”

“Generous?” He repeats the word like he’s tasting it. “Someone told me I was the opposite—that I’m selfish.”

“You are selfish.”

“No, I don’t typically do this.” He doesn’t miss a beat. “But if I found out any other employee of mine was living in a place like yours, I’d step in one way or another.”

I glance around again, slower this time. I don’t show much on my face, but this is the most beautiful space I’ve ever stood inside.

He takes me back through the living room and points out details in passing. In the kitchen, he opens a drawer in the fridge, showing me labeled buttons—chef, drinks, cleaning staff.

“It’s all simple once you get used to it. Most of the places Tracey will show you have similar appliances, so you should start learning them now.”

I nod. “Thank you. I appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome.” He checks his watch. “Be ready to go to work at four-thirty in the morning. A separate town car will be waiting... unless you’d rather share a ride with me.”

“I’ll take the car.”

“I thought so.”

He turns, but I clear my throat.

“Do I get a tour of your room?” I ask. “You left that part out.”

“On purpose.” His voice is firm. “Unless you’re planning to spend the night in my bed, I don’t see a reason why you’d ever need to see it.”

My cheeks flush, and I turn away, slipping back into the suite—and into the soaking tub, which has just earned a very cold, very long visit.

THE CEO

DOMINIC

I 'm standing under ice-cold streams for the third time tonight.

This time, when I step out, I won't let a single thought of Ivy cross my mind. I'll get over the fact that I let the sexiest woman in Manhattan stay in my condo temporarily, and I'll get at least an hour of sleep.

I've handled harder obstacles. I can handle this one.

With my plan resolved, I turn off the water and step onto the floor.

I wrap a towel around my waist and head into the kitchen.

Fuck.

Ivy is standing on her tiptoes, reaching for something in a high cabinet.

Wearing only a T-shirt and socks, she undoes my resolve in five seconds flat.

I tell myself I've handled worse. That this is nothing.

But watching her like this—bare legs, messy hair, one hand bracing the counter—says otherwise.

“May I help you with something?” I ask.

She freezes, then glances over her shoulder.

“I was just looking for the hazelnut syrup,” she says. “For my coffee.”

I walk over and open a different cabinet, pulling out the bottle.

“Anything else?”

“For you to put some clothes on while I’m out here working.”

I don’t give her the satisfaction of a reply. Just turn and walk.

I head back to the master suite, step under another cold stream, and already know what I’m doing in the morning.

Tracey’s going to have to make Ivy’s apartment search move at the speed of light. Two weeks, max.

She’s not staying here longer than that.

THE INTERN

IVY

At the edge of sunrise, Dominic's condo stirs to life like a symphony.

The drapes slowly rise to reveal a still-sleeping New York, soft piano music filters through the ceiling speakers, and bright lights twinkle against the baseboards.

The early performance ruins my chances of getting any hint of sleep before work.

Every time I've tried to shut my eyes, all I could see was Dominic walking into my suite and climbing on top of me. Him taking full control of my body and never letting go, no matter how loud I screamed.

And I didn't hate any of the visions; I didn't stop them, either.

I make sure I have all my folders for work, and as I'm walking to the kitchen, a man dressed in all gray walks through the front door.

"Good morning, Miss Locke," he says, slightly bowing. "I'm Chef Peters. Would you like anything in particular for breakfast today?"

"No, whatever you make is fine."

He smiles and slips into the kitchen, and the door swings open again—this time with two men.

One heads down the hall to Dominic's suite with a wardrobe bag in hand. The other extends his hand to me.

"I'm Mr. Hershey," he says. "I'll be driving you and Mr. Sutton to work today."

"I thought I was getting a separate car... And doesn't he drive himself?"

"Only from work, never to," he says. "It's hard to focus on the road when he has to handle so many morning calls."

"But what about the town car I was promised?" I can't handle being this close to him so soon...

"The secondary driver is sick today." He offers me a small smile. "You'll survive. Trust me."

Before I can ask him another question, Chef Peters hands me a box wrapped with a satin blue bow.

"Strawberry parfait with lightly toasted waffles and artfully spiced eggs," he says.

"Thank you."

Seconds later, Dominic walks down the hallway in a custom black suit and light blue tie, and the calmness in the room disappears.

The chef hands his box to the driver. A housekeeper appears from—somewhere—and rushes to dust off the coffee table.

Someone else hands him a cup of coffee, and as if he's somehow confused as to why I'm still here, he stops right in front of me and tilts his head.

“Miss Locke, today is a ‘pitch polishing’ day.”

“I know,” I say. “That’s why I stayed up all night studying.”

“Then you shouldn’t be dressed like we’re going to a funeral.” He looks at his watch. “No black allowed on pitch-polish days. Change, and I’ll see you in the car.”

He leaves without another word, and as I’m returning to my room, another someone is already holding out a blue dress for me.

“You’re a size four, right?” she asks. “I guessed based on when I saw you in passing yesterday.”

“That’s... extremely creepy, but yes.”

She laughs. “I’m Mr. Sutton’s guest assistant. I’ll help you with everything you need until you check out.”

“Noted. Are you going to watch me change clothes?”

“Would you like me to?”

“No.”

“Then no.” She smiles and picks up a Chanel box. “Size Eight.”

She disappears, and I make a vow to “check out” by the end of the week.

The drive to headquarters is only six miles, but it takes just under an hour in traffic. And I already know I’ll be calling an Uber for the rest of my stay with him.

The way this man looks at me—the way my brain mentally undresses him and pulls off his tie, wishing he'd lean forward and bury his head between my thighs—is not healthy.

I've never been this attracted to any man in my life.

The moment we pull into the parking garage, I don't wait for his driver to open my door.

I jump out and take the emergency stairwell instead of the elevator.

Later that afternoon

"Isn't it inspiring that Mr. Sutton is self-made?" Tracey beams as we set up the conference room for pitch rehearsal. "Like, can you imagine having his background and then building a company that's worth over a billion dollars?"

"I thought he was a trust fund baby..."

"He was definitely not." She scoffs. "Haven't you looked at his bio at all?"

"No." I reposition the projector screen. "But whenever I'm not doing a million things with two hands or anticipating his next meal order, I'll be sure to use my limited free time for that."

"Well, I know his biography like the back of my hand. I've even met with the author who's working on?—"

She looks at me like she's waiting for me to say, Okay, tell me, but I just hold out my hand for the extension cord.

“You could probably learn a lot from him,” she continues. She makes it perfectly clear why she’s his right hand and number one fan. “What other CEO in Manhattan would give you an hour a day to go apartment hunting with his top assistant? That’s true character right there.”

“Could we please talk about something else? Anything else?”

“Um... want to discuss what amenities you want in your new apartment?”

“Sure,” I say, grateful for anything but more Dominic chatter. “I would really like a soaker tub, if possible. I know those are hard to?”

“Mr. Sutton did a campaign for Kohler Soaker Tubs, and they designed all the ones in his condo here for free,” she interrupts. “They also vowed to do any new ones in any property he buys. Would you like to hear how that came about?”

Kill me now.

THE CEO

DOMINIC

“Y ou all cannot be fucking serious...” Braxton stands at the front of the boardroom table, glaring at the team. “If I were Skittles, I’d walk right out within the first fifteen minutes of listening to this dreck.”

“Sir, you haven’t even given us fifteen minutes,” Marcus says. “It’s literally been five.”

“Well, it feels like an hour.” He presses a hand against his forehead. “Skip to the mock commercials, preferably with a bit more enthusiasm and less crap.”

I lean back in my chair, grateful that he’s saying all the words coming to my mind. Well, the words regarding work and not Ivy.

She’s sitting across from me, crossing and recrossing her legs, and I’m trying not to stare.

“Okay, let’s bring customers back and show them there are more ways to taste the rainbowww!”

” The presentation begins, and I swear this is not what we discussed the other day.

It’s nothing like what Ivy suggested—he hasn’t incorporated any of her brilliant notes—and I can see Braxton’s eyes about to pop out of his skull.

“Okay, enough.” I hold up a hand. “Let’s take the rest of the day off and reconvene tomorrow morning. I’ll send emails this evening. You’re all dismissed.”

Everyone scuttles out of the room—including Ivy—and Braxton walks over to the window.

“Thank you for finally saying something,” he says. “Has Miss Locke’s pussy got your tongue?”

“What?” I arch a brow. “That’s a highly inappropriate thing to say to me.”

“You’ve never been this quiet on a pitch polish day,” he says. “You’re over there smiling like the team isn’t serving up turds on a pee platter.”

“You really need to work on your metaphors... I was in deep thought.”

“About what?”

“Am I really that selfish?”

“Stop bullshitting me, Dominic.”

“It’s a genuine question.”

“You once paid an executive fifty dollars extra on a check by accident,” he says.

“You immediately called the bank to claw it back.”

“That’s not selfish. That’s good accounting. If I let that slide a hundred times, it starts to add up.”

“You’ve done it over a hundred times,” he says. “For overages of like thirty and fifty

cents.”

“It still adds up.”

“Right.” He rolls his eyes. “Are we going to be ready for Skittles at the end of this month? It’s looking like we’ll need to reschedule, cancel, or replace everyone on this team for severe incompetence.”

I tap my fingers against the table, unsure of what to say.

“They could potentially be one of our biggest clients if we land them, and it’ll forever close the door on Mars, Inc. coming back to us, but…” He sighs. “They will laugh us out of our own building if we present whatever the hell I just saw.”

I nod. I agree with him one hundred percent, but we’re too close to make any major shifts.

“Miss Locke had some extremely good ideas at our last meeting,” I say, pushing my notebook toward him. “More upscale than nostalgic. Focused on elegance instead of memories and summer.”

He picks it up and reads. Then he slumps into a chair.

“Can you and I work on her idea together today, and then make them rework it for you?”

“Only if you give me five ways in which I’m not selfish.”

“I can’t even think of one.” He laughs. “Can I have a rain check?”

“No.” I groan. “Let’s just get to work.”

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE INTERN

IVY

Nolan (BF... I think?)

Why are you avoiding me, babe?

Are you seeing someone else?

Babe? Seriously? I'm in Central Park, ready to have dinner with you and my parents and talk about our future and... you're not here. Is this a joke?

PICK UP THE PHONEEE!

S hit...

This is the last thing I need today.

On top of Marcus completely ignoring all my ideas—and everyone getting kicked out for it—to the heated stares I couldn't avoid from Dominic, I completely forgot about Nolan. I can feel my world collapsing around me.

I never responded to his previous texts, never told him that we need to adjust our “meet up and discuss the break” promise at Central Park.

“So, tomorrow we'll bypass the ones without a doorman and see how you feel about

that, okay?" Tracey smiles at me as we pull into Dominic's condo garage.

"Sounds good."

"Are you okay?" She tilts her head to the side. "Your face is red and you look kind of sweaty."

"How fast do you think I could get to Central Park from here?"

"Pretty fast." The driver smiles at me through the rearview mirror. "But I'd suggest getting an umbrella from upstairs first. We're due for a thunderstorm."

"Here..." Tracey hands me a water bottle and some type of pill.

I don't ask what it is; I just take it.

"Should I wait for you to go retrieve an umbrella, Miss Locke?" the driver asks.

"No, that's okay." I step out of the car. "Tracey, when do you think Mr. Sutton will be back?"

"Probably not until midnight," she says. "He and Mr. Braxton aren't going to leave that room until they're happy with the pitch."

"Perfect, thank you." I grab my purse. "I'll see you at work tomorrow."

Shutting the door, I rush to the elevator and finally text Nolan back.

Sorry. Was in a long meeting.

Since it's about to rain, we can meet at my new place for our usual hour or so. Here's

the address.

THE INTERN

IVY

“My bathroom is to your left.” I let Nolan into the condo. “We can go back to the lobby to talk when you’re done.”

“Well, damn...” He smiles, looking as in awe as I was when I first saw this place. “Why can’t we just talk up here?”

“I just don’t think that’s a good idea,” I say, crossing my arms. “To your left and make it quick...”

He ignores me and walks over to the windows, taking in the city below.

“Are your parents on their way?” I ask.

“No, um...” He clears his throat. “I lied about them coming. I just wanted to send you on a guilt trip because I thought you were ignoring me.”

I roll my eyes. “How mature.”

“Sorry.” The smile on his face reveals he isn’t slightly apologetic. “Do you have anything to drink?”

“There’s an entire coffee bar downstairs.”

“Oh, come on, Ivy.” He walks over to me. “Is it really like that now?”

“I don’t know,” I say, honestly frustrated. “We’ve been ‘on a break’ with status checkups for almost two years now, and sometimes I honestly forget what the hell we’re still holding onto.”

“I’ll make the drinks myself then.” He moves past me and into the kitchen, making a beeline for Dominic’s custom wet bar.

“I really would prefer if we went downstairs.” I notice him loosening his tie.

As if he can’t hear me, he pulls down a flight of shot glasses and fills them with vodka before pushing them toward me. Then he makes a glass of whiskey for himself.

“This brand is like five hundred a bottle,” he says. “I’m impressed that you’re making enough to buy something like this now. Six months ago, you could barely afford to get a decent six-pack of beer.”

I knock back a shot.

“Are you going to ask me what I’ve been up to, Ivy?” He takes a long sip. “I’ve made some huge upgrades in my life, too.”

“Sure.” I resist the urge to roll my eyes and knock back another shot.

“Well, six months away from you—well, ‘us’—flew by in a flash, and I really did learn a lot about myself and what I want in a relationship.”

“Me too.” I pause, thinking I heard the elevator chime on the other side of the door, but it can’t be.

It can't be...

"I've always thought you were a go-getter," Nolan says. "And you've always had the most creative mind I've ever known. There's even?—"

He stops talking as the front door swings open, as Dominic strolls inside, still wearing the custom navy blue suit.

"Um, who are you?" Nolan asks.

Dominic doesn't answer. He just clenches his jaw while glaring at me.

"Babe?" Nolan sets down his glass. "Who is the guy walking into your place like he thinks he owns it?"

"Like I think I own it?" Dominic asks. "Is that what you just said?"

"He's my roommate." I shoot Dominic a please help me out look. "He's part of the, uh, huge intern-plus-executive-office-share program I mentioned to you."

"Ohhh." Nolan nods. "Oh, okay."

"Yeah, okay." Dominic keeps his eyes on me. "Can I speak to you in private for a second, roommate?"

"Excuse me..." I barely manage to Nolan, and I follow Dominic down the hall and into his parlor room.

He shuts the door behind us, and I can literally feel the heat rolling off his body in waves.

“So,” he says through gritted teeth, “you cut your apartment search early today to come home and fuck another man in my condo?”

“No. We weren’t even supposed to come up here, but?—”

“You have two minutes to get him the hell out of my place, and then I’ll deal with you after that.”

“Dominic, listen.”

“Two fucking minutes.” He dismisses me with nothing more, and I return to the living room.

“Everything alright, babe?” Nolan asks.

“No,” I say. “And I need you to stop calling me ‘babe,’ when we’re on a break that never seems to end. I’ll have to talk to you some other day.”

“Well, that’s fine.” He shrugs. “I was only trying to see you to say that I think this latest break has been good for us, and I miss you, but I’m not quite ready to get back together.”

“So why did you make such a big deal out of wanting to see me?”

“I wanted to see where you are—like in life. To see if you’re leveling up like I’m leveling up,” he says. “And it looks like you’re finally getting my vision, and I think with another six months, we’ll be good so...”

He steps forward and presses an unwanted kiss on my cheek. “Don’t give away what’s mine and don’t let anyone else touch you, okay?”

I'm juggling far too many emotions right now to even respond to that.

"I'll call you tomorrow to see if you want to have one final lunch before we set a new break check-in date. We're not over just yet, right?"

I don't answer that. I just walk him to the door and into the hallway for the elevator.

I resist giving him a hug when he holds out his arms, stepping back and serving him a fake smile instead. When the doors close and take him away, I let out a breath and return to the condo.

The moment I step inside, Dominic grabs me by the waist and pushes me against the wall, his eyes heated. "Help me understand why you had the audacity to bring another man into my condo. Now."

"I'm not allowed to have guests?" I try to soften the mood, but he tightens his grip.

He's not amused at all.

He briefly releases his right hand from my hip and wipes the cheek where Nolan left a kiss on my skin. Then he grips me once more.

"Don't try to change the subject on me." He speaks slowly. "If he had tried to fuck you in my condo, would you have let him?"

"I..." The bluntness of his question catches me off guard.

"Do I need to repeat my question?"

I shake my head.

“No, you wouldn’t have let him fuck you, or no, I don’t need to repeat my question?”

“Both.”

“I wasn’t aware you were in a relationship.”

Me either... “So, staying with you does have strings attached?”

“I’m just saying I didn’t know you had a boyfriend—a shitty one at that.”

“What would you know about good relationships?” I hiss. “None of your bios mention anything about ever being married or engaged.”

“I’m really impressed with your way of trying to skirt around the goddamn issue here,” he says. “It’s not going to work, but for the record, I’m flattered that you’re researching me. You might actually learn something.”

He pulls me even closer against his body, trapping me with no space to move. “Your ex-boyfriend is not welcome to come up here again, and if the guest isn’t related to you or a close female friend, I don’t ever want to walk in on you with another man again.”

“Hope you’ll extend me the same courtesy when it comes to your one-night stands.”

“I haven’t slept with anyone in over nine months.”

“Yes, well...” I try not to stare too deep into his eyes, but I can’t help it. “I won’t have male company again, and?—”

“You’ll also tell him to fuck off because someone else has touched you.” His hand slides under my dress, trailing up my thigh with purpose. “Because you’ve found

someone else who makes you come so hard you forget your own name.”

His mouth brushes against my neck—hot, possessive, unhurried.

“And if I don’t?”

As if that’s the permission he’s waiting for, he grabs a fistful of my ass and sinks his teeth into my skin, then captures my mouth with his.

The kiss is rough, full of heat and frustration, dragging every unspoken moment between us into one collision.

I moan against his tongue as he deepens the kiss, pinning me tighter between the door and his body.

I wrap one leg around his waist, desperate for friction, and he slides his hand between my thighs—fingers slipping inside me like he already knows the shape of my body. He strokes me with precision, his other hand bracing my hip as I grind against him, breath catching with every movement.

“If you keep fucking with me—” he growls into my mouth, “I’ll show you who you really belong to...”

I come hard—shaking, gasping, unraveling against him—gripping his shoulders like I need something to hold me together. And he doesn't stop. He keeps me right there, held in place, grounded by his strength as the orgasm rips through me.

He watches me fall apart, watches the last bit of control drain from my body as I cling to him, trembling.

When I finally catch my breath, he lets his fingers slide out slowly, lifting them to his

mouth without breaking eye contact. He tastes me, slow and deliberate.

“You’re done with him,” he says it as a statement, not a question. “End it.”

“Yes...”

“Good.” He releases me and steps back, adjusting his shirt collar like nothing just happened. “See you at four-thirty in the morning.”

THE CEO

DOMINIC

The taste of Ivy's mouth lingers on my lips, and the feel of her pussy throbbing against my hand is a memory that refuses to stop running on a loop in my mind.

While I thought we would ride together to work in the morning for part two—she leaves for the office before me.

And what starts as one day of her avoiding eye contact with me somehow transitions into two, three, and then damn near a week.

No matter my tone or how harshly I request something, she manages to get it done without giving me a single glimpse of her eyes.

She rides to work in the morning with Tracey—much to my chagrin—and although I purposely wait for her in the parking garage so we can ride home together, Tracey meets me instead with a, “Oh, I let her use my driver so she could finish apartment searching.”

Luckily for her, the depth of this never-ending candy campaign—reframing it from disaster into spectacular—is taking up most of my energy...

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

THE CEO

DOMINIC

Wednesday Night

I 'm pacing my living room and chatting with Marcus via FaceTime, wondering why the hell Ivy isn't home yet. She left work an entire hour before I did, and I didn't assign her or Tracey any after-hours tasks.

"Are you listening to me, Mr. Sutton?" Marcus smiles. "I just had a breakthrough moment."

"I didn't catch it," I say. "Repeat it for me."

"I'm thinking that maybe—just maybe—the real problem with Skittles is their slogan." He pauses. "Instead of 'taste the rainbow,' we should suggest 'be the rainbow,' or 'feel the rainbow.' It's more modern, it'll catch people's attention, and it'll spark more creativity from our team."

"Marcus..." I try not to lose my shit. "They've had that slogan since 1994."

"That's why now is a perfect time to change it."

"Their proposal contract literally has 'We will not change our slogan' in bold font."

"But if the Dominic Sutton suggests it, maybe they'll reconsider."

“Get some sleep and wake up with better ideas.”

“Yes, sir.”

I end the call before he can say anything else ridiculous. Opening my laptop, I relaunch the latest commercial shoot, and just as I’m about to recite my suggested notes, my front door opens.

Ivy stumbles in, wearing bright red stilettos and a short black dress that leaves little to the imagination.

Mitchell is behind her, holding her purse and a jacket.

He doesn’t offer an explanation—just leaves.

“Where have you been?” I ask Ivy.

“Out,” she says. “Nolan wanted to make things up to me.”

“You better be joking.”

“I am.” She braces herself against my hallway table and slips out of her heels. “I was out with my new work friends, and now, if it’s okay with my boss and my temporary landlord, I’m going to take a bath.”

“I’m not stopping you.”

She stares straight ahead, then glances down the hallway.

“I need help walking,” she says. “Mitchell had to let me lean on him to get up here.”

“Then ask me to help you.”

“Or you could just offer.”

“I’ll wait.”

She stands still, refusing—determined not to lower herself to ask me for shit. She takes a small, unsteady step forward.

Then another.

At this rate, she’ll make it to her bathroom by the end of the week.

“How much did you have to drink?” I ask.

She ignores me, focusing on her next step.

“Ivy.” I move closer. “How much did you have to drink?”

“A few shots and four margaritas.”

“That’s probably three too many.”

“Yeah, well. We were drinking to our misery at Sutton,” she says. “You wouldn’t understand... You’re really not going to help me?”

“Not until you ask, no.”

“Fine then.” She lets out a breath. “Lord Sutton, King of all Manhattan and owner of this penthouse suite, would you please help me walk to my room, sir?”

“There’s no need to be formal.” I notice she’s not wearing panties under her dress, and her bra is see-through, revealing large areolas on her perfect C-cup breasts. “Plus, I could do without the sarcasm.”

“Seriously?”

“I have all night.”

“Could you please just help me get to my suite, Dominic?”

“Yes.” I slide my arm around her waist and she leans against me.

“See?” She looks up at me. “I just needed some support to walk.”

I hold back on telling her she’s not walking. I’m practically carrying her, with no help at all on her end.

When we reach her bathroom, I hit the lights and she plops down on a plush chair.

“You’re welcome,” I say, turning away.

“Wait.” She calls out when I’m halfway out of the room, and I look over my shoulder. She’s pulled off her dress, and she’s completely naked.

Her legs are spread wide, her pussy glistening. Her breasts tempt me to suck the nipples between my lips.

“What do you want, Ivy?” I ask.

“I need help getting into the tub... and running the water, please.”

Dragging my gaze over her again, I stroll over to the tub and turn on the water, making sure it's not too hot before tossing in a loofah and bubble bath.

Sliding my hands under her body, I lift her up and gently place her into the tub.

“Happy?” I ask, feeling my cock stiffening in my pants. “Do you need anything else?”

“A towel for when I'm done, if it's not too much to ask.”

I grab one from the warmer and drape it across the tub's edge. Then I step back, because she's drunk as hell—and as tempting as she is, I want her completely sober whenever she gives in to me.

“Where are you going?”

“To take a very cold shower,” I say.

“Shouldn't you stay and talk to me—make sure I don't slip under the suds?”

“No,” I say. “The next time your pussy is in my face like this, I'll be devouring it, and you'll be taking every inch of my cock once I'm done.”

A blush creeps over her face.

“If you need anything else, call my staff.” I gesture to the phone on the wall.

“They're the only people in this condo who don't want to fuck you like I do...”

THE INTERN

IVY

I set Dominic's lunch on his desk with today's notes, feeling his heated gaze follow me as I slip out of his office.

As much as I've resisted letting him get closer or control another avenue of my life—today confirms it. I've never experienced the longing I feel around him with Nolan.

It's been over, but it needs to be final.

I don't deserve to hang on to something that's not working for another day.

I grab my purse and head down to the café for my break. I find a booth in the corner and call Nolan, slowly rattling off the ways I think we'll be better apart.

"I hope we can still be friends," I say. "Not immediately, of course, but down the line, huh?"

"You're really breaking up with me?" he asks. "You're ending our break?"

"Technically, you broke up with me," I say. "I'm just letting you know that I'm not holding on, and I don't need any more extensions. I want to move on."

"No."

“No, what?”

“No. That’s not how this goes. I’ll let you know when I’m done with you, and we’ll revisit this relationship three months from now instead of six, since that’s what I think you’re really after.”

“No, Nolan.”

“I’m Ivy League-educated, on track to make millions, and you think you can do better than me?”

“I think I’m going to hang up the phone now.”

“Before you do that, you might want to consider all the ways I could ruin your life within a matter of hours.” His voice is terse. “You don’t have many close friends these days, and I’m pretty sure you’re still telling your job—and others—a few little lies...”

“Why does it sound like you’re threatening me?”

“It shouldn’t sound like that at all, Ivy.” There’s a smile in his voice. “Are you breaking up with me?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’m not threatening to ruin you at all.” His laugh has never sounded uglier. “I’m making you a promise.”

He ends the call before I can ask him what the hell he means by that.

I call him back, but he doesn’t answer.

I try to reach him again and again, and his only response is a text message.

Nolan

I'm going to stop by Hudson University and ask them to confirm you actually attended...

What do you think your bosses will say when they find out the REAL truth?

You barely lasted three semesters, and you're nowhere near close to finishing...

It clearly doesn't matter since I already have this job.

On the website it says everyone has a master's degree or one in progress.

Let me make some calls.

Nolan...

I wonder how Skittles would feel if they knew they were being lied to about the qualifications of their marketing team.

My dad is best friends with their CFO, you know?

What in the actual hell...

I immediately text Dominic.

Something personal just came up. I need the rest of the day off to handle it.

For what?

I just need it. Please.

Give me a good reason to say yes.

Because I foolishly took your advice with Nolan without planning for it first.

You need time off to cry about a good decision?

I'm done explaining myself. I'm off for the rest of the day. Thank you.

THE INTERN

IVY

Six Hours Later

I rush into the lobby of Dominic's condo, my heart thudding in my chest. Inside my purse, I have heirloom jewelry that I've collected from pawn stores, things I could finally afford to pay back. Things I hate that I ever told Nolan about.

I've been dealing with his threats all afternoon—letting him lead me on a twisted scavenger hunt of secrets I thought he would keep. And at this point, I'd rather just sift through whatever carnage he causes instead of trying to prevent him from striking me anymore.

Taking several deep breaths, I vow to never let him back into my life again. As I'm repeating those lines again, someone calls my name from behind.

"Ivyyyy!" It's a raspy, deep voice that's all too familiar.

What the...

"How the hell are you affording to stay in a place like this, Ivy?" my dad bellows from across the lobby. "The price tag is something I wouldn't be able to afford in twenty lifetimes."

My mother and my older sisters walk in behind him, their expressions fit for a

funeral.

“What’s going on?” I ask. “Why are you in town?”

“I’m asking the questions here.” His voice is terse. “Newark is only four hours away, and you know I can make it here far faster than that if my daughter is in deep shit.”

“Deep shit?”

“Since when do you live in Manhattan?” He eyes the chandelier above us. “Are you selling drugs?”

“No, Dad.”

“Are you into human trafficking?”

“What?”

“Your sister’s place—the one she bought after closing that Ferguson deal for me—isn’t even this nice. So whatever you’re doing, it must be something illegal.” He looks livid. “I’m glad Nolan called us with his concerns. This is an emergency indeed.”

“George.” My mom places a hand on his arm. “Let Ivy explain herself.”

“I am letting her explain. She’s standing there like a damn mute.”

“I got a promotion,” I say. “This is?—”

“So, you’re sleeping your way to the top?” He shakes his head. “Oh God. We raised you better than that.”

“I got a promotion based on my talent, Dad,” I say. “In marketing.”

He and my mom exchange a look. It’s the same look they’ve shared since I was seven years old, when they realized I wasn’t going to follow the path of my older three siblings into the family business.

There would also be no sports. No music. Nothing extracurricular.

Just creative writing.

I brace myself for my dad’s “You still owe us money for taking so long to finish your degree” speech, followed by my mother’s “Why can’t you try to be more like your brothers and sisters? What’s wrong with chasing something successful?” pity monologue.

If it weren’t for the fact that I know them verbatim—and that I’ve steeled my heart against their veiled venom disguised as wisdom—I’d probably break into tears.

But there’s a part of me that wants to confess everything right now—dropped out of college, still surviving, trying to create something for myself that actually means something—and in the midst of their yelling, right as the profanity-laced confession is about to roll off my tongue, the door from the parking garage opens.

Dominic, dressed in a white T-shirt and gray sweats like he’s just come from the gym, takes out his earbuds and looks between them and me.

“Well, hello there, sir.” My father walks over to him. “Since you live in this building, maybe you can help us get to the bottom of this.”

“What exactly is this?” Dominic asks.

“Do you know my daughter here by chance?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, good. Well, maybe. Her boyfriend Nolan mentioned a shady roommate situation. Is that you or someone else?”

“He’s not my boyfriend anymore, Dad.” I hiss. “He’s an asshole and he called you with bullshit to get back at me.”

My dad waves off my words, extending a hand to Dominic. “George Locke of New Jersey. We—minus Ivy here—run one of the top family-owned agricultural centers on the East Coast. You?”

“I’m Dominic Sutton,” Dominic says. “I’m the CEO of Sutton Enterprises. My company designed most of the labels for the vendors you supply.”

“No way!” My father smiles. “What a small world. Does Ivy know what you do? Are you hiring?”

He doesn’t give Dominic a chance to answer.

“We’re here because we’re worried and we know she’s lying about things, but maybe you know more than we do.”

“I don’t think so,” Dominic says, looking at me. “I actually came here to go over meeting notes with her. She’s one of the marketing executives at my company, and she’s on the verge of helping us secure what I hope will be a two-hundred-million-dollar marketing contract.”

My father’s jaw drops. My mother and sisters gasp in unison.

“My apologies for interrupting your family time, Miss Locke. Would you like to do this some other time, or maybe I can take your parents on a quick city tour while you get ready?”

I mouth ‘thank you’ before nodding. “I’m not sure they’d want a tour.”

“Of course we’d want a tour of Manhattan, especially a free one from someone who lives here!” my mother says, then she looks at me. “I had no idea you were doing so well, honey. I would’ve never...”

“Next time I see Nolan, my fists have some unfinished business,” my dad says, walking over to me. He hugs me, but the words he said before still hold weight; they still hurt.

“I’ll be back in a few hours if that’s all right with you, Miss Locke?” Dominic is being way too chill and understanding about this, but I don’t turn down the chance to catch a break from my family.

“Sounds good,” I say. “I’ll be ready for work when you return.”

My family follows him out the door, and I let out a huge breath.

I’ve definitely lost the right to call him selfish for a while now...

I refresh my inbox repeatedly in the evening, hoping for updates from anyone, but there’s nothing.

It’s not until Mitchell comes up to the suite to give me a warm weighted blanket that I finally burst at the seams.

“Do you know when Dominic will be back?” I ask. “Do you know where he went?”

“I believe he’s leaving a Broadway show with your parents,” he says. “They did a relatively quick tour and he treated them to a Michelin-star dinner.” He tilts his head. “This is the first time I’ve ever seen Mr. Sutton try to make an impression on his girlfriend’s parents...”

“Oh, no. I’m not his girlfriend.”

“Okay, Miss Locke.” He smiles.

“I’m serious.” I shake my head. “I’m sure his timeline on meeting his girlfriend’s parents is still whatever it is.”

He stares at me, saying nothing.

“What is his normal timeline for meeting girlfriends’ parents?”

“Never.” He places a glass of water on the coffee table. “He never makes time to get close to anyone.”

“Oh...”

“Except you, of course.” He tips his hat. “Goodnight, Miss Locke.”

“Goodnight.” I remain on the couch, waiting and trying not to let my heart get ahead of itself.

This was just a sweet gesture. It doesn’t mean anything.

It doesn’t mean anything...

Later that night, the sound of shoes hitting the marble makes me roll over on the

couch.

The lights slowly brighten, and I sit up as Dominic shuts the door.

He's in all black now—a button-down shirt and slacks—looking tired but controlled.

“I am so sorry,” I say. “I know you said no company in your condo again, and I swear I didn't invite them, and I was about to tell you exactly what happened because Nolan decided to?—”

“Stop.” He cuts me off. “You don't need to explain it.”

He walks over to the bar and pours two drinks.

I watch as he hands me one and then sits down beside me.

“You probably should've had one of those a lot sooner.” He smiles. “Would you like mine?”

“Yes.”

He hands it to me, but commands, “Sip slow this time.”

I oblige.

“After spending five hours with your family,” he says, “I understand why you lied to them. I would probably do the same, so... keep it up.”

I snort. “They mean well, they just...”

“Don't understand,” we say in unison.

I nod and take another sip.

“Did you ever have to lie to your family when you were starting your company?” I ask.

“I never had a family,” he says. “Surely you’ve read my bio by now.”

“I’m just waiting for you to slip up and admit it’s fiction.”

“It’s not...” His lips curve. “Are you still with your boyfriend?”

“Depends.”

“On what?”

“What answer would make you finally stop looking at me like you want me?”

“Yes or no?” He moves closer.

“No.”

He doesn’t wait another second.

He cups the back of my neck and drags me into his mouth, swallowing my gasp like it’s what he’s been craving all day. His lips are rough, hungry, and I kiss him back with everything I’ve been holding in.

He shifts, guiding me into his lap—his control absolute, but his touch careful.

My blouse comes undone under his hands, button by button, and his mouth follows every inch of skin he reveals.

His tongue traces the curve of my breast before sucking one nipple between his lips.

I whimper, arching into him, his name a breathless plea.

He stands with me in his arms, carries me to the mirror-walled hallway without breaking the kiss. When my back presses against the cool glass, he lifts my leg and slides his fingers beneath my panties.

“You’re soaked for me already,” he murmurs, eyes locked on mine. “Did the thought of me fucking you tonight keep you squirming on this couch?”

I nod, breath caught in my throat.

He strokes me slowly, teasing, until my hips are jerking into his hand. His free hand pins my wrists to the mirror.

“Look at yourself,” he growls. “Watch what I do to you.”

I do. I watch his fingers disappear between my thighs. Watch my mouth fall open as pleasure takes over.

When he kneels in front of me and pulls my panties down, the image of his dark head between my legs in the reflection is almost too much. He devours me like a man starved—licking, sucking, groaning into me until my knees give out and the only thing holding me up is his mouth and his grip.

“Dominic...” I gasp. “Please...”

“Please what?” His voice is velvet and fire.

“I need you inside me.”

Without a word, he flips me around, bending me over the nearby table. I hear his zipper, hear him unwrapping a condom, feel the hard heat of him press against me.

“Say it again.”

“I need you inside me.”

He slams into me in one deep, punishing thrust, and I cry out. He fucks me hard, one hand in my hair, the other gripping my waist like he’s afraid I’ll disappear. The mirror shows every roll of his hips, every filthy, wet connection of our bodies.

“You feel that?” he growls in my ear. “That’s what it’s like when someone actually owns you. When it’s real.”

I come hard, crying out his name, legs shaking. He doesn’t stop.

He lifts me, still inside me, and carries me into the bedroom. Lays me down, climbs over me. This time, it’s slower. Deeper.

His hands cup my face, and his eyes never leave mine.

“You’re not leaving,” he whispers. “Not tonight.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

He thrusts again, holding me through another orgasm. And when it’s over—when we’re both wrecked and breathless—he wraps me in his arms, still inside me.

“Sleep,” he murmurs.

And this time, I do.

THE INTERN

IVY

I walk like nothing happened last night, like my mouth wasn't wrapped around the CEO's cock and his cock wasn't deep inside me all night long.

It was just sex, Ivy. It didn't mean anything...

I settle at my desk outside his office and open my laptop like I'm about to tackle world peace. Instead, I spend the next five minutes trying to remember how to spell brief .

"You're two hours early for work today, Miss Locke." Dominic's voice cuts through my concentration like a knife. "You left long before I could suggest we come here together. Any reason why?"

He's standing in his office doorway, perfectly dressed and calm as ever.

"Yes." I give him a nod. "Lots of final touches on the Skittles campaign."

"I see." He smirks. "Would you like to go over them with me?"

"No." I look away from him. "I would like to only be summoned when you have a real, nonsexual task."

"Have I ever given you a sexual one?"

“Could you please stop talking before someone else hears you?”

“There’s no one else here.” He moves closer. “Are you about to try to avoid me again?”

“Yes.” I straighten my back.

“Why?”

“Because you and I are currently stuck in a weird Twilight Zone episode where the older man screws his much younger?—”

“You’re not that much younger...”

“—intern,” I pick up where I left off. “And then, because he’s done so much nice shit trying to pretend to be a nice guy, she’ll catch feelings off some sexual innuendos and then he’ll be screwing someone else at the end while her heart breaks during the credits.”

He blinks. “What do you think about all that?”

“I think it’s obvious you’ve never watched an episode of The Twilight Zone .”

“I’m being serious,” I say. “I have three more condos to look at with Tracey, and I should have that done by the time the Skittles team comes to see us and... I don’t want to—I don’t want to cross the line again.”

“Okay, Miss Locke,” he says. “Fair enough. We’ll keep it strictly business from here on out.”

He walks away easily, confirming everything I just said.

THE INTERN

IVY

Several Mornings Later

I don't remember making the agreement that we would ride to and from work together every day, and yet, despite the fact that we're barely talking, that's what's happening.

And I'm slowly slacking on my apartment search, even though deep down I know this can't last.

Every morning like clockwork, the Audi pulls up to the curb in front of the penthouse, and every night—after he finishes working like he's singlehandedly trying to buy the moon—he's standing in the parking garage holding the passenger door open, waiting to take me home.

He doesn't always talk.

Sometimes he's on calls.

Sometimes he's answering messages.

But sometimes he just watches me. Quiet. Intense.

And even when he says nothing, his presence wraps around me like a warning.

At the apartment, he doesn't intrude. But things shift.

There's always hot coffee in the machine.

A charger appears next to my bed, even though I never asked for one.

Fresh towels in the guest bath. My favorite toothpaste. A drawer cleared in the vanity for my stuff.

He doesn't say it's for me, but it is.

The tension at the office doesn't go away, though...

If anything, it sharpens.

He adds more to my plate, sends me tasks he could've given someone else, and keeps me on the floor late most nights, under the pretense of "preparation."

Sometimes I think it's his way of keeping me close.

Other times... I wonder if it's his way of keeping me just far enough away.

THE CEO

DOMINIC

“H ey.” Braxton steps into my office without knocking on Friday evening.

“Hey.” I keep typing. “You need something?”

“You’ve been working longer hours than usual lately,” he says. “But it seems like you’re getting less done.”

“I wasn’t aware I had a boss here. You can write me up if you like.”

He doesn’t laugh, just crosses his arms.

“I was wrong about Ivy Locke,” he says.

I stop typing.

“She’s smart. Sharp. Good instincts,” he continues. “Not just a pretty distraction for you.”

“I know that.”

“But I have to ask...”

He leans against the wall.

“Be honest with me. Are you sleeping with her?”

His question makes my head shoot up.

“I’m clearly in an office talking to you right now,” I say. “Do you need to get your eyes checked?”

“You know what I mean.”

Silence.

“We’re down to the wire for time on the Skittles pitch,” I say. “I believe this conversation can wait.”

“It’s not a conversation. It’s a yes or no question.”

I meet his eyes. “No.”

Braxton smirks. “So that’s a yes.”

He pushes off the wall.

“Fire her by the end of the month or else.”

I arch a brow. “Or else what?”

“Or else I will.”

“Because you think I like her?”

“Because she’s affected your productivity in a way I never thought was possible.” He

looks at his watch. “And that affects my money, so... she has to go. Sooner rather than later.”

THE INTERN

IVY

There's one day and twelve hours left until our big presentation.

The team is still grinding, huddled in the war room like our entire existence depends on thirty colorful slides, blown-up balloon candies, and a product video.

We've all been chatting nonstop—fixing minor lines and revising where we'll stand, and Dominic hasn't said much of anything. He's remained mute in his chair, watching.

“Do you think we should lead with the montage of our proposed commercials or the montage of their slogan against the stock footage?” Marcus asks me.

“The commercials,” I say. “I'm not changing my answer on that.”

“I know.” He smiles. “Just double-checking.”

“Would you mind going over the color blocking on the?—”

“He should mind since he's already gone through it for you six fucking times tonight,” Dominic speaks for the first time—his voice laced with venom.

All the air is suddenly sucked out of the room, and everyone goes still.

“I don’t mind showing it to you again, Miss Locke.” A junior strategist stammers. “I know you mentioned swapping the placement of the demographic data and?—”

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence.” Dominic silences her with a glare and then he scans the room.

His jaw ticks once. Twice.

Someone coughs. A pen clicks. Chairs creak under nervous shifting.

“How about fixing this instead of going over the same shit over and over again?” He holds up my segment like it’s garbage. “Do you actually think this is good enough?”

I blink.

My part has been the strongest since day one.

“You all are wasting your time going in circles,” he says. “Make a decision, commit to it, and then focus on making it stick. I can’t believe I’ve sat here this long without saying that.”

“And I can’t believe you’re being this much of an asshole, for no fucking reason.” I snap.

A collective gasp fills the room, and suddenly it feels like everyone is scared to take a breath.

“Excuse me, Miss Locke?” Dominic’s face reddens. “What did you say?”

“You’re being an asshole.” I enunciate every syllable. “For no reason. Everyone is here late, working their asses off for your company, so you and your partner can

potentially make millions, and this campaign is amazing.”

He narrows his eyes.

“Don’t take out whatever personal issues you’re going through on us.”

“Miss Locke, there is nothing personal going on between us right now.” His voice is cold as ice. “And there’s no room for questioning little things this close to a presentation day. If you had years of experience like most of the people in this room, you’d know that.”

“Okay, Mr. Sutton.” I refuse to put up with a back-and-forth with him, refuse to let him make me feel small. Especially now. I grab my bag and make sure to leave my materials on the table.

“You know what?” I shrug. “I’m done working here.”

“If you walk out now, don’t bother coming back.”

“I won’t.” I shove my phone into my bag and leave without another word. I walk straight out the glass doors, past the elevators, and down the hallway until I find one of the dark, unused client offices.

Shutting the door, I lock it and brace my hand against the desk.

What the hell are you doing, Ivy?

No, what the hell is wrong with HIM?

I take several deep breaths and try not to scream. Then I count down from fifty, so I calm down and leave this office and Dominic’s random rage behind.

Right as I'm getting ready to leave, the door handle jiggles.

I step back.

"Ivy..." It's Dominic. "Open the door."

I stare straight ahead. Maybe if I stay silent, he'll just go away.

"Ivy, I'm not going to ask you again," he says. "Open this door."

I still don't move.

The lock slowly turns and he steps inside, shutting the door behind him.

"I don't appreciate being talked to like that in front of my staff," he says, his voice low.

"Fuck you," I say. "None of us appreciated being talked to like that either."

"I followed you to fix some of the damage," he says. "I believe we both lost a bit of control."

"No, only one of us did." I shake my head. "You. So, can you just admit that you're taking out some personal frustration you have with me on everyone?"

"Yes."

"I..." I stop, shocked that he's admitted it. "Can you tell me what I've done to you, then? I didn't realize you were this pissed at me until then."

"You haven't done anything," he says. "But I am having a bit of a personal problem

with us.”

“I wasn’t aware we were an ‘us.’”

Silence stretches between us, but he doesn’t come closer.

“I’m going to pretend like you didn’t say that last sentence,” he says, voice low.

“Don’t.” I swallow. “I definitely did.”

The second the words leave my mouth, he closes the distance—his hands tangled in my hair, mouth crashing down on mine.

The kiss is messy. Rough. Every ounce of tension from the last few days poured into the way he claims me.

I try to stay mad—try to push him back, but his grip tightens at my waist and a low growl escapes him as our bodies press together.

He backs me against the desk, knocking pens and papers to the floor, lips on my neck, teeth grazing my collarbone as his hands tear at the buttons of my shirt like they’ve personally offended him.

“You really want to pretend this isn’t happening?” he rasps against my throat.

“Shut up.” I yank his belt open, tugging him closer. “I’m still pissed at you.”

“Good.” He shoves my panties to the side like they’re in the way. “Then you won’t forget this.”

He lifts me onto the desk in one smooth motion, and before I can even catch a breath,

he's inside me—hard. Deep. No buildup. Just raw, relentless need.

I cry out, back arching against him, nails scraping across his shoulders.

His rhythm is brutal—unforgiving. Like he's trying to erase every word we said before this.

“This changes nothing,” I breathe.

“Keep telling yourself that,” he growls, slamming into me harder.

I cling to him, matching every thrust, every bite of pressure, like I'm chasing a high I don't want to come down from.

Our bodies slap against the wood, breath ragged, sweat slicking our skin, and the tension we've been choking on all week finally explodes between us.

When it's over, we're both breathless. Quiet. Eyes locked like we have no idea what the hell we just did.

He kisses my shoulder. His thumb strokes my thigh.

“We need to do that again before we go back to work,” he murmurs.

It's not a question. It's a promise.

Minutes later, we slip upstairs to the executive suite that's connected to his office.

This time, there's no anger. No chaos.

The shower's barely on before he presses me against the wall, steam rising around us

like fog swallowing the moment whole.

He kisses me slower now—his tongue tracing the seam of my lips, his hands sliding under my thighs to lift me again.

The tile is cool on my back. His body is hot, hard, and completely in control.

His mouth finds my neck, then lower. His hands grip my hips, tilting me to meet every slow, devastating thrust.

“I should hate you right now,” I whisper.

“You don’t,” he says, eyes burning into mine. “Not even close.”

His pace is unhurried, deep. Like he’s memorizing me. Like he’s trying to make me stay.

Fingers tangle in wet hair. Legs wrapped around him.

Every moan is swallowed by the water. Every breath feels stolen.

Something about this round feels different—dangerous. Not just because it’s slower, but because it feels like he means it.

And I don’t want that. I don’t want to name whatever this is.

After, we change back into our clothes and head back down to the war room.

No one says anything when we return. It’s as if our argument happened ages ago, and they’re far too tired. Too focused.

I settle into my seat and work, finding Dominic's eyes in between readouts. His fingers graze mine when he hands over notes, and I follow him out of the room four times for a kiss in the hallway.

It feels like I'm floating on air, like maybe—just maybe, we are an “us,” but I know better than to let that thought go any further than one sentence.

Because somewhere between round one and round two, I realized something.

This can't (and won't) last.

Dominic is not the relationship type, and he never has been.

He doesn't do girlfriends. He doesn't feel the need to keep any people around, unless they've been on his staff for more than ten years.

After we land this campaign, I won't have an excuse to stay.

I'll move out and into one of the apartments I liked from last week.

And I'll find a new job.

Preferably one where my boss doesn't make me forget my own name every time he touches me.

THE CEO

DOMINIC

Five executives in sharp, tailored suits—each a different color of the rainbow—walk in with polished briefcases and perfectly timed expressions. Their shoes don't squeak. Their faces don't flinch.

They shake hands, sit down, and stare at the screen like they already hate it.

The conference room is cold and quiet, the type of quiet that presses against your chest. Sunlight cuts across the table in clean, diagonal lines, making everything feel too sharp, too exposed.

The team lines up in silence while Braxton and I take our seats on the other side of the boardroom table.

"Today's not about making a pitch," Marcus says. "It's about shifting a legacy."

He clicks the first slide, and then—as a surprise to me—he hands the clicker to Ivy.

She doesn't miss a beat.

She walks forward, takes the device like it was always meant to be hers, and adjusts the mic with a flick of her wrist. No hesitation. No stammer. Just her voice, steady and crisp, cutting through the room like she owns it.

From there, it's a blur.

Ivy commands attention without asking for it.

She floats in and out of the spotlight between slides—taking the lead, stepping back, delivering key points without missing a beat.

She doesn't just present. She performs. She reads the room better than anyone else I've ever worked with.

And then it happens.

They play the luxury commercial:

Skittles reclining in first-class airline seats with silk eye masks.

Mini bags slipping into designer purses and clutches.

Rainbow candy floating lazily on mirrored pool floats shaped like swans.

Back-alley kids pedaling sleek bicycles through narrow streets, Skittles nestled like jewels in their baskets.

A clash between classes.

And yet, the candy is the constant. The bridge.

It doesn't just connect people. It levels them.

When Ivy says, "The End," the final slide fades to white.

She lowers the clicker, her hands steady at her sides.

The room is dead silent, but it's not the silence of disinterest.

The kind that teeters between disbelief and slow, dawning approval.

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THE INTERN

IVY

I glance at Dominic, unsure if this is the good silence or the awkward kind.

Marcus's face is paling by the second, and Mr. Braxton is looking like he's about to shout into the void just so we can all hear something.

But then suddenly, the lead executive in the all-red suit slides out of his chair and stands to his feet. And he applauds.

Blue, yellow, orange, and green suits join in, and I let out the nervous breath I've been holding all morning.

I don't get the chance to ask if there are any questions. The Skittles team is shaking our hands and leaving the room to render their verdict in private.

Dominic and Mr. Braxton slip out of the room to await judgment, and as I slump into a chair, my phone buzzes.

Dominic

You did one hell of a job today.

Looking forward to showing you how much I mean that later tonight...

Me too...

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THE CEO

DOMINIC

S kittles broke our all-time client signing record.

They signed the preliminary agreement less than ten minutes after walking out of the boardroom. Not only that, but they agreed to a ten-year contract.

That's practically unheard of in this digital era, and a true mark of trust and belief.

The champagne bottles are now popping in the presentation room, sending bubbles everywhere, and although I should be making a speech and congratulating the team on the success, I can't stop thinking about Ivy.

Not the part where she presented flawlessly or the way she nailed the messaging without needing a single edit—it's the way she smiled at me as I slipped out of the room.

It was like she was forcing it.

Maybe I'm imagining this shit...

Ready to lure her up here with me, I slip out of the deal room and up to my office.

"Your dinner is on me all week, so I suggest you pick some good places." Braxton tosses a manila folder on my desk. "In the meantime, the legal team is waiting on

your signature.”

“There’s no way they hammered out the post-deal print that fast.”

“Of course they didn’t.” He shrugs. “That’s Miss Locke’s erasure file, where you acknowledge that she was a temporary executive hire, but now you have no use for her employment here.”

“She just helped land the biggest client we’ve had in years.”

“And now you’ll reward her by firing her with a very generous exit package.” He pulls a pen from his jacket and holds it out to me. “That was the deal, remember?”

“No.” I lean back in my chair. “You said end of the month.”

“And that’s at the end of this week.”

I say nothing.

Braxton stands there, waiting.

I glance down at Ivy’s name and suddenly picture her face—mouth open, breathless, pressed up against the glass wall of my shower.

“There’s a reason I run this company,” I say, setting the file aside. “And not you.”

“It’s the same reason why I have hiring and firing privileges.” He signs the contract and sighs. “I knew you wouldn’t be able to do it, but this is just covering our tracks anyway.”

“I’m planning to do it, Braxton. I would just like to do it in a respectable way.”

“After you already slept with her?”

I don’t answer that.

“Anyway—” He stuffs the signed contract into his breast pocket. “Thank God Miss Locke is smarter than you because she already quit, and she didn’t flinch when I asked her to sign a few more NDAs.”

“What?”

I glance at my phone. That’s not what our last text messages say or convey at all...

“She turned in her resignation this morning,” Braxton says, “effective the moment the final pitch is completed.”

“She blindsided me with this bullshit?” I ask. “She didn’t even think to tell me?”

“So there are some feelings there?” He eyes me. “It’s more than just sex?”

“No.”

“None at all?”

“None.”

“You wouldn’t care if you found out she was dating someone else by next week?”

“I...” I clench my jaw, and he sits across from me. “Ask me something else.”

“Fine with me,” he says. “Can you remain here at headquarters for the evening to continue the celebration, so you won’t rush home to try to see her?”

“Actually, I just forgot I left something at home.” I stand to my feet. “I’ll be right back.”

“She’s gone, Dominic.” He shakes his head. “She’s been slowly moving stuff out all week.”

“You knew?”

“Of course I knew.” He scoffs. “Please accept the silly little fling for what it was—I think—and then go back to being your selfish self, please. It’s driving me fucking nuts...”

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THE CEO

DOMINIC

So, you're gone. Just like that?

Without at least giving me a fucking goodbye?

All because of your made-up Twilight Zone mantra?

Ivy

You were right. It wasn't a Twilight Zone episode.

It was just reality...

Thank you for everything, Dominic. I really appreciate it, and I think it's best if we both move on.

THE INTERN

IVY

My duffel bag hits the bed with a loud thud. It's the last bit of luggage to arrive at my temporary hotel suite, and I have no intention of unpacking until I'm moved into my new place.

Until all my memories with Dominic are in my rearview mirror, and I'm no longer walking on a road that leads to breaking my own heart.

Ignoring the pain in my chest, I slip off my heels and unhook my skirt.

My phone buzzes on the mattress.

Dominic.

I let out a sigh, tempted to slide my finger across the screen and accept.

But I can't.

I know what'll happen if I answer because I've seen this movie before, and I'd rather see the alternate ending...

I toss the phone into the drawer and slip into the shower.

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THE INTERN

IVY

Missed call. Dominic Sutton.

Missed call. Dominic Sutton.

Dominic (Don't Answer. It'll never Work)

You didn't have to lie to me about leaving...

I deserve an explanation.

Who's being "selfish" now?

I 'm still mentally counting the minutes since I walked out of Sutton Headquarters, still trying to make myself believe that I made the right decision.

Outside of sex and a passion for marketing, Dominic and I have nothing in common. Our worlds are far too different to ever coexist, and the only place where I'm willing to believe in fairytales and fantasies is in a promotional campaign.

Sighing, I pull on my blazer and walk around my new living room in search of my subway pass.

This place is a simple brownstone walk-up, far across town from the amenity-laden

places Tracey showed me. Far away from anything that remotely resembles the world of Sutton.

I make sure I have my files and rush out the door to my new job: Front Edge Group—a mid-sized marketing firm that has upfront views of the Hudson River.

Another huge (and necessary) change...

I step into the conference room for onboarding and smile politely at the two other new hires beside me.

The Human Resources manager walks us through policies, perks, company culture.

Nothing exciting. Nothing scandalous. Just... ordinary.

Exactly what I need.

“Our owner will stop in shortly to introduce himself,” she says. “He’ll take over the second half of your orientation.”

I take a long sip of coffee and focus on the ferry boat cruising by our window.

Minutes later, the door opens behind us and heavy footsteps fill the room.

I glance up with a smile?—

And my stomach drops.

Dominic?

He stares at me for a few seconds before extending his hand to the other new hires.

When he shakes my hand, every nerve in my body comes to life, and his fingers linger against my skin a little longer than necessary.

“I don’t typically come to my boutique firm this early in the season, but...” His eyes meet mine. “I received an email with your names and thought I’d make an exception.”

The other two women blush and hang on his every word as he gives a shortened version of his bio, and then he thanks us for our time and hands us his business card.

I never knew he had business cards, but as the card touches my hand, I can’t help but notice the tagline in grey italics:

“The most selfLESS CEO in Manhattan.”

I hold back a laugh.

“It was nice meeting you ladies,” he says. “If you ever need anything, or want to consider working at the main headquarters, let me know.”

“Thank you.” I push up my chair and follow them to the door.

“Miss Locke.” His voice pins me to the spot. “Stay behind, please.”

“I have work to do.”

“I doubt it. You just started here...”

I turn around to face him, hating how my heart instantly reacts. How it can’t determine the difference between lust and true emotions.

“I didn’t know you owned this company,” I say.

“It’s only a partial stake,” he shrugs. “Just enough to matter.”

“Well, it’s nice seeing you again, but?—”

“So, you’re trying to control shit that’s out of your hands?” A slow smile crosses his face. “I need you to come with me for brunch.”

“Now?”

“Just for one hour.”

“And if I say no?”

“We can talk right here.”

“There’s nothing to discuss...” I look over my shoulder and keep my voice low. “I’m not sleeping with you again.”

“You miss having sex with me that much?”

Yes . “No.”

“I miss sex with you,” he says, looking me up and down. “Terribly.”

“There are thousands of other women who would happily give you that opportunity.”

“I’m only interested in one,” he says. “And if she says one more sarcastic thing, I’ll be pushing her against that wall until she finally gives in to brunch.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“I thought so.”

He gestures for me to walk with him outside, leading me next door inside the restaurant where I first picked up his Uber Eats order.

This time I’m seeing it like a patron.

All white-clothed tables and elegant candle centerpieces.

The server ushers us into a private booth near the back; I order a wine. He orders a whiskey.

“I would like you to come back and work for me,” he says. “Without any assistant duties.”

“I doubt that would work...”

“You don’t have to work on the same floor,” he says. “But our marketing team could use you, and I’d raise your salary again.”

“Mr. Sutton?—”

“Dominic.” He corrects me. “We’re not going backwards. Just think about that offer for a few nights and get back to me.”

“Okay.” I nod. “I will.”

We stare at each other in silence until the server returns with menus.

Neither of us opens them.

“It should be illegal for them to charge what they do for pasta,” I say. “It’s just noodles and dressing.”

“Prepared by a world-class chef.” He smiles, sipping his drink. “It makes a difference...”

“I’m back with Nolan now,” I say. “We’re on good terms again.”

“Let’s discuss a potential relationship between us,” he says. “I would like to explore that.”

“Did you not hear what I just said about being with Nolan again?”

“I did, but since we both know you’re too smart to ever go back to him, I’m not taking the bait... I’ve never had an exclusive girlfriend, but I’d like you to be mine if you’ll give me the chance.”

I study him. My fingers curl around the wine glass.

This man—who wrecked my plans, upended my routine, and made me feel everything I told myself I didn’t want—looks like he means it.

“You really think this can work?”

“I think we can work better than you think.”

I lean in, slowly. “And what exactly do you think we are, Dominic?”

He doesn't blink. “Not temporary.”

I swallow. “I need more than just late nights and sex in locked offices.”

“I know,” he says. “You need someone who listens. Someone who doesn’t make you feel disposable. Someone who lets you have your own voice—and doesn’t punish you for using it.”

“You’ll still be demanding,” I say. “Still bossy. Still act like the world spins just for you.”

“You’ll still drive me insane and argue with me for no reason.”

I cross my arms. “So what makes you think I won’t be tempted to walk away again?”

He leans forward. “Because I won’t let you forget what it feels like to stay.”

I say nothing.

That one hits deeper than I want it to.

He doesn’t push. He just waits.

I tap the edge of my wine glass. “If this implodes, and you make a fool out of me?”

“I won’t.”

“But if you do...”

He reaches for my hand. “Can you please just give me a fucking chance? I really like you—I liked you from day one, and I miss you... I would also prefer if you held off on arguing with me for a few hours so we can pick up where we should’ve left off before you left my boardroom.”

“I don’t know,” I say, giving in, “Not sure if I want everyone knowing that I’m dating the most selfish man in Manhattan.”

“I’ve never been the slightest bit selfish with you—especially in the bedroom,” he says, standing and squeezing my hand. “And I’m about to regret you calling me that again.”

“I haven’t said yes to giving you a chance yet.”

“It’s okay.” He pulls me against him and presses a long kiss against my lips. “I know exactly how to get it out of you...”

—The End?—

PROLOGUE

Tara

“Winners never quit, and quitters never win ...”

If I had a dollar for every time my mother said those words to me, I would be sipping wine on my own private island off the Amalfi Coast at this very moment.

When I cried about hating ballet, she squished my feet into those ugly pink flats and made me go to practice anyway.

When I told her that I wanted to change my major from Business to “something more creative,” she threatened to stop paying my tuition.

And when I told her that I was seconds away from telling my first real boss to go fuck himself, she would only sigh and give me her tried and true words of advice.

She insisted that all my late-night emails were “wasteful whining,” that my screams of hatred were “misplaced admiration,” and that all the times he made me work over a hundred hours in a single week were “much-needed character building.”

After two long years of working for him, I’ve finally accepted that none of those things are true.

Preston Parker is an asshole boss. That is it. End of discussion.

My mother can call me a “quitter” all she wants, but she’ll never know what it’s like to work for a man like him. A man whose ego is bigger than all of New York and Vegas combined.

Yes, he can make any woman wet by uttering a single syllable from his perfectly molded mouth. Yes, his deep emerald and grey eyes are downright breathtaking, and the way he’s able to make any suit look like it was made explicitly for him, never ceases to amaze me.

But I’ve had more than enough.

I can’t take working for him anymore, and I’m finally drafting the two weeks’ notice I should’ve drafted the very first month we worked together. (No, the very first week we worked together.)

I’m getting ahead of myself, though. I can’t start this story from the bitter end or the miserable middle. I need to start it from the very unfortunate beginning ...

Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:16 am

ANDREW

New York City is nothing more than a shit-filled wasteland, a dump where failures are forced to drop all their broken dreams and leave them far behind.

The flashing lights that shined brightly years ago have lost their luster, and that fresh feeling that once permeated the air—that hopefulness, is long gone.

Every person I once considered a friend is now an enemy, and the word “trust” has been ripped from my vocabulary.

My name and reputation are tarnished thanks to the press, and after reading the headline that The New York Times ran this morning, I’ve decided that tonight will be the last night I ever spend here.

I can’t deal with the cold sweats and nightmares that jerk me out of my sleep anymore, and as hard as I try to pretend like my heart hasn’t been obliterated, I doubt that the agonizing ache in my chest will ever go away.

To properly say goodbye, I’ve ordered the best entrées from all my favorite restaurants, watched *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway, and smoked a Cuban cigar on the Brooklyn Bridge.

I’ve also booked the penthouse suite at the Waldorf Astoria, where I’m now leaning back on the bed and threading my fingers through a woman’s hair—groaning as she slides her mouth over my cock.

Teasingly darting her tongue around my tip, she whispers, “Do you like this?” as she looks up at me.

I don’t answer. I push her head down and exhale as she presses her lips against my balls, as she covers my cock with her hands and moves them up and down.

Over the past two hours, I’ve fucked her against the wall, forced her to bend over a chair, and pinned her legs to the mattress while I devoured her pussy.

It’s been quite fulfilling— fun , but I know this feeling will only last for so long; it never stays. In less than a week, I’ll have to find someone else.

As she takes me deeper and deeper into her mouth, I tightly tug her hair—tensing as she bobs her head up and down. Pleasure begins to course its way through me, and the muscles in my legs stiffen—forcing me to let go and warn her to pull away.

She ignores me.

She grips my knees and sucks faster, letting my cock touch the back of her throat. I give her one last chance to move away, but since her lips remain wrapped around me, she leaves me no choice but to cum in her mouth.

And then she swallows.

Every. Last. Drop.

Impressive...

Finally pulling away, she licks her lips and leans back against the floor.

“That was my first time swallowing,” she says. “I did that just for you.”

“You shouldn’t have.” I stand and zip my pants. “You should’ve saved it for someone else.”

“Right. Well, um...Do you want to order some dinner? Maybe we could eat it over HBO and go at it again afterwards?”

I raise my eyebrow, confused.

This is always the most annoying part, the part when the woman who previously agreed to “One dinner. One night. No repeats.” wants to establish some type of imaginary connection.

For whatever reason, she feels like there needs to be some type of closure conversation, some bland reassurance that’ll confirm that what just happened was ‘more than sex,’ and we’ll become friends.

But it was just sex, and I’m not in need of any friends. Not now, not ever.

“No, thank you.” I walk over to the mirror on the other side of the room. “I have someplace to be.”

“At three in the morning? I mean, if you just want to skip the HBO and go for another round instead, I can...”

I tune out her irritating voice and begin to button my shirt. I’ve never spent the night with a woman I met online, and she isn’t going to be the first.

As I adjust my tie, I look down and spot a tattered pink wallet on the dresser. Picking it up, I flip it open and run my fingers across the name that’s printed onto her license: Sarah Tate.

Even though I’ve only known this woman for a week, she’s always answered to

“Samantha.” She’s also told me— repeatedly , that she works as a nurse at Grace Hospital. Judging by the Wal-Mart employee card that’s hiding behind her license, I’m assuming that part isn’t true either.

I look over my shoulder, where she’s now sprawled across the bed’s silk sheets. Her creamy colored skin is unmarred and smooth; her bow shaped lips are slightly swollen and puffy.

Her green eyes meet mine and she slowly sits up, spreading her legs further apart, whispering, “You know you want to stay. Stay ...”

My cock starts to harden—it’s definitely up for another round, but seeing her real name has ruined any chance of that for me. I can’t stand to be around anyone who’s lied to me, even if she does have double D tits and a mouth from heaven.

I toss the wallet into her lap. “You told me your name was Samantha.”

“Okay. And ?”

“Your name is Sarah.”

“So, what?” She shrugs, beckoning me with her hand. “I never give my real name to men I meet on the internet.”

“You just fuck them in five-star hotel suites?”

“Why do you suddenly care about my real name?”

“ I don’t .” I glance at my watch. “Are you spending the night in this room or do I need to give you cab money to get home?”

“What?”

“Was my question unclear?”

“Wow...Just, wow...” She shakes her head. “How much longer do you think you’ll be able to keep doing this?”

“Keep doing what ?”

“Chatting someone up for a week, fucking her, and moving on to the next. How much longer?”

“Until my dick stops working.” I put on my jacket. “Do you need cab fare or are you staying? Check out is at noon.”

“Do you know that men like you— relationship avoiders , are the type that typically fall the hardest?”

“Did they teach you that at Wal-Mart?”

“Just because someone from your past hurt you doesn’t mean that every woman after her will.

” She purses her lips. “That’s probably why you are the way you are.

Maybe if you tried to actually date someone you’d be a lot happier.

You should take her out for dinner and actually listen, see her to her door without expecting an invitation inside, and maybe bypass the whole ‘let’s go fuck’ in the hotel suite thing at the end. ”

Where are my keys? I need to go. Now.

“I can see it now...” She can’t seem to shut up. “You’re going to want more than sex

one day, and the person you want it from is going to be someone you least expect. Someone who will force you to give in.”

I pull my keys from underneath her crumpled dress and sigh. “Do you need cab money?”

“I have my own car, dick-face.” She rolls her eyes. “Are you really this incapable of having a regular conversation? Would it kill you to talk to me for a few minutes after sex?”

“We have nothing more to discuss.” I put my room key on the nightstand and walk toward the door. “It was very nice meeting you, Samantha, Sarah . Whatever the hell your name is. Have a great night.”

“ Screw you !”

“Three times was more than enough. No, thank you.”

“Things are going to catch up to you one day, asshole!” She yells as I step into the hallway. “Karma is one hell of a bitch!”

“I know.” I toss back. “I fucked her two weeks ago...”