

ATTRACTION

Best served with caution



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The queue was longer than normal, and I was getting increasingly agitated with my need for a coffee fix and the need to have my early morning chat or flirt - whatever it was - with Bernie, the young pretty barista that gave me *extra* attention.

As I approached the counter, I was instantly mesmerised by her full lips and dark brown eyes and, as always, I had to remind myself not to stare.

‘Usual?’ Bernie said in her usual chirpy manner, pushing back her short, shiny hair.

‘Yes please,’ I managed to muster alongside my best casual smile.

I watched her as she skipped to the coffee machine, noticing her breasts bouncing ever so slightly in her tight T-shirt. I found her almost as enticing as the latte I had just ordered. It didn’t make sense, she was not my type and I am not sure I even fancied women, but there was something about her that drew me in. Then again, I was no good with attraction, it made me vulnerable.

She came back as I was in mid stare and she must have noticed as she made sure her fingers lingered over mine as she slid the coffee cup.

‘See you tomorrow?’ she said with a hint of an invite, but the stance of a question.

‘See you tomorrow,’ I said a little more confidently before slowly pulling my hand and coffee cup from her.

As I walked back to my grotty office block, I tried to rid any thoughts of Bernie and her bouncing breasts in order to concentrate on preparing for the energy-sucking day that awaited me.

Even from the foot of the graffiti ridden stairs that led to our offices, I could hear them all cheering and chanting in the meeting room. Every Monday we would train up the new recruits and motivate the old ones. I hated Mondays. As I swung open the heavy meeting room door, I was greeted by my 6'3" Managing Director, Simon, in the form of cheer and a clap.

'And here she is...Rachel Johnson! Our top sales consultant. Six months in a row she has smashed the leader board. This person, right here, is who you should be aspiring to be!'

The fifteen or so new recruits looked on in confusion. I'm sure my unkempt blonde hair stuffed in a ponytail, lack of make-up, and a look of complete disinterest was not what they were expecting. The other sales reps looked almost as apathetic as me, apart from the arse lickers, Andy and Jerome.

'Ok...' Simon drew out the word to try and uncover the uncomfortable silence that followed my grand entrance. 'I am going to leave you with Rachel for your morning motivation and briefing. Good luck!'

looking disinterested, I turned to Andy,
'Over to you,' I said before turning on my heels and heading towards the door.

'What? No way, that's your job!'

‘Not today,’ I replied as I walked out. I heard him mutter *bitch* under his breath, but it didn’t phase me. I needed to lock myself away in my office and step away from the world. However, it was less than a minute before Andy barged in.

‘I’d say your mood is down to whatever you have been up to, but you’re always a bitch. The police are here.’

He said it with a patronising smirk that I could have swiped off his face as quickly as he did with his feed of Tinder targets.

‘What?’ I said in further annoyance.

He didn’t have time to answer before two police officers walked in.

I quickly placed my feet on the floor and sat upright in my chair.

‘Rachel Johnson?’

‘Yes,’ I replied with some hesitancy.

The stern-looking police officer looked down at his notepad. ‘Rachel Johnson, who lives at 20 Swansea Road with a Mr Earl Copeland?’

‘Yes, but we do not live together, he lives in the flat below at 20a.’

He looked at me in bemusement.

‘Do you know the whereabouts of Mr Copeland yesterday evening between the hours of eight and ten?’ He responded, his tone becoming a little sharper, to assert his authority I supposed.

‘Yes, he was with me...well until nine.’

‘Mr Copeland says he was with you all night.’

I wasn’t with him all night and I told them so. I had to go to the station to give a statement. They wouldn’t tell me what he had been arrested for, but I knew it was serious enough to keep him in.

Back home, I checked social media to see if I could work anything out, and there it was. I knew, without evidence, that he had been arrested for the murder of Jamie Cook. The feeds were filled with R.I.Ps and dedications.

Jamie was a mutual friend of ours, we both had a weird crush on him, a bit like what I have with Bernie. He worked in a music shop, and we were sort of connected as I spent many hours browsing through vinyl. It was inevitable that something bad was going to come out of it because as much as Earl and I didn't want each other, we never really wanted anyone else to have us either.

I sat in the dark that night, recalling my relationship with Earl. In the five years we knew each other, we had connected like nothing else. Not physically, but through some weird consciousness. He was oddly charming; to me, anyway. Most nights we would have dinner together, watch films, smoke a few spliffs - every now and again - and just do all the things most couples do. Then he got arrested which meant that I had to do all this stuff on my own. That was the difficult part. Not having Earl around as my comfort blanket. I finally drifted off to sleep in the knowledge that now Earl had gone, I would have to stand on my own two feet.

The next day I went to fetch my usual coffee and was greeted by Bernie who was working on her own. She prepared my coffee as usual, but as she slid the coffee to me, she looked around to make sure no one was listening, and then she said 'I am on a twelve-hour shift... I finish at eight.'

I smiled and nodded my head. 'Ok,' I replied, in an accepting way.
I was confused as I didn't know what to do with that information. Should I meet her from work or not?

Back at work I remained silent and allowed the office gossip to flow but Andy couldn't help himself. It took precisely one hour and two minutes to interrogate me. They all knew it was in the papers already.

'So...shacked up with a murderer eh? That's tough.'

'And none of your business,' I replied. The rest of the open-plan office were hanging on to our every word, to enhance their sad lives I assumed.

'Ooh...touchy,' he said swinging back on his chair, arms behind his head and legs spread wide to promote his alpha male. 'You know if you need someone to keep your bed warm, I'm your man.'

Without a second thought, I threw my hot coffee onto his lap. He jumped up and called me a psycho bitch. I didn't care. No matter what had happened, I loved Earl and I was desperate to see him.

At home, I waited for the clock to turn at 8 pm. Then I waited once more until 8.15 pm. I took a deep breath as my heart started to beat its way out of my chest, and grabbed my car keys. I found Bernie, as expected, walking down the long stretch of road that led to her house. I knew where she lived as curiosity had led me to follow her home one night....or maybe two.

It was raining hard, so when I pulled over, she looked grateful. She smiled and thanked me, and then she kissed me- which took me by surprise.

One month passed and I finally got a visiting order for Earl. His case had escalated quickly as it was clearly evidenced, and he had pleaded guilty.

'Thanks for coming to see me,' he said as he pushed his chair in to sit more comfortably.

I stared at him a while, trying to gauge his emotion. There was no anger and no sadness. If anything, he looked calm.

‘Earl, I’m sorry...’ I started to say, but he stopped me in my tracks.

‘It’s ok...this is best for me. I am safe here and so is everyone else!’

‘But you never did anything!’ I said with a tear escaping.

‘I know, but I wanted too.’ He took my hand. ‘You are the same, you and me, so you know more than anyone that this is the best place for me.’ He squeezed my hand before releasing it and sitting back in his chair. I pulled my hands away from the table and placed them nervously on my thighs. Earl was examining me, his face was smiling, but his eyes were narrowing.

‘I have to say, it was very clever transferring the blood, making sure I was alone...using the car.’ He leaned towards me once more. ‘You can’t do this with every person who shows mutual attraction!’

I looked down at my hands which were now fiddling with my thumb ring.

He continued to stare until I looked up. ‘You have done it again, haven’t you? Who is it this time?’ He was sharp in his tone but concerned.

‘Bernie,’ I replied solemnly. ‘Her name was Bernie.’